

A sailboat with a yellow sail is on a blue lake. The background is a dense green forest covering a mountain, with snow-capped peaks visible in the distance. The text 'TRANSCEND! COURSE' is written in large, bold, white capital letters, and 'GROWTH CHALLENGES' is written in smaller, bold, white capital letters below it.

TRANSCEND! COURSE

GROWTH CHALLENGES

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Congratulations on embarking on your journey of self-actualization and transcendence with our global community. The Growth Challenges presented on the following pages contain exclusive content that was designed to accompany the course material, bring our discussions to life, and provide opportunities to engage with others across our global community in our mutual pursuit of integration and transcendence.

We hope that you will continue to revisit the exercises you've already completed — as well as the *new* growth challenges presented here — throughout the rest of your lives, as working toward transcendence and integration is a LIFE-LONG process.

As we've discussed throughout the course, life is not like a video game, and human development is often a two-steps-forward, one-step-back process.

We have so enjoyed the privilege of working with you. It has been a gift for us, and we look forward to continuing these relationships.

In love and continued growth,
The Transcend Team

“One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.”

— Abraham Maslow¹

¹Bland, A. M., & DeRobertis, E. M. (2017). Maslow's unacknowledged contributions to developmental psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, doi: 10.1177/0022167817739732.

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GROWTH CHALLENGE #1: POSITIVE INTRODUCTION



The Challenge

1. Think about a time in your past when you were at your best, when you demonstrated your strongest character strengths and virtues. Refrain from thinking exclusively about times of greatest performance or achievement—rather, consider a time when you stood up for something or someone you believed in, went out of your way to do something kind, or sacrificed your own momentary happiness for a greater good. This can be a recent event, or something in the more distant past.

2. Reflect on why you acted this way; what inspired you to act this way? What did it feel like in the moment? Afterward? What does it feel like to think about this moment now?

3. Tell your story in no more than one single-spaced page. See Maya Angelou's essay "[Philanthropy](#)" for an example of a positive introduction.



GROWTH CHALLENGE #2: SPOT YOUR LOPSIDED DEVELOPMENT

One crucial step on the path to becoming a whole person is awareness of your lop-sided development. This growth challenge is a start toward identifying and facing your own outsized reactions to the world, so that you can begin moving in a direction to live more by your values, rather than falling subject to many of the illusions that we tend to live by mindlessly every day.

Certainly, there are times when it is important to be compliant, aggressive, and detached from the world around you. However, if you find yourself disproportionately falling into one of these categories more than the others, this may indicate that you are stuck in the boat of insecurity without setting sail and moving forward.

The Challenge

1. Start by reading through the various statements under each heading (Compliant, Aggressive, and Detached).² Tally up the number of statements you agree with under each heading to determine your “neurotic trend,” as the humanistic psychoanalyst Karen Horney put it.³ The neurotic trend with the most agreed-with statements is where we will first bring our attention.

(If you find that you affiliate with an equal number of statements under multiple headings, you can simply choose the one you want to work on first.)

²“These statements were adapted from the Horney-Coolidge Type Inventory (HCTI): Coolidge, F.L., Moor, C.J., Yamazaki, T.G., Stewart, S.E., Segal, D.L. (2001). On the relationship between Karen Horney’s tripartite neurotic type theory and personality disorder features. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 30,7-1400. ³Horney, K. (1945). *Our inner conflicts: A constructive theory of neurosis*. New York: W. W. Norton.

	COMPLIANT	AGGRESSIVE	DETACHED
1	I need to be liked by everyone.	It's a hostile world.	I am totally self-sufficient.
2	I am completely self-sacrificing.	Life is a struggle.	I don't really need people.
3	I'd almost always rather be with someone else than be alone.	I like to be in command.	I could live quite well without anyone.
4	I care too much what other people think of me.	Only the strongest survive.	I avoid long-term obligations.
5	I feel crushed if I am rejected.	I enjoy feeling powerful	I resent people trying to influence me.
6	I feel weak and helpless when I'm alone.	I enjoy outsmarting other people.	I try to avoid advice from others.
7	I try to avoid fighting or arguing.	Other people are too sentimental.	I could live fine without friends or family.
8	I tend to feel it's my fault if something goes wrong	I am uninhibited and brave.	I like it better when people do not share their thoughts or feelings with me.
9	I tend to be the one who apologizes first	To survive in this world, you have to look out for yourself first	I feel I'd be better off without people than with people.
10	I constantly need the company of others	It's a fact of life most successful people step on others to get ahead.	I try to avoid conflicts.

