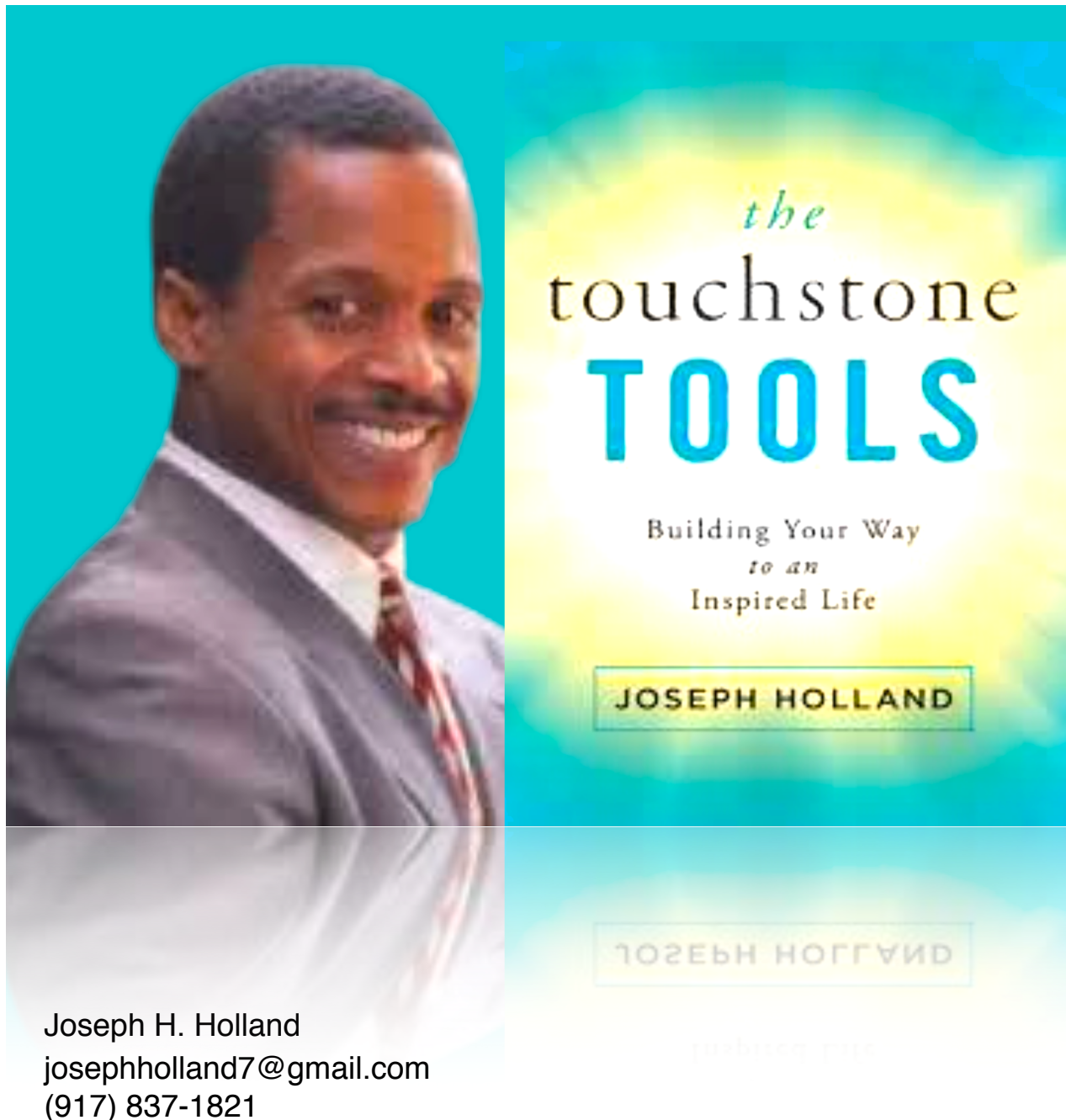


The Touchstone Tools:

Building Soft Skills for Academic Achievement & Career Advancement



Overview

Whether you are facing setbacks and adversities, feeling overwhelmed and lost, or simply living beneath your created potential and seeking more meaning out of life, these are the tools that will fortify you with a moral core, spiritual fiber, inner vitality, and insightful strategies to build your way to an inspired life.

