

# The Wisdom Factor

## Reducing the Control of Bias, Threat, and Fear while Building a Better World

Alice Darnell Lattal & Carlos A. Zuluaga



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*“If there is anything the world needs, it is wisdom.  
Without it, I exaggerate not at all in saying that very  
soon, there may be no world ...”*

—ROBERT J. STERNBERG

# Dedication

*Alice Darnell Lattal:*

Written for my grandchildren—Nicholas, Ella, Alex, Ava, Brendan, Calista, Julia Grace—and the wiser world they and their peers will build. To my children—Matthew, Rachel, Ashley, and their spouses—Jen Maas, Charlie Camp, and Ian St. John—for providing their children the tools of compassion and knowledge. My thanks to Don Hake, Ph.D., for his visionary efforts in the experimental analysis of behavior, exploring the conditions that promote trust, cooperation, and sharing, and who left this world at too young an age. To my brother, Mike Hammer, for always appreciating the richness in diversity and responding with enthusiasm to various ways of living life. And to my lifelong partner, Andy, for his loving support and boundless curiosity. Thanks for this lifetime of discovery.

.....

*Carlos A. Zuluaga:*

I would like to dedicate this book to some of the people that have guided me in this journey called *life*. They have given me examples of wisdom and leadership and inspired me to be a better person each day. To Dr. José A. Martinez-Diaz, Thomas R. Freeman, Antonio Zuluaga, and Frances M. Torres.

*“Cada persona que pasa por nuestra vida es única. Siempre deja un poco de sí y se lleva un poco de nosotros. Habrá los que se llevarán mucho, pero no habrá de los que no nos dejarán nada. Esta es la prueba evidente de que dos almas no se encuentran por casualidad.”*

–Jorge Luis Borges

*“Every person who comes into our lives is unique. They will always leave a bit of themselves and take a bit of themselves. There will be the ones who will take too much, but there will be none that will not leave something. This is the evident proof that two souls don’t find each other by coincidence.”*

–Jorge Luis Borges

# Acknowledgments

When we began to work together, we had a simple idea about how to write this book, thinking that we had something to say about acting wisely. It has taken approximately 24 months to get from that start to this point. We have had to step back many times to check our understanding. Ours was a *collaboration* in the best sense of that word, each learning new things from one another about behavior and how it relates to the concept of wisdom. It was our mutual pleasure to work and learn together. We discovered that we saw the world and the people in it in much the same way. We did learn that critical elements must be considered when striving to be wise; that becoming wiser is a noble goal, a process of ongoing learning, and a lifelong journey.

Several people helped us in the writing of this book. They include Andy Lattal and Frances M. Torres, who read the book in draft form and made many good suggestions along the way that helped us redirect our efforts and start again. Marcia Cornell edited the first few chapters to help us get started. Gail Snyder edited the first and final draft. A special *thank you* to David B. Baker, Alyce M. Dickinson, Chata Dickson, Patrick C. Friman, Paulie Gavoni, Sigrid Glenn, Steven C. Hayes, William L. Heward, Philip N. Hineline, Jack Marr, Francis Mechner, Terry McSween, Sigurdur Oli Sigurdsson, Shane T. Spiker, Janet S. Twyman, and April Michele Williams. The process and design experts at KeyPress Publications added greatly to the book's professional look and feel, keeping the book on track. Thank you to Jana Burtner for producing a beautiful cover that in itself tells a story about the importance of wisdom in this world. These individuals gave us clear advice about what worked well and what did not, sometimes specifically in sections where we used their work. At times these individuals wrote or talked to us directly to ensure they understood what we were trying to say and that we heard their advice. We listened hard, invited more critique, and in the end are deeply indebted to each of them and others who advised us generally. We thank them all. Whatever mistakes remain, they are ours alone.

