

# Make Me Smart August 17, 2021 transcript

**Note:** *Marketplace podcasts are meant to be heard, with emphasis, tone and audio elements a transcript can't capture. Transcripts are generated using a combination of automated software and human transcribers, and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding audio before quoting it.*

**Kai Ryssdal:** So we'll get going here whenever, whenever Brian behind the glass decides to push the button. It's up to him.

**Molly Wood:** Hello, everyone. I'm Molly Wood. Welcome back to Make Me Smart, the podcast where none of us is as smart as all of us.

**Kai Ryssdal:** I'm Kai Ryssdal. Thanks for being here on this Tuesday or whenever you happen to listen to this podcast. But it is the day on which we do a deep dive into a single topic, and today, and, and I, you know, we didn't plan it this way when we planned to do this episode, but for my money anyway, part of the reason to do this today is just to give us all a little mental break from the news, well, me maybe, and maybe it's not everybody, from the news out of Afghanistan. And what we're going to talk about is coming out of or more accurately dealing with the very long tail of this pandemic, because some workers are back in offices, some are not, kids are back in school, there's masks, there's all kinds of stuff. And honestly, I think it's a tad fraught, that's what I think.

**Molly Wood:** It is fraught. And there's this kind of free-floating anxiety that our guest wrote about, which we're going to talk about in a minute. But that is related to this sense of whiplash that, you know, you could say that this administration had its mission accomplished moment, and it was not, and so now there's a question of, you know, are we having hot vax summer or is school gonna close again, and it's making us all a little bit crazy, let's say.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Little bit. Nice tying up of many news threads there with the whole mission impossible, mission accomplished thing and all that jazz. Anyway.

**Molly Wood:** It's all happened before and will happen again, apparently.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Only one story. Anyway, so how should we go about all this? How should we think about it? And, and, and what do we do? What do we do? Anyway, Amy Cuddy is on the line. She's a social psychologist also, she teaches at the business school at Harvard's executive education program. Amy, thanks for coming on the program.

**Amy Cuddy:** Thanks so much for having me. It's kind of strange to hear that this is a like, an escape from the news. Like that speaks volumes about this week. Yeah. No, no, I hear you though, I hear you.

**Kai Ryssdal:** So look, let me, let me just like, generically start with, is it weird to be stressed about all of this terrible stuff kind of seeming to end or wind down?

**Amy Cuddy:** Not at all. And I mean, it, you know, it's interesting because I started to work on this piece on, you know, what I call pandemic flux syndrome, in early July, before the, the big Delta spike, so, and people were already kind of going back into this sort of depressive anxious stage, as we were reemerging. Now, this is another twist in the plot that makes things even more complex psychologically, but I think it's very common for people to be experiencing spikes in whatever they tend toward, whether that's anxiety or sort of depression. And along with that, to have a desire to escape. And, and if you are more on the depressive kind of melancholic side, that means kind of wanting to shut down for a while, like hide under a weighted blanket, and, you know, put on headphones. If you're more on the anxious side, I'm seeing a lot of people who are wanting to make major life changes, like I have to move or change my job or like, something really drastic. And all of that is about a desire to escape this feeling of uncertainty and threat.

**Molly Wood:** I mean, I feel like I read your piece, actually, toward the end of vacation, and it resonated with me so much, and I'm so glad that our producers had already suggested having you on, because there's so much value in understanding that you are not alone in these feelings. And that, in fact, when we thought things were going to open up and the mission had been accomplished, there was a lot of stress associated with that, like the first stages of grieving what had happened or even missing lockdown. But then this sense of like, fear and lockdown came right back around, like, can you talk about how it was a little more--about how it was those two sort of conflicting waves of intense emotion crashing?

