Summary of Chapter 3
Ken Bain shares the many insights he gained about successful students from his extensive research and in-depth interviews with former students and teachers. In chapter 3 Bain examines the ways that the best college students manage their thinking, behavior, and approach to learning. The best college students effectively manage themselves by being aware of how they are thinking and learning, engaging in mindfulness, avoiding biased thinking, and overcoming stereotype threat. These students approach life with self-examination, kindness, and curiosity. By engaging in their learning with these approaches, they experience deeper learning and a more meaningful life.

Strategies for mindfulness:
• change an absolute statement into something conditional
• change the words used with students (shift the language and categories we employ – e.g., use ‘any’ or ‘one of many possible strategies’ instead of finite words)
• present information in novel ways
• encourage students to take on new perspectives

Avoiding bias:
• Myside or confirmation bias: people tend to think from their own perspective and have difficulty seeing inconsistencies for arguments or people who agree with them
• Vividness bias: the tendency to pay more attention to a single vivid example or fact while overlooking less vivid/interesting examples or facts
• Framing prejudice: how a problem or question is ‘framed’ can significantly influence how others respond to it

Quotes
Pg. 67-68 – “To escape from our boxes, we have to understand how the brain works, how it constructs reality. Only then can we imagine jumping outside our confinements and looking at the world from different angles. But that insight is unlikely to occur unless we find ourselves in a situation where our existing models do not work for us. We call those moments of new insight ‘expectation failures’...To have an influence, the expectation failure often has to be shocking and bold.”

Pg. 70 – “Good teachers will help created those challenges, and you should seek them out and take their classes. You can also challenge yourself and your friends, and they can challenge you...just working with someone from a different social group can make you a better problem solver, even if you feel uncomfortable in doing so.”
When we place ourselves in an environment in which many of our mental models do not work, we have greater capacity to build new models, to expand our understanding and our capacity to create. We can use the power of those expectation failures, deliberately exposing ourselves to people who may make us uneasy but nevertheless prompt greater creativity.”

“Mindful people engage in the ‘continuous creation of new categories.’ They possess an ‘openness to new information,’ and they have ‘an implicit awareness of more than one perspective.’ That means, of course, that they notice novelty and distinctions. They constantly pay attention to different contexts and perspectives, and they live in the moment.

“If framing is so powerful, it means that when we mindfully pay attention to the frames that other people create for us, we can escape the tyranny of those boxes and cobble together ways of looking at the world that let us enjoy what we do...So much of school can frame everything in a way that makes it boring and tedious. Grades create extrinsic motivators that reduce intrinsic interests.”

Possible Discussion Questions

1. How can/do you engage students in metacognitive thinking in your classes or interactions with students?

2. What invisible thought processes or strategies can/do you use as an expert reader, writer, or thinker in your discipline that you could make visible to your students?

3. What assumptions of students in your discipline need to be challenged? How do you create those challenges (or failure expectations)? How can/do you challenge your assumptions as an instructor?

4. (Quote from pg. 74 above) How can/do you encourage mindfulness with your students? How do/can you help students overcome myside bias, vividness bias, and framing prejudice?

5. (Quote from pg. 83 above) How can/do you frame activities and assignments in ways that intrinsically motivate students?

6. In what ways do you see your students react to stereotype threat? How can/do you reduce stereotype threat in your classes or interactions with students?