— Joseph Holland, *The Touchstone Tools Book*

The Touchstone Tools (“TTT”) is an initiative that balances personal development and leadership skills: ***Build a better you – Build a better world.*** TTT strategy is to raise the skill and performance level of those with a personal history of under-performance by addressing their attitudes and behaviors through a holistic approach. The traditional educational focus has been almost exclusively on hard skills: the academic skills to make one college-ready and/or the vocational skills to make one job-ready. Though necessary, imparting hard skills is often not sufficient. There are soft skills: non-academic and socio-emotional issues that individuals must learn to manage in order to thrive in the face of life’s adversities, achieve success and fulfill purpose.

Enter TTT, which offers a TOOLKIT FOR LIFE: the inspirational principles that create a dynamic balance of hard (academic/vocational) skills and soft (emotional/ social intelligence) skills. Ten thematic modules comprise TTT: responsibility, vision, self-esteem, discipline, association, planning, work, wealth, love and faith. Participants will learn that these holistic tools are more than moral precepts; they are intentional and strategic ways to foster motivation, stability, perseverance and other virtues on the road to personal success.

Background



TTT evolved from the strategy of building lives with holistic tools in the Harlem homeless shelter started by Joseph Holland (“JH” — pictured at far left above with some of the residents of the shelter). JH has adapted the life-transforming principles to various settings over the years: prison re-entry, substance abuse and job readiness programs as well as schools to reach young people. JH is a Harlem-based writer, attorney, entrepreneur, civic leader and ordained minister with thirty-five years of experience building institutions that serve the community. His creative

work includes a memoir “From Harlem With Love: An Ivy Leaguer’s Inner-City Odyssey”; his inspirational self-help book, “The Touchstones Tools: Building Your Way To An Inspired Life”; and “Holistic Hardware: Tools That Build Lives”, a motivational video series stemming from his work at the homeless shelter. As an entrepreneur, JH established an American Express Travel Office, a Ben & Jerry’s ice cream parlor, a Body Shop retail store and served as Vice-President of the Harlem Business Alliance. He also served as New York State Housing Commissioner, as a board member of the Empire State Development Corporation and other state agencies. The son of a U.S. Ambassador, JH holds his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Cornell University — where he was an All-American football player — and his J.D. degree from Harvard Law School. Based on the breath of these experiences, JH has birthed TTT, to bring the success tools that he has learned to lives that need them most. Here’s a link to a [JH bio reel](#) that reveals a sampling of the many communities impacted by this program.

Philosophy

TTT is an innovative program that guides the individual on an inner journey of developing deliberate, effective habits, a process that will result in their meeting their goals and attaining their aspirations. TTT’s inward trek balances academic/vocational pursuit with character development (this holistic strategy is depicted below): where what one is becoming on the inside is ultimately more important than what one is achieving on the outside. This approach emphasizes a dual focus -- external objectives (classroom attendance/punctuality, extracurricular/athletic participation) to inner goals (being more persistent, more joyful, more visionary, more disciplined,); thus equipping students to not only work hard in the classroom but also to make good choices outside of the classroom.