# Endorsements for The Wisdom Factor

“It’s not enough merely to aspire to be wise; you must create the environments and strengthen the skills that are key to that life task. This book brings a step-by-step, practical approach to acquiring wisdom. Grounded firmly in behavioral science, it never talks down to you, or substitutes aspirations for actions. Instead, it creates a bond of trust between author and reader, and then it delivers. Every page rings true to me. I can highly recommend it.”

–**Steven C. Hayes, Ph.D.**

Foundation Professor of Psychology, University of Nevada, Reno  
Originator of *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* and author of  
*A Liberated Mind*

.....

“*The Wisdom Factor* is a wise telling of over a century of psychological science and practice that has grappled with the question of what makes us human. More specifically, it offers an accessible and practical roadmap to make us better humans. In this book, the reader will find valuable tools to chart a course to a greater understanding of ourselves, our environment, and each other.”

–**David B. Baker, Ph.D.**

Senior Program Director, Cummings Foundation for Behavioral Health  
President, Baker Performance Facilitation  
Professor Emeritus of Psychology, The University of Akron

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“In essence, Lattal and Zuluaga pose the question: How can I, one person, make a difference for the better in this world? They explore this question through the lens of behavioral science and build their case by addressing some of the biggest societal challenges facing the Western World today. You will come away from reading this book understanding what it means to be a positive change agent and how to act accordingly in tune with your personal values. It will also help

you understand why others behave the way they do. That is perhaps equally as important: if we want to build a society in tune with our values, we need to look beyond the walls of our echo chambers. Want a science-based step-by-step approach to make a difference for the better in the world? Ready to look beyond the walls of your echo chamber? Then buy this book.”

–Sigurdur Oli Sigurdsson, Ph.D.  
Manager of the Quality Board for Higher Education in Iceland

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“Pragmatic, optimistic, and rich with resources, *The Wisdom Factor* brings together the science of learning and behavior with universal, timeless truths about what it means to be human. Darnell Lattal and Carlos A. Zuluaga do not preach to readers about how we should act; rather, they open the possibility for us each to do what is important to us. They lay out a framework for operating with humility, integrity, and courage. In reading this book we learn that wisdom is not about expertise or information, but it is something that occurs in behavior—wise acting. Wisdom is not some essential or innate feature of an individual. It is a way of being and behaving. This is a beautifully optimistic perspective, because in this view we all have access to wisdom in any moment, regardless of our life circumstances. Developing a robust and reliable repertoire of wise behavior is the work of a lifetime.

*The Wisdom Factor* is for everyone. Accessible. Universal. Timeless. Instead of a recipe, the reader receives the ingredients that make the work of transformation possible—for our own lives, our families, our workplaces, and indeed, for our world. As soon I finished the book, I picked it up and began again. It will continue to be relevant in new ways as I continue to navigate my way through the challenges and opportunities of life. I’m excited to share this work with my family, friends, and students, and I encourage you to read it as soon as you can!”

–Chata Dickson, Ph.D.  
Assistant Director of Research, Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia at the  
New England Center for Children

“Much has been written about wisdom down through the ages. We’ve been informed about what it is, what it isn’t, who has it, and who doesn’t. But very little has been written about how to attain it other than taking many trips around the sun or apprenticing at the feet of a master. This lovely book fills in the gap by explaining how it can be attained simply by turning the knobs and the dials of our own behavior. Furthermore, the many recommendations available herein spring not from the creative imaginations of the authors but from their scrupulous reading and careful distillation of countless studies from behavioral science. Purchasing the book will involve money wisely spent.”

–Patrick C. Friman, Ph.D., ABPP  
Vice President of Boys Town’s Outpatient Behavioral Health Services

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“*The Wisdom Factor* is both engaging and useful. Lattal and Zuluaga weave together a tapestry of science and wisdom that points the way to effective interpersonal relationships.”