GROWTH CHALLENGE #2: SPOT YOUR LOPSIDED DEVELOPMENT

(CONTINUED)



Most Prominent Neurotic Trend: _____

1. Now elaborate on the concrete beliefs or behaviors you exhibit that reflect each of the statements you agree with, i.e., how do these thoughts manifest themselves in your life?

2. Consider: How do these beliefs and behaviors help you? How might they get in the way of you living most by your values and feeling whole? How can you question the beliefs that are impeding you so that you may live with greater inner freedom?

3. Commit to being more aware of these beliefs as they come up in your life — how can you continue to challenge these beliefs and free yourself so that you can become the person you most wish to become?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #3:

FACE YOUR FEARS

This growth challenge involves identifying and facing your psychological fear(s), so that you may better combat the persistent anxieties in daily life that interfere with your health and overall capacity to grow to your fullest potential. You will start by reading through the Psychological Fears Scale below and continue with the exercise prompt.

Psychological Fears Scale⁴

Fear of Failure

1. I am afraid of failing in somewhat difficult situations when a lot depends on me.
2. I feel uneasy doing something if I am not sure of succeeding.
3. If I do not understand a problem immediately, I start feeling anxious.

Fear of Rejection

4. When I get to know new people, I often fear being rejected by them.
5. Being given the cold shoulder when approaching strangers makes me feel insecure.
6. Being rejected is a big deal for me.

Fear of Losing Control

7. I become scared when I lose control over things.
8. I start worrying instantly when I notice that I don't have an impact on some things.
9. The idea of not having any control in a situation frightens me.

Fear of Losing Emotional Contact

10. I am absolutely devastated if a good friend breaks off contact with me.
11. I become agitated when I lose emotional contact with my loved ones.
12. If a close friend blows me off, I become anxious about our relationship.

Fear of Losing Reputation

13. I would be very worried if my good reputation was in danger.
14. I'm very keen on an undamaged reputation.

⁴Schönbrodt, F. D., & Gerstenberg, F. X. R. (2012). An IRT analysis of motive questionnaires: The unified motive scales. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 46(6), 725–42



The Challenge

1. Think about some of your own fears. For some, these might come immediately to mind, or you may read through the Psychological Fears Scale to see which statements resonate with you most.
2. Determine which fear(s) you would most like to work on, based on your current life experiences and taking into account the Psychological Fears Scale.
3. **In a written reflection, explore the following:**
 - What am I afraid of?
 - Why is this so scary to me?
 - What is the worst possible outcome of this happening to me?
 - What could be a potentially favorable outcome of this fear unfolding?
 - In what ways might I grow as a person? What might I learn?
 - What parts of myself can I rely on (i.e. specific qualities, strengths) that could help me overcome my greatest fear(s)?
4. Throughout the rest of this journey with the growth challenges and beyond, try to notice when your fears are getting in your way. Commit yourself to facing this fear and being even-handed with what positive things might ensue, as you feel yourself panicking or avoiding these aversive stimuli.



GROWTH CHALLENGE #4: FOSTER A HIGH-QUALITY CONNECTION (USING ACTIVE CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONDING)

Even brief moments of connection with other people can enliven our days and bring us closer to experiencing wholeness. Imagine how different your day might feel if, instead of feeling tension and awkwardness with your neighbor, co-worker or classmate, your interactions were defined by trust, humor, and mutual positive regard. This exercise is about transforming a subpar or even neutral relationship in your life into a source of energy and sustaining connection. To do so, we will leverage the science of High-Quality Connections as well as Active Constructive Responding to optimize our connections with others (be it in person, or in our virtual reality).

Tips for Building High-Quality Connections (HQC) in Four Domains⁵

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT	TASK ENABLING	TRUSTING	PLAYING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be present• Listen, really listen• Be punctual• Be affirming yet authentic• Communicate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coach• Facilitate• Accommodate• Nurture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share with others• Self-disclose• Ask for feedback and proceed accordingly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make meetings playful• Let your guard down• Create fun rituals

⁵Dutton, J.E. (2003). Energize Your Workplace: How to Create and Sustain High-Quality Connections at Work. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Tips for Building High Quality Connections (HQC) in Four Domains

Ways of Responding to Positive News⁶

Example: Your friend shares with you that they have received a job promotion.

ACTIVE-DESTRUCTIVE Demeaning the event “Isn’t that new job just going to make you more stressed and unhappy than you already are?”	ACTIVE-CONSTRUCTIVE Enthusiastic support, asking questions, helping another capitalize on the positive “That’s wonderful! Tell me everything from start to finish!”
PASSIVE-DESTRUCTIVE Ignoring the event, shifting focus to the self “You’re not going to believe what happened to me today!?”	PASSIVE-CONSTRUCTIVE Proving quiet, understated support “I’m happy to hear that, but I’m super busy right now... can you tell me about this later?”