TTT Holistic Strategy



Program

TTT curriculum will be implemented in regularly scheduled workshops, which can be conducted either in person or virtually. Each workshop will cover one of the ten tools — responsibility, vision, self-esteem, discipline, association, planning, work, wealth, love and faith — and will feature worksheets, breakout sessions and **Individual Action Plans (“IAP”)**. The IAP’s are key, for they will create an academic and social task list (Daily Plan of Action) for each participant so that they are prepared academically: college-ready; vocationally: job-ready; and socially: ready to effectively interface with others, even those from other cultures; and practically -- prepared to overcome life’s challenges. The IAP will be highly personalized and organized; it will be managed in order to provide participants with appropriate tasks and monitored in ways to hold them accountable. The hard skills action plan will include a list of assignments as a reminder to participants to prioritize their external activities as much as their inner journey. The soft skills action plan will encompass checklists to keep participants focused on their non-academic priorities, e.g., updating their planning calendars, staying out of arguments and fights, maintaining proper diet and rest, avoiding falling into the same traps, etc.

TTT workshops will be facilitated by JH or other trained facilitator(s). The workshop format/timetable will run approximately 60 minutes as follows:

Workshop Topic Introduction & Worksheet Explanation — 10 mins.

Breakout into small group for discussion of tools — 25 mins.

Class Share: small group leaders present findings to entire class — 15 mins.

Closing: Facilitator summarizes the key principles of the workshop — 10 mins.

TTT workshops are designed as a supportive approach, making it clear to participants that, no matter what they’re dealing with outside of the workshops, they can find the right skills and strategies to navigate the rough terrain ahead. Great emphasis is placed on soft skills because their importance tends to be glossed over; these skills also help participants embrace the truth that they are the masters of their own success. High expectations — academic/vocational and personal — will be set to help participants develop their own regimen of self-improvement.

*Based on organizational interest and demand, JH will scale TTT through Training of the Trainers workshops to equip workshop facilitators to help meet the specific needs of all TTT participants.

Some feedback from participants in TTT workshops in New York City and in Ithaca, NY appears in the Appendices.

Funding

TTT funding will be project-based and customized according to participant and organizational needs and objectives based on the following factors:

- In person versus online sessions;
- Number of participants;
- Age range of participants;
- Timeframe of sessions;
- Organizational budget; and
- Organizational goals.

Conclusion

Each day you use the tools is both a step forward and a cornerstone laid. . . . your life will become a steady, unending series of hurdles overcome, adversities vanquished, goals attained, dreams realized and destiny fulfilled. Inspiration, in other words, will actually become not a point in time, something that comes and goes, a one-shot deal . . . but will be the distinguishing feature of your day to day life—all of your life.

— Joseph Holland, ***The Touchstone Tools Book***

TTT: Building Soft Skills for Academic Achievement and Career Advancement is based on the premise that all participants are capable of developing the skills and motivation required to get a high school/college diploma, attain gainful employment, pursue the careers of their choosing, and fulfill their dreams. The tools are designed to take the individual on an inner journey to gain both the understanding and the inspiration to excel. TTT strategy is all about providing a holistic tool kit; equipping participants to manage and master their personal as well as their academic/vocational lives by gaining the fortitude to make it through a life fraught with stormy crises. The program will encourage them to see education/training in a new and different way, as a spark to creativity and passion, to high performance and leadership; it will motivate them to reach for their aspirations, and use education/training to realize them. The aim is to expose individuals to new information, dynamic values, motivational role models and inspirational examples, broadening their perspectives; brightening their horizons; raising their life trajectories; and attaining daily victory.