–Sigrid Glenn, Ph.D.  
Retired Professor and former Dean of the School of Behavior Analysis,  
University of North Texas

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“This is a sophisticated, scholarly, and indeed wise book about gaining wisdom—individual and collective—through the application of behavior science. As such, it is far, far more than a ‘self-help’ book. Its scope and depth as well as its science-based approach make the book uniquely valuable.”

–M. Jackson Marr, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychology, Georgia Institute of  
Technology, Atlanta, GA

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“We all want to act wisely and with kindness, but too often the person who ‘shows up’ in our actions harms others. Lattal and Zuluaga describe a life-long



journey by which each of us can contribute to a better, more just world. A continual process of self-knowledge and learning, the journey involves analyzing the environmental conditions maintaining our current behavior, making our values concrete, changing our environment to support behaviors consistent with our values, observing and measuring if what we do matches our good intentions, and celebrating our accomplishments and progress. If B. F. Skinner and Ben Franklin collaborated on a plan for self-improvement, it might read a lot like *The Wisdom Factor*.”

–William L. Heward, Ed.D., BCBA-D  
Author of *Exceptional Children*, Co-Author of *Applied Behavior Analysis*

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“*The Wisdom Factor* is a powerful book. Given the world in which we live, with heightened sensitivity to diversity and inclusion, political divide, a pandemic, and climate control disrupting our environment, each of us can benefit from increasing our wise actions. *The Wisdom Factor* not only gives us the tools with which to do that, but also clearly lays out the scientific foundation on which those tools are based—the foundation that enables us to understand and alter our own behaviors. The book goes beyond self-improvement, however; it also provides ways to help others, most notably our children, become catalysts for a wiser culture and brighter future.”

–Alyce M. Dickinson, Ph.D.  
Retired Professor of Psychology, Western Michigan University

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“I loved this book. At a time when our schools are routinely criticized for an exclusive focus on facts and information, Lattal and Zuluaga help fill the void with *The Wisdom Factor*. The book takes the reader on a journey to consider the kind of person they want to be and, in contrast, how they show up in the world in comparison to that ideal. They ask the reader to consider how they behave, and how other people are likely to interpret that behavior, and, importantly, whether that is the person that the reader wants to be. Beyond just reflecting on these topics, the author provides tools from the field of applied behavior

analysis and a series of practices for improving behavior and moving toward the reader's ideal person. At a time when so few people reflect on their biases, and too many accept their negative attributes, this book fills an important need. While everyone should read it, I hope this book finds its way into college curricula across the country, as our young people need it.

That said, this book is not just for our young. I had the opportunity to read it as I was entering my retirement. What an awesome time to reflect on the person you want to be. I find this book to be timely in so many ways, and on so many levels. Indeed, I hope everyone will read it and work to apply its wisdom. If you do, it will be a better world."

–Terry McSween, Ph.D.  
CEO, Quality Safety Edge, Inc.

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"The authors offer a wide-ranging, guided tour through quotations and comments by a large and diverse roster of prominent figures, as well as by dozens of prominent behavioral scientists and psychologists to address such behavior-related concepts as motivation, learning, beliefs, heuristics, compassion, words and language, knowledge, reciprocity, emotions, self-control, experience, collaboration, competency, thinking skills, problem-solving, flexibility, objectivity, values, goals, and of course, wisdom. The authors' behaviorally informed values and ethics glisten throughout their science-based behaviorally informed guidance."

–Francis Mechner, Ph.D.  
President, The Mechner Foundation

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"The 1st two decades of the 21st century have been marked by multiple acts of terrorism, climate disasters due to a rapidly warming climate, a multi-year global pandemic, and repeated incidents of violence against members of racial/ethnic minority groups. The root causes of all of these difficulties can be boiled down to human behavior. One could be excused for giving in to despair and hopelessness caused by events that seem well beyond our control and too

powerful to overcome. Luckily, the authors of *The Wisdom Factor* present an alternative and, with it, a reason for optimism, which is the wisdom to be gained from understanding ourselves can make the world a better place for all of us.