The Challenge

1. Choose a relationship in your personal or professional life in which your interactions with another person are less than ideal. In writing, describe and reflect on the current state of this relationship.

2. What about this connection might be subpar? (Use the High-Quality Connection domains as a guide)
 - How might facets of each of these domains be lacking in your relationship?
 - Are any of these domains stronger than others? (i.e. which are you already doing that you can capitalize on to enhance the relationship)?
 - How do you (or don’t you) speak about positive events with one another?
 - Do you notice yourself falling into certain response patterns with this person other than the active-constructive style?
 - What might be keep you from responding active-constructively?

⁶Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 228-245.

3. Strategize about potential steps that you can take to improve your quality of connection with this person. What specific actions can you take to enhance the relationship quality and build genuine positive regard?
- How can you authentically integrate active-constructive responding into your relationship?

4. When you are ready, actually start making a change, and reflect on what you observe.
- Do you notice any changes in the quality of this connection?
 - How much effort did this take, and does this impact you?
 - How might you continue to ensure this connection, and other connections, remain high quality?

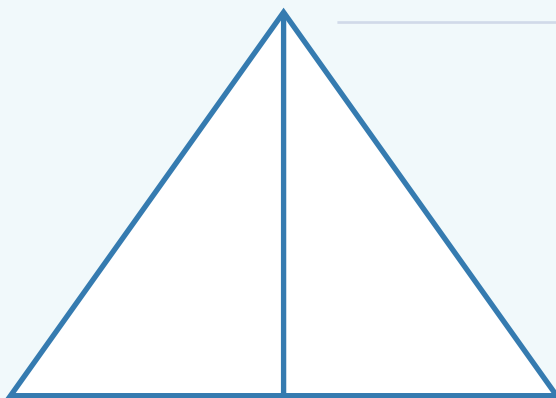
GROWTH CHALLENGE #5:

PRACTICE HEALTHY ASSERTIVENESS

Practicing assertiveness involves employing a communication style that enables open and honest exchange with others and demonstrates that you are in control of your own behavior and actions. An assertive style is one of four communication styles, which include passive, aggressive, passive-aggressive, and alternating.⁷

The Challenge

1. Review the pyramid graphic, including the behaviors, nonverbal communication, beliefs, emotions, and goals of each of the communication styles. Determine which communication style is your dominant response. If you are already an assertive communicator in most domains of your life, you may simply reflect on how using this style benefits you in your life and in your relationships. If you are nearly always assertive except in certain situations, focus this exercise on those situations in which you could be more assertive.



ASSERTIVE STYLE

Behavior: Express your needs, wants, feelings directly and honestly; allow others to hold opposing views without dismissing them

Nonverbal: Relaxed body, frequent but not glaring eye contact

Beliefs: Others' needs are just as important as your own; everyone has something valuable to contribute

Emotions: You feel positive about yourself and the way you treat others

Goals: You and others keep your self-respect; express yourself without having to win all the time

PASSIVE STYLE

Behavior: Keep quiet, don't share feelings or wants, put self down, and apologize often

Nonverbal: Make yourself small, look down, hunch shoulders, avoid eye contact, speaks softly

Beliefs: Others' needs are more important than yours, you are worthless

Emotions: Fear of rejection, helplessness, frustration, reduced self-respect

Goals: Avoid conflict, please others at expense of the self; give others control over you

PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE STYLE

Behavior: Failure to meet expectations of others by forgetting, being delayed, other "deniable" means; deny personal responsibility for actions

Nonverbal: Mimics passive style

Beliefs: You are entitled to get your own way despite commitments to others

Emotions: Fear of rejection if you were more assertive; resentment of demands of others; fear of confrontation

Goals: Get your own way without taking responsibility

AGGRESSIVE STYLE

Behavior: Express feelings and wants as though other views are unreasonable; dismiss, ignore, or insult the needs of others

Nonverbal: Make yourself large and threatening; eye contact is fixed and penetrating; voice is loud

Beliefs: Your needs are more important than others'; you have rights, they don't

Emotions: Angry or powerful, victorious when you win, later feel remorse, guilt, self-hatred for hurting others

Goals: Win at the expense of others, gain control

⁷Patterson, Randy J. (2000). *The assertiveness workbook: How to express your ideas and stand up for yourself at work and in relationships*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.



The Challenge

2. Briefly list one to three situations in your life in which you would like to become more assertive (and less passive, passive-aggressive, or aggressive).

