Michelle Alexander, Theodore Dalrymple, and Jonathan Haidt, among others, have ideas that might fit the exact place you find yourself. Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile's work, "Politics and Religion: How Christians and Theologians Can Live in and Engage the World," offers a way of thinking earlier in my career. Their ideas can help you understand why you talk, think, eat, and vote the way you do. That said, the task of influence and persuasion offers a feeling known to students in every program. Many times I want to cut more quickly toward the persuasive effect which grows out of how we frame ideas and the seminal work on persuasion, and those frames.

One of my favorite books is "Hillbilly Elegy" by J.D. Vance. This memoir, written by a Harvard University graduate who grew up in Kentucky poor white communities, is a love letter to his hometown. It is not new. As an event planner and owner of a small catering company, I respond to requests from countless families who want to host an outdoor wedding reception. Many of those families grew up in small towns. They shared stories of their hometowns, wanting to host their wedding reception in the same places they grew up and where they now live. It wasn't new. It was filled with schedules, trains, stone-paved roads, and a backdrop of Mississippi Delta blues.

Perhaps because I'm a librarian, graduates will often say something about how the first time they read a book was great. It wasn't new. It seemed easier than prayer. This is true. I wrote my first non-fiction book, "Girl, Wash Your Face," more than 20 years after his untimely death. It is a great way to discover helpful books. My second book, "Mississippi Lake," is a historical work that chronicles the life of one Mississippi family over the period of 40 years. My third book, "Rabbi: A Year of Thoughts and Reflections," is a collection of essays written for the Jewish News. I wish I had access to this book when I was a rabbinical student. "Rabbi" is a masterful treatment of Judaism's relationship to American life. It is a treatment of how to engage the world, the American experience, and the fear of dying. It is a great way to discover helpful books. My fourth book, "The Failure of Nerve: How Churches Have Failed America," argues that churches should read novels and non-theological books. It is a way of thinking earlier in my career. My fifth book, "The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion," argues that churches should read novels and non-theological books. It is a way of thinking earlier in my career.

I confess that I read "The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion," by one of my favorite writers, Jonathan Haidt. It is a masterful treatment of how we frame ideas and the persuasive effect which grows out of how we frame ideas. I wish I had access to this book when I was a rabbinical student. "Rabbi" is a masterful treatment of Judaism's relationship to American life. It is a treatment of how to engage the world, the American experience, and the fear of dying. It is a great way to discover helpful books.