This could easily be a book of all style and no substance, full of advice, platitudes, and examples of remarkable people to emulate without explanations of how to do so. The key difference between what it could be and what it lies in the strength of the examples and recommended exercises, which coach the reader in the expansion of their understanding of their own (and, ultimately, others') behavior. An incredible amount of information is provided, all of it supported by research and taken from a variety of settings, without being too scholarly or intimidating.

The authors don't shy away from the complexity of behavior but explain those complexities. In doing so, the reader's beliefs are frequently challenged or, more accurately, the reader is frequently invited to challenge their own beliefs. This is the definition of empowerment, and all it requires is a willingness to consider taking a different perspective. This change in perspective is made easier through the explanations in this book and is likely to be life-changing for those who work to adopt it because it shines a light on those parts of our internal experiences we don't understand and reframes them in a way to help us be more flexible in who (or, more importantly, how) we are. Changing perspectives on behavior also releases us from the grip of our past and frees us to move forward with more intention. Following the exercises in this book will give readers the experience needed to carry on in this way for the rest of their lives.

It is a credit to the authors that they present rather advanced conceptual information in such an easy-to-comprehend and useable way. In fact, their advice is so deceptively simple, that the reader may be forgiven for discounting it. Lattal and Zuluaga take abstract principles of behavior and break them down using countless examples. They follow with practices that lead the reader through the work of understanding themselves.

We have not needed a book like this more than we do now. When much of what we see around us seems to be unfolding in a less-than-desirable direction, what else can we do but take ahold of what we can, our own behavior. In

fact, we can build the world we want to live in. The work is difficult, but the payoffs are huge, for ourselves and for our fellow humans.”

–April Michele Williams, Ph.D., BCBA-D  
Associate Professor, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL

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“I think we need many efforts to wake and shake people into thinking about and understanding that behavior matters, and that contingencies matter most of all. I love the authors’ message that wisdom comes from knowing and understanding the effects of behavior influenced by contingencies. It needs to be in the hands and heads of people whom it can help (everyone!).”

–Janet S. Twyman, Ph.D., BCBA, LBA-NY  
Chief Learning Scientist, BLAST

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“Perhaps I’m an optimist, but I believe that, in general, most people share a common wish to do well by themselves and others. With the best intentions, they pursue short and long term goals while taking care to avoid harm to themselves and others. But even those possessing great enthusiasm and meticulously laid out plans fall short as their intention fails to produce the outcomes they value the most. This is because there is incongruence between what they value and how they behave. Often it is because they fail to recognize the misalignment between ways of living that are truly important to them, the behavior they are engaging in, and the impact of this behavior on who and what they value.

In *The Wisdom Factor*, the authors shine a compassionate behavioral light on this misalignment through the often used, but nebulous concept of wisdom. Like a ball held and slowly turned to examine all sides, the concept of wisdom is looked at from multiple angles through the pragmatic lens of the science of human behavior. Now, behavior science doesn’t give people the answer; however, it does provide them with a clear and practical methodology for determining effective solutions. This book maintains this approach in that it doesn’t tell you what to do to be wise. Rather, it provides you with compelling real-life

examples supported by concrete, actionable steps for determining both what wisdom is for you, and what behaviors are aligned with the outcomes you have determined to be ‘wise.’

As the authors remind us in so many words, becoming a wiser person takes effort, but it may not be as difficult as one might think with the right environmental arrangements. If you are trying to be a better version of yourself tomorrow than you were today, you must have a good understanding of where you currently are. To do this, you must ‘know thyself.’ Wisdom helps you to do just that. It is the crystal-clear mirror we all need to better reflect on ourselves and take the actions required to live a valued life. I give this book two gloves way up!”