3. Complete the following sentences:

- I act most passive when _____
- I often become aggressive when _____
- My biggest fear of being assertive is _____
- The one to three people in my life with whom I find it hardest to be assertive are _____
- I am already quite assertive when _____

4. Reflect upon your answers to these questions and use them to actually practice acting in a more assertive manner in one domain in your life. **Write a brief reflection on your experiences.**

Here are some additional tips for being more assertive as you go complete this exercise.⁸

1. Assertiveness is about controlling our own behavior, not the behavior of others. You always have a choice. You can't stop people from asking of you, but you can say no.
2. People are not psychic. If you want something, ask for it! If others say no, do not take it personally.
3. Symbolic value (i.e. what actions represent, as opposed to the action itself) is often what makes confrontation hard. Try to get others to change a behavior, not their personality.

⁸<https://www.bakadesuyo.com/2016/09/how-to-be-more-assertive/>



GROWTH CHALLENGE #6: CHALLENGE COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

Throughout our evolution, humans have developed ways of navigating our world to make it easier to make decisions when we are inundated with information. The **confirmation bias** is one such shortcut, defined as the tendency to notice, remember, and value information that supports our beliefs and disregard and devalue evidence that conflicts with our beliefs. The problem is, our beliefs themselves are often fraught with cognitive distortions or irrational errors in our thinking (elaborated on below).⁹ We often then rely on these faulty beliefs to make judgments about the world, others, and ourselves. This faulty reasoning can leave us feeling exhausted, isolated, and constantly disappointed by others and dissatisfied with ourselves.

This exercise is about identifying and understanding some of the thinking errors that you fall subject to, and actively challenging and testing the truth of them so that you *may break negative thought patterns* and change your core beliefs that aren't serving your growth.¹⁰ In doing so, you can eventually learn to take your negative automatic thoughts less seriously and free yourself from some of our own angst, frustration, shame, perfectionism, and neuroticism.

⁹Beck, A.T., Davis, D.D., & Freeman, A. (2015)(Eds.). Cognitive therapy of personality disorders (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press; Gillihan, S.J. (2018). ¹⁰Gillihan, S.J. (2018). Cognitive behavioral therapy made simple: 10 strategies for managing anxiety, depression, anger, panic, and worry. Emeryville, CA: Althea Press.

Common cognitive distortions include but are certainly not limited to:¹¹

- **Black-and-white Thinking:** Viewing everything in extreme terms (e.g., “If I get rejected by this woman, I’m a total loser in life.”)
- **Catastrophizing:** Believing that the worst will happen in a given situation (e.g., “If I approach this girl I really like, I am 100% going to get rejected harshly and everyone will see and I will feel totally humiliated and the video of this happening will appear on Instagram somewhere and my Mom will see and...”)
- **False sense of hopelessness:** Believing we have less power to reach an outcome than we really do (e.g., “There’s no point in approaching her anyway, I’ll probably just come across as shady.”)
- **Minimizing:** Undervaluing positive events (e.g., “She seems interested in me, but I don’t think I really deserve it... It was probably my new jacket she really liked and not anything I said or did in that interaction.”)
- **Personalizing:** Attributing the outcome of a situation as solely the result of one’s own actions or behaviors (e.g., “She said she has a boyfriend; she must be saying that because she really is not interested in me and was probably repulsed by me.”)
- **Should-ing:** Thinking the way we want things to turn out is how they ought to have turned out (e.g., “She really should have liked me, it seemed so meant to be.”)
- **Entitlement:** Expecting a particular outcome based on our status of behavior (e.g., “I deserve for her to like me because I’m such a nice guy.”)
- **Jumping to Conclusions:** Feeling certain of the meaning of a situation despite little evidence to support that conclusion (e.g., “She hasn’t texted me back in two days; I know that she is actively trying to avoid me...”)
- **Overgeneralizing:** Drawing conclusions or settling on a global belief based on a single situation (e.g., “Since I was rejected by her, I might as well never approach any other woman I’m interested in ever again because I am obviously unlovable.”)
- **Mind Reading:** Assuming others know what you are thinking or that you know what another is thinking, despite not communicating directly (e.g., “She should know that I am interested in her romantically, it doesn’t need to be said.”)
- **Emotional Reasoning:** Reasoning that what we feel is true, without evidence (e.g., “I feel jealous when I see my new partner talking to other guys... She must be cheating on me, or why else would I feel this way?”)
- **Outsourcing Happiness:** Giving outside factors the ultimate arbiter of our happiness (e.g., “I can’t be happy in life unless I am attractive to women.”)