**Amy Cuddy:** Absolutely. So, so just to kind of set the context, context in mid-June. So between June 14 and the 21st, Gallup did a poll, they asked a couple of questions about--they call them like, sort of life thriving questions, they've been doing this for 13 years. And in mid-June, that number, so the number of people polled in about 5000 Americans, almost 60% felt optimistic about the present and future. So they were classified as thriving. Now, in mid-June, it was sort of, you know, the heady early days of summer, when we were really thinking we were going to reemerge, hadn't yet quite done it, we were really looking forward to doing things that we had missed, like going to concerts or going out to dinner with friends. You know, and then all of a sudden, well, I think the Fourth of July comes along. And that is, you know, I think of that as a sort of unofficial marker of full-fledged summer, right, in the US. And people first weren't as happy as they thought they'd be. So I started getting emails from friends saying, I don't know what's wrong with me, like I, you know, I went out to dinner with friends, I went to a concert, I went to a sporting event, and why am I not happier? What's wrong with me? Why am I, why do I want to retreat back home? So a lot of those reactions, and that's about a couple of things. One, one is that we're not very good at predicting our emotions in the future, you know, for predicting how we'll feel about future events, and we call these affective forecasting errors, you know, we don't forecast our affect well, and that's in negative cases and positive cases. So in this case, you know, where we thought, I'm going to be euphoric when I socialize when I emerge, and then you're not, that's an affective forecasting error. So generally, we overestimate the intensity and

the duration of our emotions after big single events, discounting all of the other things that are affecting our mood, right. So people think they'll be much happier after a sporting event win for their team than they are and for much longer, and they think they'll be much more upset after a breakup, and for much longer than they are, right. So, but I think that was part of what was happening, is that affective forecasting error.

**Kai Ryssdal:** How long does that--sorry, go ahead.

**Amy Cuddy:** I was gonna say that the second piece there and this is relevant, I think, even more broadly, is that this is a lot. This has been a long crisis, right? This is, this is, in compared to many other sort of humanitarian crises, this one has gone on a long time. And the way that we deal with crises is we first go into this kind of emergency phase. And we use what psychologists refer to as surge capacity. And that's this network of psychological and physical systems that help us adapt and deal with acutely stressful situations. But we can't do that for long, that gets depleted. And we then go into this regression phase where we withdraw, we get sad, agitated, we don't want to hang out with people, we're done with zoom meetings, right. And that's where we are trying to recharge. And so that went on for so long that our nervous systems are depleted. They're kind of wrecked right now. And so it's not surprising that we don't have the capacity to feel intense positive emotions right now, when we go out to that live concert.

**Kai Ryssdal:** So how long is that gonna last? I mean, you're talking short, right? I mean, you're talking short term here, I think. But in like five years, granted, there are going to be systemic and societal impacts of this pandemic that are gonna be generational, probably, but like, on an individual basis, when does it end?

**Amy Cuddy:** I obviously, you know, it's gonna vary from person to person. But I do think that the sort of the silver lining is that when you look at data over the last year and a half, people are actually in, on average, coping pretty well. Yes, we had this downward turn this summer. But on average, people are quite resilient, like our emotional immune systems are pretty good. So we will return to our baseline levels more quickly than we expect to. But I do think that we need to first acknowledge that people are feeling, a lot of people are feeling bad and they feel guilty to talk about it because on the one hand, you know, many, many more people are vaccinated. We are moving, moving toward reopening. And they feel kind of, there's a sense of shame that they don't feel better. In fact, some people were really taking comfort in some of the new routines that they had picked up, you know, they felt that they were moving at a slower pace of life, and that works better for them. And they're not really ready to go back into, you know, full blown interactions in the workplace. So I think that, that, you know, we need to kind of acknowledge all of these different things that are happening for people, that there's, there's some differences in how people are dealing with them, and at the same time, maintain that sense of optimism that's based in, you know, decades and decades and decades of data that people are actually pretty psychologically resilient.

**Molly Wood:** Right. But I wonder how we can use some of that understanding about these forecasting errors to maybe the second time that we open up, or, you know, resume for real, or

maybe the third time, like every time that we have a setback and then a restart, could we reexamine and by we I mean, companies, employers, you know, society, reexamine the things that we actually thought were great before we had this like, big reset about our lives. Like maybe we never liked going out to restaurants, I don't know.

