



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

S E R I E S

THE NUTSHELL OF SHIFT

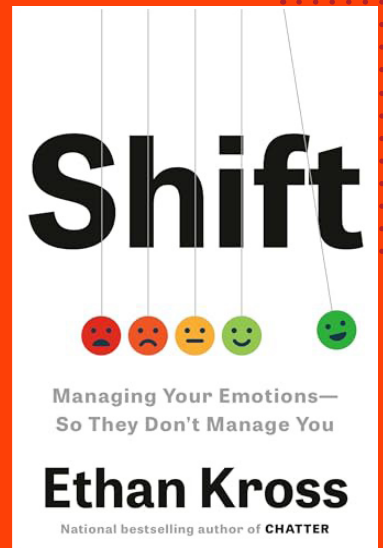
By Ethan Kross
Crown 2025

Emotions are like breathing air: both unavoidable and crucial to our survival. Success is not about turning feelings off, but about understanding how to use them skillfully so they don't completely take over. Oftentimes, we can't control the trigger, but we can still shape the trajectory: how intense a feeling becomes and how long it lasts. This is done by reaching for "shifters" that move us in and out of states when we choose.

Attention is a mental spotlight; sometimes we approach the pain, sometimes we swing the beam away. Flexibility, not constant confrontation, predicts resilience. When attention can't pivot, perspective can: a changed filter changes the feeling.

Inside levers arrive first. Sensory hits work in milliseconds. Distanced self-talk ("You can do it") and mental time travel ("How will this matter in ten years?") supply rapid, low-effort reframes.

Outside levers press on us all day; we can control those. Switching space to a personal *green spot*, or modifying the room—hiding phones, adding plants—dampens rumination before willpower is required. Feelings are contagious, so curate relationships: seek advisers who both empathize and broaden perspective, notice



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when venting slides into co-rumination, and remember that spending on others reliably lifts mood.

Culture is the master switch: shared beliefs, norms, and practices turn regulation into default. When a culture harms, revise the levers or walk away.

Knowing tools is not enough; they must surface automatically when fear or anger spikes. Link Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, and Plan into a WOOP: *If* the obstacle appears, clarify the desired outcome, identify key obstacles, *then* create a plan. These if-then scripts wire cues to responses like a NASCAR pit crew, making regulation as reflexive as buckling a seat belt. Studies show WOOP boosts grades, health, and mood for years.

There is no one-size-fits-all formula. Pandemic surveys revealed wild diversity: some leaned on music, others prayer, walks, decluttering, or quick acts of kindness. Treat shifters as a menu; experiment, keep what works, update plans as life changes. Painful emotions carry information, so the goal is to modulate them, not erase them. By combining inner levers, environmental tweaks, social circuitry, cultural scaffolding, and practiced WOOPs, anyone can build a personalized, automatic pit crew for the mind.

Master the instrument, or it will play you. Emotions remain the music and the magic, the indelible markers of our time on earth; learning to shift them is the straighter path through every 5 a.m. shock, every winter forest, and every ordinary day that follows.