–Dr. Paulie “Gloves” Gavoni

Wall Street Journal and USA TODAY best-selling author

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“In a time where compassion and science are sorely lacking, *The Wisdom Factor* is a welcomed breath of fresh air. The authors have the uncanny ability to directly pinpoint how we currently respond and where we should be going. This book could easily share a shelf with other behavioral scientists who are striving for a shared vision of a better world.”

–Shane Spiker, Ph.D., BCBA

Director of Training and Dissemination at Positive Behavior  
Supports, Corp.

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# Preface

No matter the times or the circumstances that surround us, the principles in this book speak to the human condition throughout history. The principles are timeless, but as Bob Dylan sang, “The times they are a-changing,” as they always will be. We hope this book has something to say about the present, and we believe it speaks, as well, to creating a better world in the future.

While finalizing this book in the winter of 2022, major events that emerged into public consciousness in 2020 were still taking place around the world. A global pandemic is continuing to effect all people on Earth in some manner, and a massive social movement initiated a continued focus on institutionalized racism and the mistreatment of our fellow humans within and across nations. War among nations that could absorb the whole world is a possibility. At this moment, we have no idea where this tidal wave ends. Will it end with a whimper, as has been the case with some social and political movements in the past? Or will it result in a declaration of a new world order, bringing long-lasting change to our social fabric?

In 1953, B. F. Skinner wrote: “Man’s power appears to have increased out of all proportion to his wisdom. He has never been in a better position to build a healthy, happy, and productive world; yet things have perhaps never seemed so black.” As history demonstrates, humankind has had many dark periods, often described as “just human nature.” We invite you to use the principles described in this book to reconsider what that phrase, “just human nature,” means. We hope every reader comes to understand that in the face of a seemingly overwhelming number of conditions beyond our control, the solution to our largest social problems lies in how we act, each of us. Practices are embedded to help you. We humans do, metaphorically speaking, hold the whole world in our hands. We may have learned that what will be will be, that time and tide wait for no man, or that opportunity has passed us by. Yet, the choices we make every day, and their immediate and longer-term effects, lead us toward or away from solutions that make this world a better place. The task at hand is to learn how to strengthen our skills by acting in ways that lead to better outcomes.

Those outcomes reside in taking better care of one another, not only to coexist but to thrive and prosper.

Consider these 6 action steps when reading this book:

1. Read the titles of each chapter and consider what you think the chapter is about. As you proceed, see if what you expect is what you find and where something new is added. Themes are repeated. You may want to make a list of common themes across chapters.
2. Complete the practice activities as you read each chapter. Think about how you could expand these activities to other areas of your life.
3. Apply the principles described in the book during your day-to-day interactions with others. Identify actions to continue to demonstrate these principles.
4. Reflect on the actions you identify. Assess missed opportunities to practice new insights in new ways.
5. Continue to build behavior-based examples in daily activity that are controlled too much by bias, threat and fear.
6. By the end of the book, consider whether you find yourself better equipped to say and do things that have the potential to increase wiser outcomes.

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PART I:

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# How We Show Up



# Chapter 1:

## Behavior and the River of Reciprocity

*“No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and he’s not the same man.”*

—HERACLITUS

### Beginning and Ending with You

*The Wisdom Factor* is about how each of us shows up in our personal conduct. Do we feel at ease in addressing the conflicts and conditions around us? What helps us become the kind of person we want to be? Becoming who we want to be is a lifelong challenge for many of us.

How are things going for you and for others around you? What is it that you see in the surrounding culture that is good? What needs to change to increase wiser outcomes, to help people have a good chance to accomplish their hopes and dreams? As you read this book, ask, yourself, “What do I need to do to behave in ways that increase the likelihood of wiser outcomes—with my family, my friends, my workplace, or the community at large?”

