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“Tech is easy, people are hard”: Philosophical Takeaways from Cat Moon’s CALICon Keynote

Rachel S. Evans

University of Georgia School of Law, rsevans@uga.edu

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[About CS-SIS](#)

[Home](#) > [Conferences](#) > “Tech is easy, people are hard”: Philosophical Takeaways from Cat Moon’s CALICon Keynote

“Tech is easy, people are hard”: Philosophical Takeaways from Cat Moon’s CALICon Keynote

[Rachel Evans](#) Posted on [June 23, 2020](#) Posted in [Conferences](#) — [No Comments ↓](#)

It feels like CALICon 2020 was eons ago in our suspended animation existence that is the new norm for those of us still teleworking past the 3 months mark. Yet the words from Friday June 5th’s keynote address delivered by [Caitlin “Cat” Moon](#) have continued ringing in my ears:

“TECH is easy, PEOPLE are hard.” – Cat Moon

I had been following Cat on Twitter for many months leading up to [CALICon’s announcement that she would be one of the two keynotes for their virtual conference](#). So I was elated to learn she would give a closing address in early June. In a [previous CALICon re-cap CS-SIS blog post](#) another avid tweeter and AALL member [Brian Huffman](#) shared an excellent brief summary of Cat’s talk. In addition to highlighting her sentiments that **this was the crisis we needed**, he noted her emphasis on “EQ. Cat recommended a human-centered design for our model going forward. Along with empathy, we need curiosity and radical collaboration to grow.” It is the “human-centered” part that is so important.

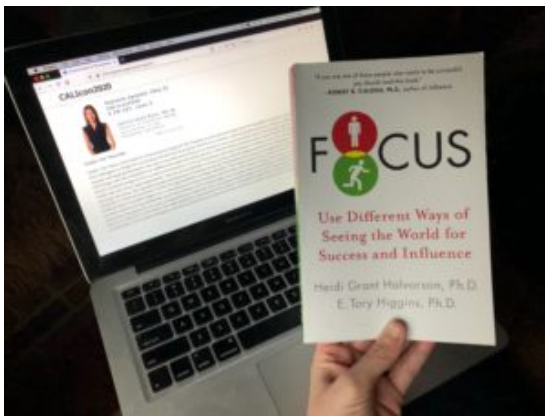
Sadly that is more often than not the key element that is missing from our designs, be they interfaces patrons use in libraries, systems that professionals and clients use in legal practice, or workflows we use ourselves in academic institutions, government offices or private firms. Part of Cat’s talk not surprisingly focused on design (duh, she is the Director of [Innovation Design for the PoLI at Vanderbilt](#)), and how COVID has been the impetus for re-designs we sorely needed. From shifting course structures to implementing patron-driven holds, this excellent slide highlights how **“the people” is a factor missing from many of our designs** which should be user-centered.



EQ is a big part of staying user-focused when we design. Also known as emotional quotient or more popularly emotional intelligence, EQ was co-developed by another [John Mayer \(the psychologist, not the CALI tech guru\)](#). Check out his [sweet archive.org-captured html-based EQ website](#). In short, your EQ is a measure of individual capability for recognizing your own emotions and others, to discern between them, to

label them appropriately, and to **use this emotional data to guide thinking and behavior**. In an ideal world, good EQ would allow you to adapt more easily and quickly to environments and the people in them, and ultimately achieve your goals.

Awareness of and programming around emotional intelligence has continued to increase at tech-driven conferences. I remember very vividly the summaries my colleague Information Technology Librarian [Jason Tubinis](#) shared from the last two ABA Techshows, and being intrigued that many were centered around more soft skill topics (like “[EQ over IQ: Building Emotional Intelligence...](#)”). I expected to hear all about Blockchain or the latest and greatest AI – but emotional intelligence at a tech conference?! He comments that “*I think it’s a credit to the Techshow that they do a really good job of keeping attorneys informed about the latest and greatest technology, but also **bringing awareness to new developments in how to be better in practice/work** generally*”. And there is good reason this is growing in popularity; if sci-fi has taught us anything it is that machine learning can’t compare to the human touch. [The ABA Techshow](#) gets it and Jason gets it. Not long before COVID closure he recommended to me the excellent title [Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In](#).



Cat gets it too; she recommended in her keynote the book [Focus: Use Different Ways of Seeing the World for Success and Influence](#). Authored by Heidi Grant Halvorson and E. Tory Higgins (psychologists from [Columbia University’s Motivation Science Center](#), part of the Business School), it really highlights **the importance of balance when it comes to motivation for succeeding in anything**. This reminded me of the balancing aspects of the Swedish *Lagome* and Danish *Hygge* ways of living. What originally brought me to these philosophies was the book [The Danish Way of Parenting: What the Happiest People in the World Know About Raising Confident, Capable Kids](#). To my wonderful surprise *Focus* also includes an chapter on

parenting. For me that chapter clearly outlined how certain techniques can be used to motivate people of all ages, even if the examples were related to children.

We experience it everyday in our positions where our roles of understanding and implementing the technology for our libraries and law schools is small beans compared to the far more essential and trickier task of translating complex systems and unpacking the jargon for coworkers and patrons. **Translation is the hardest piece of the puzzle**. Early on the book illustrates that pessimism is actually a very healthy trait expressed by individuals who are *prevention* motivated. More optimistic individuals (at least externally) are usually *promotion* motivated. I tend to fall on the “promotion” motivated end of the spectrum most of the time. As I try to find and embrace my inner pessimist, and learn more empathy for my “prevention” motivated colleagues, I encourage you to [revisit Cat’s keynote on CALI’s YouTube](#). Her words of advice, and her book recommendation, were **highly practical and on point for those of us who continue to redesign our services and resources** all while being propelled into an increasingly unknown Fall 2020.

About [Rachel Evans](#)

Metadata Services & Special Collections Librarian at UGA Law Library

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