**Amy Cuddy:** Right. And, and, and I think that gets at sort of the, sort of fourth prong of this, which is that a big part of what's happening now, which is why, you know, it was about sort of, I wanted it to be pandemic vacillation syndrome, but that's a little bit too long. Pandemic flux syndrome is that there is so much, there's been so much uncertainty, right. And so much like you said, whiplash, it's like being on a Tilt-A-Whirl, right, at an amusement park. And that uncertainty about when it ends, exactly what is the threat, the threat keeps changing, how do we fight the threat, all of that uncertainty makes us feel very powerless, right. So we lose our sense of personal power, of agency, of autonomy. And I think that employers are going to have to find ways to help people rediscover that sense of autonomy and agency. And part of that is going to be by listening to kind of what they learned about themselves over the last 18 months, about what works for them. I'm seeing that the companies that seem to be less susceptible to this, what are they calling it, the, like the massive resignation trend that we're seeing, the ones that seem to be doing better are the ones that are, are, are offering employee, employees more flexible ways to return to work and really listening to what works for them. So I do think that understanding that the uncertainty has robbed us of our sense of power, and to restore power, you're going to need to give people some flexibility, some choice in how they return to work. I think that's a smart move for leaders.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Okay. But, and, and, and, as we all know, just by reading the news, and certainly some of us living through it in our own companies, they can't decide what they want to do with requiring vaccinations, when to come back to work, all of those things, and it seems to me they might have a tougher time with the, the softer skills that you seem to be saying they will have to employ here.

**Amy Cuddy:** Yeah, I mean, certainly. Welcome to the world of being a psychologist talking to people in business, although I am always--

**Molly Wood:** But they're still people.

**Amy Cuddy:** Yes.

**Molly Wood:** They had the same experience that, you know, I did.

**Amy Cuddy:** And some of them are doing, are actually doing it well. And so I think, one, it will, you know, we do, and I know, there are all these frustrating pieces about how we keep, we keep saying we need more data, but we do quickly need to be collecting data on what's working in organizations around this, to be able to show, like to make the business case for why it's better to be flexible with your employees and to listen to them. That's certainly the most compelling thing that you can do to get to change how people sort of lead. But, you know, I think that just

beginning by acknowledging that people are struggling. I feel like in a way, employers are afraid to say it because they're afraid that somehow it makes it more real, but it's already real. And people find it so, they feel so seen and understood, they feel so relieved to hear oh my gosh, I'm not alone. And I'm not going to lose my job because I'm feeling bad right now, right. Like, you know, that's, I think Kai, you said that at the beginning, that, that just sort of the acknowledgement. Or Molly, I'm sorry, I'm not sure which, which of you said that, acknowledging it is, that alone is so important.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yeah.

**Molly Wood:** Right. Does it come down to, you know, it's interesting, I'm thinking about it now at the business level, and it sort of feels like there's probably a lot of fear in admitting that the way things were before might not work going forward because that feels like the first step in just undoing the whole thing. Like it just feels safer to pretend it was always working great.

**Amy Cuddy:** Exactly, it's, and that's the, you know, it's funny, I have a bit of trouble with the word resilience. Because you know, when you look at really what resilience means, it's about an object sort of returning to its original shape after being, you know, distorted by some stimulus. And we're not going to return to our normal shape, you know, to our pre-COVID shape, it's going to be a bit different. And so I do like the idea of agility better, to focus on, on, on the ability to, to adapt to these changing times without fear. But what, what you see also is to move past that regression stage that I was referring to earlier into what we call recovery or rebuilding, that does take some effortful, you know, thoughtful work from leaders, and there are a few things that they can do. One that seems to work is to have a day one, a new day one, it's like a fresh start day. Now, as we see, COVID is not going to end in a clear way. It's not going to be, you know, we're, we're all celebrating in the streets, and it's, you know, over a shared enemy. But an organization can say this is going to be our day one, so people get to kind of restart. Another thing that helps is to reorient people around new goals. You know, maybe--it's interesting, like some companies have thrived, some industries have thrived financially, but still, their employees are not happy. Those, those, those leaders are the most confused when I talk to them, though I don't understand we've done so well, but they're so stressed out. They're not happy, what do we do? Right, so reorienting them around new goals, getting them focused on something else to renew that sense of purpose. Also restructuring teams, because teams, you know, teams in this virtual environment struggle, it's tough for them to connect with each other. And so then you get some kind of bad, bad vibes between people, some broken trust, broken relationships, and sometimes you just need to reorganize teams, but it's going to, you know, leaders are going to have to guide people in that with a combination of, of sensitivity and, and, and compassion and optimism.

