Work, Well-Being, and Self-Actualization

COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

For centuries, work was regarded as nothing but toil—a requirement for earning one's daily bread. But in recent decades, expectations about work have been transformed, as has its very nature. While it still provides one’s daily bread, it is also regarded as a major opportunity for people to find purpose, meaning, and self-actualization in their lives. In this course we’ll discuss the latest research on what makes people fulfilled at work, and on how fulfillment at work improves the quality of work, as well as what makes a career not just successful but meaningful. We will also discuss some of the impediments—both individual and organizational—to doing meaningful and satisfying work. Students will develop their own visions of their ideal self-actualization, and of the ideal company they’d like to lead or work for. Throughout the course you will engage in experiential learning and practical exercises to begin making changes to your daily life, to improve your chances of becoming all that you strive to become in the workplace and beyond.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. 10% of your grade will be based on attendance
2. 30% of your grade will be based on reflection papers that you’ll submit by midnight the day before each class.
3. 20% of your grade will be based on a midterm exam
4. 20% of your grade will be based on a (noncumulative) final exam
5. 20% of the class will be based on your final paper

This course is all about helping you. Don’t think about your grade, think about how to get the most out of this class, so that you reap dividends for the rest of your career.

Brief Reflection Papers (30%): During the course of the semester, you will complete “growth challenges” and then write a 1-page reflection paper (maximum of 500 words) on the experience and its relevance to your current and future work life. We will not be accepting late reflections, and there will be no make-ups. However, we will drop your single lowest reflection paper grade at the end of the semester. Each brief reflection will be graded on the following scale: (3) excellent reflection, thoughtful and insightful, (2) satisfactory, more just going through the motions of the assignment (1), incomplete or not relevant to the topic, and (0) not submitted. These papers will also be reviewed with scrutiny in the case of borderline grades at the end of the semester so that final grades can be rounded up or down according to their quality.
**Final paper (20%):** Part one: Reflect on how successful you were at working toward your SMART goal. What did you try to change, what did you do to change, and how did it go? The key here is not that you succeeded, it is that you used psychological principles to change yourself, and to analyze the project [1-3 pages double-spaced].

Part two: Write out your plan for a thriving work life. Drawing on all of the insights you have gleaned about yourself throughout the semester, write an essay that considers your career from the perspective of well-being and self-actualization. What should you do to maximize your chances of loving your work, self-actualizing, and having a career with no regrets (or whatever your criteria are)? [4-7 pages, double-spaced]

The expected length for the final paper is 5-10 pages double-spaced. The key is to show that you have learned a lot in this class. Tie the elements in your plan to the assignments and class discussions. You can talk about well-being and self-actualization in your life more broadly too, but *the main focus should be on work and career thriving.*

**TEXTBOOKS**

- *How to Be a Positive Leader: Small Actions, Big Impact* by Jane Dutton and Gretchen Spreitzer (Editors)

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: Welcome & Introduction**

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. In Dutton & Spreitzer: *Invitation*
2. Haidt, Chapter 1
3. Kaufman, Preface & Introduction
4. Kaufman, “*What Does It Mean to Be Self-Actualized in the 21st Century?*”, *Scientific American*

**Assignment: Positive Introductions**

**Week 2: Signature Strengths & Virtues**

1. Haidt, Chapters 8 & 10
4. Nice talk on “Best-Self Activation” by Dan Cable: [https://vimeo.com/278640151/2df05f391b](https://vimeo.com/278640151/2df05f391b)
**Assignments:** *Take the VIA Inventory & Use Your Top Strengths in New Ways Or Hone Your Talent*

**Week 3: Meaning, Purpose, and Workplace Design**

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. In Dutton & Spreitzer: Amy Wrzesniewski, *Engage in Job Crafting*
2. Haidt, Chapter 5
3. Kaufman, Chapter 6

**Assignment:** *What's Your Ikigai? Or Best Possible Self Or Develop a Personal Oath Or This I Believe Or Harmonize Your Identities*

**AND**

**Appreciative Inquiry & SMART Goal-Setting for Improved Well-Being**

***Note: There are two assignments this week***

**Week 4: Harnessing Your Emotions**

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Fredrickson & Joiner, *Reflections on Positive Emotions and Upward Spirals*
2. Kaufman, “*Authenticity Under Fire*”, *Scientific American*

**Assignment:** *Create a Positive Portfolio Or Create a Meaningful Music Library Or Embrace Your Dark Side Or Accept Your Whole Self*

**Week 5: Mindfulness**

2. *10% Happier – Mindfulness Applications at Work: Dan Harris*
4. *The Psychology Podcast* chat with David Vago

**Assignment:** *Choose a Mindfulness Meditation*
Week 6: Health & Vitality


Unplug Challenge Or Time Tracking Or REVAMP Inventory

Week 7: Psychological Safety and Resiliency

1. Haidt, Chapter 7
2. Kaufman, Chapter 1
3. Marcus Aurelius, 2-page handout
4. CBT reading and exercise, TBA
5. Great Ted Talk by Amy Edmundson on building a psychologically safe workplace: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhoLuui9gX8&feature=youtu.be)

**Assignment:** Face Your Fears Or Spot Your Neurotic Trends Or Challenge Your Cognitive Distortions Or Practice Your ABCs

Week 8: Fostering Relationships and Social Influence at Work

1. Haidt, Chapter 6 (Love)
2. How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uMZi1gc0Nc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uMZi1gc0Nc)
3. In Dutton & Spreitzer: Jane Dutton, *Build High-Quality Connections*
   1. Kaufman, Chapters 2 & 5
   2. *Awakening Compassion in the Workplace with Jane Dutton and Monica Worline*, The Psychology Podcast

**Assignment:** Active Constructive Responding Or Foster a High Quality Connection Write Or Gratitude Letter Grow Together, Cultivate a Secure Relationship

Week 9: Cultivating Healthy Self-Esteem and Positive Identities at Work

1. In Dutton & Spreitzer: Laura Morgan Roberts, *Cultivate Positive Identities*
2. Kaufman, Chapter 3

**Assignments:** Practice Healthy Assertiveness Or Ditch Perfect!

**Week 10: Cultivating Exploration and Creativity at Work**

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. Kaufman, Chapter 5
2. Mark Synnott, *Legendary Climber Alex Honnold Shares His Closest Call*, National Geographic
3. Haidt, Chapter 7 (“The Uses of Adversity”)

**Assignment:** Be Curious! Or Test the Waters: Expand Your Comfort Zone Or Creativity Challenge Or Post-Traumatic Growth

**Week 11: Cultivating Peak Experiences at Work**

1. Kaufman, Chapters 7 & 8

**Assignment:** Practice Savoring Or Create an Awe Experience Or Create a Flow Experience

**Week 12: Positive Work Cultures**

**ASSIGNMENTS**

1. In Dutton & Spreitzer: Oana Branzei, *Cultivate Hope: Found, Not Lost*
2. This is a good summary of Ed Schein’s model of organizational culture which is one of the most broadly used: [https://www.toolshero.com/leadership/organizational-culture-model-schein/](https://www.toolshero.com/leadership/organizational-culture-model-schein/)
Week 13: Ethical Organizations

1. In Dutton & Spreitzer: Kim Cameron, *Activate Virtuousness*
2. In Dutton & Spreitzer: David Mayer, *Lead an Ethical Organization*
3. In Dutton & Spreitzer: David Mayer, *Imbue the Organization with a Higher Purpose*
4. [The Path to Purpose with William Damon](https://www.thepsychologypodcast.com), *The Psychology Podcast*