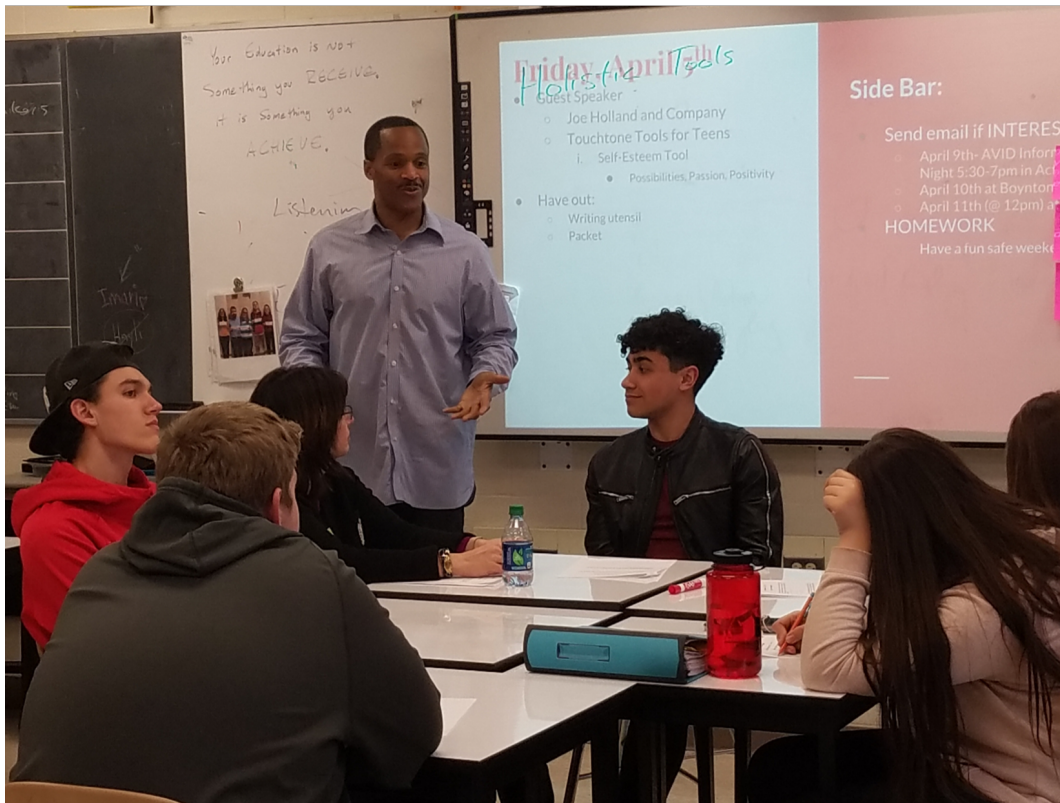
APPENDIX A



During the 2016-17 academic year TTT workshops took place at Thurgood Marshall Academy, a public high school in Harlem. Below are comments from some of the students who completed TTT workshops; a photo of some of the TTT graduates holding their Certificates of Completion appears above.

- *I learned a lot of life lessons, and it changed my train of thought.*
- *TTTeens is a great opportunity to try and improve yourself as a person. I learned a large amount in such a short time, and the content was very dense but doable.*
- *I enjoyed us working together and then presenting our work so others can see how our classmates think.*
- *I changed my way of thinking because I know what I want in the future and I take opportunities more seriously now.*
- *This program is very useful. It teaches you life skills and tips that aren't taught elsewhere. By being exposed to these things at an earlier age, you'll be more prepared to take on the challenges of life and become more successful.*
- *It really opened my mind to where I'm going to see myself in the future.*
- *I have been limiting my friendship with some people who would have a negative effect on my life. I have been time managing myself and planning what is important.*
- *I like how it made me think about my life. I learned many things about my attitude.*

APPENDIX B



During the 2018- 2019 a TTT workshops took place at Ithaca High School in Ithaca, NY. Yuri Alfen, a Cornell University student, participated as a facilitator of some of the workshops. Yuri's feedback showed how impacted he was by the experience. A photo of Yuri in the Ithaca High School classroom appears above; Yuri is seated, directly to the right of JH.

I enjoyed how the writing activity made the students reflect on their lives and form a reaffirming statement. With that, I think the students who benefited most were the ones who said it out loud. Participation falls on the students, so the solution is student comfort which relates back to needing the time to build a rapport with the students. . . . Thank you so much for allowing me to work with you . . . It was a pleasure, and I look forward to working with you in the future.