**Molly Wood:** Love it. Amy Cuddy is a social psychologist who teaches at Harvard Business School's executive education program. Amy, thank you so much. I feel seen.

**Amy Cuddy:** Oh, I'm so glad. Thanks for having me. Love you guys. Thank you.

**Molly Wood:** Thank you!

**Kai Ryssdal:** So we're gonna take a quick break here in a minute. But let us know what you're thinking. What do you, if you're, if you're going through some of those things that Amy and Molly and I talked about, let us know. And, and let us know how you're dealing with it. Because look, as Molly and I have shared on this podcast many times, sometimes we're not dealing with it so well, you know.

**Molly Wood:** I know. Exactly. And the only outlet we have is this show.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Is you guys, yeah.

**Molly Wood:** And maybe the occasional kind of crappy gardening. So tell us how you are coping as this flux syndrome--it's real. It's real. It's real. And if anything, I hope you feel, feel acknowledged by that. You can send us a voice memo or an email to [makesmart@marketplace.org](mailto:makesmart@marketplace.org). You can also call us and leave us a voicemail message. Our new number is 508-827-6278, also known as 508-UB-SMART. We'll be right back.

**Molly Wood:** And we're back. And it's time for a quick news fix.

**Kai Ryssdal:** We are back. Alright, I'll climb in and, and just go real quick first, and I'll say this will probably be the last time I try to mention Afghanistan on this podcast just because I'm becoming news overwhelmed. But I want to make sure that people are aware of this reporting that the Washington Post did two years ago now, in a series of really great investigative reports, which were basically the Afghanistan papers, analogous to the Pentagon Papers of the Vietnam War. It's a bunch of reporting the Post did, basically laying out in detail how the American government knew that this was an unwinnable war, that things were not going to end well. And yet on we kept going and on we kept messaging to the American public that the Afghan military could handle it. So we're gonna put this link on our show page. It's a secret history of the war, the Afghanistan papers in the Washington Post from two years ago. And all y'all check it out. Because it's just, it's, look, I've been clear, I think this is just a terrible ending to a very sad chapter of this country's Expeditionary Forces. Anyway, that's it.

**Molly Wood:** I read today, actually, I just dropped it in our Slack, because it's going to end up in the show notes probably. I just read actually, the Washington Post did a piece about Barbara Lee.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Oh, yeah.

**Molly Wood:** Who was the only member of congress after 9/11 to vote against the war in Afghanistan, specifically against the broad authorization that was used to carry out that war, which is what led the Bush administration to be able to say, you know what, now that we like, caught bin Laden and toppled Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, we're just going to stay, we're going to expand the mission to this kind of like, nation building thing. That is what really became the

morass, like the first part already took 10 years, and it was 10 more years of this, this campaign that was enabled by this authorization that only Barbara Lee, the representative from California, voted against. She got death threats, you know, she was called a traitor. And she's spent, she has spent all of the intervening time since introducing legislation to roll back that exact type of authorization that lets presidents basically prosecute any war they want. And, you know, let all their buddies profit.

**Kai Ryssdal:** And oh, by the way, the AUMF, it's called the authorization for the use of military force AUMF, AUMF from 2001 is still in force. And it's what every president since George Bush has used every time they use force, and the Congress cannot take it upon itself to make the difficult decisions to withdraw these permissions. It's kind of a mess. Kind of a mess.