The principles in this book are of no practical value if they do not cause the reader to think about issues that need a little more wisdom. We hope this book gives you two elements that are essential to creating a wiser world. The first: conditions that surround you determine, to a large extent, your words and actions—behavior. That principle of learning needs to be considered and, at

# About the Authors



## Dr. Alice Darnell Lattal

Dr. Alice Darnell Lattal has spent a lifetime on issues of coercion and its fallout across educational, health, mental health, and workplace settings. A clinical psychologist by training, she spent her first two decades of professional life in special education, adult clinical, and community mental health while addressing the suppressive effects of poverty on infant development, child and spousal abuse, and literacy in rural America. She established her own consulting company, Context Management, Inc., in 1980. Joining several business-to-business consulting companies, she served as a coach for individual, group, and leader development. She served as President and CEO of Aubrey Daniels International, Inc. for 14 years, appointed as Board Chair for another two years before returning to her coaching and consulting work. Since March of 2020, she has served as CEO and President of ABA Technologies, Inc.; her wealth of experience spans more than 50 years and six continents. Her publications include Clark and Lattal, *Workplace Ethics: Winning the Integrity Revolution* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1993; University Press, 1998), *Ethics at Work* (Performance Management Publications, 2005); Lattal and Clark, *A Good Days Work* (2008), McGraw Hill; Ishida and Lattal, *Sustaining a Stress-Free Workplace using Positive Reinforcement* (English title translation) (2010), Toyo Keiza Press; Daniels and Lattal, *Life's a PIC/NIC® when you understand behavior* (Sloan Publishing, 2017), Daniels and Lattal, *Live a Good Life: Using the science of behavior to drive personal and social change* (Performance Management Publications, 2020); and *The Wisdom Factor: Reducing the Control of Bias, Threat, and Fear while Building a Better World*, Lattal and Zuluaga, (KeyPress Publications, 2022). Darnell is married and lives in Hilton Head Island, SC. Among her positions, Dr. Lattal served as President of her state psychological association, a Board of Trustee's national board dedicated to reducing violence in America, and is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies. She lives with her husband, Andy, in Hilton Head Island, raising three children, benefiting today from the wit and wisdom of their seven grandchildren.



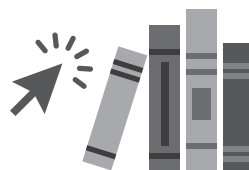
## Carlos A. Zuluaga, M.S., BCBA

Carlos has been a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) since 2007 and received his master's in applied behavior analysis from Florida Tech in 2006. Carlos' master's thesis was published in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. As a member of the ABA Technologies team, Carlos has been a co-instructor for the ABA Online program since 2010.

He loves teaching online courses because it allows him to share his passion for behavior analysis with students and colleagues. Carlos has helped translate some of the courses into Spanish to bring ABA to new audiences. Prior to joining ABA Technologies, Inc., Carlos worked for seven years as a lead therapist at QuestKids, an early intervention agency. During that time, he learned to conduct various skill assessments such as the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP), develop verbal behavior programs, and teach various skills to children with developmental disabilities, train caregivers, and provide supervision.

Carlos enjoys reading, drawing, playing guitar, listening to music, and exercising during his free time. He is very excited to help disseminate behavior analysis around the world.

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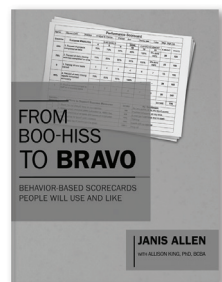
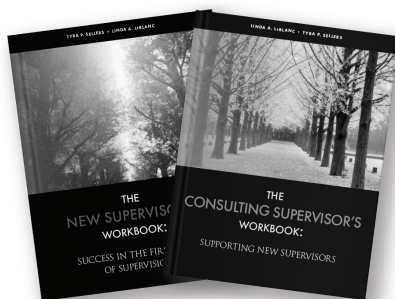
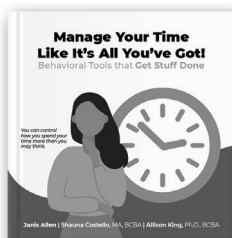
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