**Molly Wood:** Yeah. And she's still at it. She's still there trying to get this, she's still trying to get this repealed. I mean it really, like these are the mistakes, let's, you know, let's for once maybe learn from this mistake, because these, this is why this keeps happening. This kind of thing. And it's a tragedy every time. It's just appalling and infuriating. I will commend to you actually a little thread on from my, my erstwhile beat from the tech world, because I just think that, I thought it was so interesting--Brian Fung from CNN did a bunch of reporting and then a bunch of tweeting about, ironically, about how social media now is trying to deal with the Taliban takeover because according to, not the State Department but the Treasury Department, the Afghan Taliban is listed as a specially designated global terrorist entity. And so all of a sudden, social media almost as quickly as the United States government, is like, oh, crap, they're in charge. Now what do we do? Facebook has said that, you know, the Taliban has been banned for years. YouTube, like, took three days to try to figure out a plan and then finally wrote back to Brian Fong and said, no, no, yeah, totally, because of the Treasury thing. They're absolutely, they're off. Twitter seems to have no idea what to do. And then all of them are going to run into their own kind of weird, arbitrary rules about world leaders and notable figures. And it's just sort of part of, I don't know, I just thought it was really interesting that it speaks to the fact that kind of no one knows what to do.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Nobody knows what to do. Nobody.

**Molly Wood:** And then my totally non Afghanistan mention today is actually about the--Bloomberg had this remarkable piece that came out yesterday, a big, big, big graphic--sorry, came out a week ago, but it was a big graphic representation of how McKenzie Scott, the former wife of Jeff Bezos, is just like dropping philanthropy bombs left and right, she's, you know, given out almost, or announced at least \$8.6 billion in gifts. She is outspending the Gates and the Ford Foundation combined. She is reshaping the nonprofit world and the thing that I wanted to point out is that of that money, \$25 million of the almost \$9 billion pledged has gone to environmental causes.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Wait, say that again cause that doesn't sound like that much money.

**Molly Wood:** Yeah. It's not. 20--it is like the tiniest little chunk. And there have been articles for years asking, and let me put this subtly, from [insidephilanthropy.com](http://insidephilanthropy.com) since 2015, where the hell

is all the philanthropy spending on climate? 2017, the Hewlett Foundation, why philanthropy must do more on climate change. I spoke to the Gates Foundation, man, I don't know, six or seven months ago about, you know, because Bill Gates wrote this climate book like, what do you guys actually do? And I'm here to tell you, like, nothing. Had the, had the entire engines of philanthropy turned their attention to this cause and no, it is not philanthropy's problem to solve alone, but at a moment when a person is making like these massive waves in philanthropic giving, truly transforming huge sectors, almost zero of that money on a relative basis is being spent on environmental issues and climate change.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yeah. It's amazing.

**Molly Wood:** Learning from our mistakes, that's it for the news fix. Let's do--if she would, you know, ever go on anybody's show, I would, I would ask her directly, but she won't, so, let's do the mailbag.

**Kai Ryssdal:** So we got an email, a voice memo, actually from Rob in Seattle, and the backstory that you need to understand where this one's coming from is this: we did an episode a couple of years ago trying to figure out why the cost of college is just so completely confusing, right? Because nobody pays full freight for a whole lot of reasons. Well, except international students, but that's a whole different podcast. Anyway, Rob sent us a voice memo back then, a couple of years ago, telling us about how he was getting ready to send his twin sons to college and how he was planning to pay for it. Here's the update.

**Rob:** Now here we are, 2021. They graduated last year, learned a couple things along the way. One is that scholarships made themselves available over the course of their, their studies. We didn't anticipate that. And the other thing is that there are certain expenses, like private apartments, that are not eligible for payment from 529 funds. So only checks that you write to the institutions are eligible for, for 529 funds. Please note, parents out there. So keep up the great work, still loving the show.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yeah, the morass. No, go ahead, go ahead, because I've been down this road. So you're, you're learning things here, go ahead.

**Molly Wood:** Well yeah, that should get fixed. I'm sorry, like housing is kind of a big deal. And if parents are putting away money for years and years and years in their 529s and it's not helping pay for college and housing is not part of that if it's off-campus, that's absurd. But also, um, how awesome that we got an update from Rob in Seattle. like four years later.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Molly Wood:** That's so amazing! Oh, I love our show.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Good stuff.

**Molly Wood:** That's outstanding. Alright. Thanks, thanks, Rob. Thanks for continuing to listen to our show all these years later, and also keeping us up to date and congrats to you and your boys. That's amazing. Or your twins, I can't remember. I guess if you said they were boys, yeah, twin sons. Anyway, this next voice memo is for you, Kai.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Okay.

**Natalie:** Hi, this is Natalie calling from Davenport, Florida. I was originally going to submit this as a what do you want to know Wednesday question because as I was listening to the economics on tap last Friday, and Kai was talking about being in his shed, I thought, oh, I wonder how Kai's internet is holding up? And then like two seconds after that thought came into my mind, Kai's internet did not hold up. And so what started out as a what do I want to know Wednesday ended up being made into a make me smile moment. So thank you, Kai, and I'm sorry your internet is still not working.

**Kai Ryssdal:** I don't even know. I can't even. I can't even with the internet provider in my, in my hometown. It's just butts.

**Molly Wood:** Maybe Natalie caused it just a tiny bit. Maybe she manifested it.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Holy cow, yeah, no. So I get to come down. I get to come down to the abandoned studios at Marketplace world headquarters every single day, which, you know, is not so bad. It's not so bad.

**Molly Wood:** I think "Kai's internet is down" would be great premium fundraising swag. That'd be a pretty awesome t-shirt. You know how I love a random t-shirt.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yes, totally true. Alright, one more voice memo. Here it is. And it's about going back to work.

**Beth:** Hey, smart folks. This is Beth calling from New York City, where in the before times, I worked backstage in the wardrobe department on a Broadway show. I'm very pleased that our employers are going to be requiring us all to get vaccinated because there's no way I can do a quick change with an actor from six feet away. It's just not going to happen. And my union has said, yes, your employer is going to be requiring this and we're not gonna fight that because that's not the hill we want to die on. Literally. Have a good, smart day.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yeah, totally.

**Molly Wood:** Yep. Thanks for sharing, Beth. I, to all of the companies out there who are sort of waiting to see what everyone else is going to do--

**Kai Ryssdal:** Don't wait. Why are you waiting?

**Molly Wood:** Do right by your people.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Do the right thing.

**Molly Wood:** Yes. Tell us, by the way, what else is going on with your workplaces. We would love to know more. Are you going back? Are you staying home? Is your, is your employer trying to not make waves by waiting to see what everyone else is gonna do? How do you feel about it? Let us know, [makemesmart@marketplace.org](mailto:makemesmart@marketplace.org), or, of course, call us, 508-UB-SMART.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Alright, leave you, as we always do, with this week's answer to the make me smart question: What is something you thought you knew, later found out You were wrong about? Go.

**Ben:** Hi, this is Ben Vickers from Cave Creek, Arizona. Something I thought I knew but later found out I was wrong about was tequila. After an ill advised that with a drink, I wrote it off as disgusting. But then thanks to you guys, I try a hang for the first and now I'm back on the tequila train. Thanks for making us all smart.

**Molly Wood:** Welcome back friends. Welcome back. Welcome back.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Oh, my god.

**Molly Wood:** I credit, I credit my good friend Lisa for like, I don't know, six or seven years ago, you know, we were hanging out and she ordered a reposado over ice. And I was like, wait, tequila can be good and also classy? And that reintroduced me to the world of tequila, which is delightful. Welcome back. Welcome back Ben. Glad we can help in ways big and small.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Oh, my Lord. There we go. Alright, so look, send us your answers or random anecdotes that fit in the line--along the lines of what is something you thought you knew but then found out you were wrong about. Voice memos can come to us in our emails from your phones or a voice message at our new phone number 508-82-SMART. Hook us up, would you? Let us know what's on your mind.

**Molly Wood:** You know, you can help just one person in any way whatsoever, we'll take it. Make Me Smart is produced and directed by the wonderful Marissa Cabrera. Tony Wagner is our digital producer. Our intern is Grace Rubin.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Brian Allison engineered in the moment today. Juan Carlos Torrado is going to mix it later. Ben Tolliday and Daniel Ramirez composed our theme music. The senior producer was Bridget Bodnar. The executive director of on demand is Sitara Nieves. There you go.

**Molly Wood:** 2%, by the way.

**Kai Ryssdal:** 2% what?

**Molly Wood:** 2% of philanthropic giving goes to climate issues.

**Kai Ryssdal:** Yeah, it's insane.

**Molly Wood:** This is my new obsession. Maybe we should do a whole show on it.