The Challenge

1. Pick out some of these cognitive distortions that you find yourself falling subject to regularly. Ask yourself:
 - When do you typically fall into these patterns?
 - How do these patterns impact my sense of self-worth and sense of competence?
 - How do these impact the way I view others?

¹¹Burns, D. (1989). *The feeling good handbook*. New York: Morrow; Gillihan, S.J. (2018). *Cognitive behavioral therapy made simple: 10 strategies for managing anxiety, depression, anger, panic, and worry*. Emeryville, CA.

2. Think about a specific example when you fell into one of these cognitive distortions. In writing, outline the specific example, note what trap you fell into, and ask yourself the critical questions for each distortion:
 - **Black-and-white Thinking:** What might the gray area be here? (e.g., “If I get rejected by her, might there be some alternative explanation other than ‘I’m a total loser?’”)
- **Catastrophizing:** How likely is it that this worst-case scenario will happen? What evidence do I have to believe that this will happen? Do I have a sense of agency here to improve the outcome? (e.g., “If I do happen to get rejected, what can I do to ensure I maintain my dignity and self-respect?”)
- **False sense of hopelessness:** What could come of taking a risk here, even if the odds of success are low? (e.g., “She may downright reject me, but what if she doesn’t? What do I have to lose?”)
- **Minimizing:** What could I have done to contribute to the situation? (e.g., “Other than my cool leather jacket, what else did she like about ME?”)
- **Personalizing:** What could others have done to contribute to the situation? (e.g., “She very well may have liked me, but she has a boyfriend; sometimes, it’s just not the right timing.”)
- **Should-ing:** Is this thought rational? (e.g., “What about the situation led me to think we ‘should’ be together?”)
- **Entitlement:** Is this thought rational? (e.g., “Does my being a nice guy automatically mean that she should be attracted to me romantically? Why do I deserve this particular girl in this particular instance, without her even getting a chance to get to know me? Or are there other factors at play?”)
- **Jumping to Conclusions:** What might be an alternative explanation for this thought? (e.g., “She hasn’t texted me back in two days; other than avoiding me, could she be busy? Without reception? Working?”)

- **Overgeneralizing:** Is this a fair global assessment? (e.g., “Am I globally unlovable, or is there another explanation for why this did not work out?”)

- **Mind Reading:** Was I clear in communicating my feelings? Am I missing critical information? (e.g., “Did I adequately express my feelings to her? How could I have been clearer in getting my message across?”)

- **Emotional Reasoning:** Do my feelings accurately reflect the facts of the situation? (e.g., “Do I have factual evidence to support my feelings of jealousy? Is it possible that I am wrong here?”)

- **Outsourcing happiness:** How can I rely on my inner self for happiness in this moment? (e.g., “What do I love about myself, and how can I use my own strengths to get me through this moment?”)

Consider the following:

- How might you notice when you are falling into a distortion in real time?
- How can you prevent yourself from falling into some of these patterns in the future?
- How can you actively test the evidence for your negative core beliefs? Be a scientist: Keep track of the evidence for and against your belief during the course of your day. Look at your thought log and analyze the data— how strong is the case for your belief, *really*?¹²
- How can you build new core beliefs that are more conducive to growth? *Tip:* see if you can identify a more realistic belief. As clinical psychologist Seth Gillihan notes, “don’t worry if you have a hard time feeling like your alternative belief is true. Negative core beliefs can be persistent, and modifying them takes time and repetition.”¹³

¹²Gillihan, S.J. (2018). Cognitive behavioral therapy made simple: 10 strategies for managing anxiety, depression, anger, panic, and worry. Emeryville, CA.

¹³Ibid. p. 80.

GROWTH CHALLENGE #7:

DITCH PERFECT!

Securing our self-esteem involves worrying less about what other people think, taking more risks, and spending less of our energy projecting a persona of perfection. Many of us spend too much of our own precious time and energy striving for perfection, worrying about how we are doing at any given task, rather than what we are doing in the moment. This quest for perfectionism can leave us feeling exhausted, isolated, and constantly dissatisfied with others and ourselves. This exercise is about questioning the pressures that we place on ourselves and receive from others to be perfect and settling for “good enough” so that we can move in the direction of growth.

The Challenge

1. Think about an area in your life in which you find yourself striving for perfection.

Explore the following questions in a written reflection:

- Why might I feel pressure to be perfect?
- What does striving for perfection require of me? How does it impact my energy?
- How does it impact my feelings of self-worth?
- How might seeking perfection actually interfere with my performance?
- What am I putting at risk by not achieving perfection?
- What is the worst thing that will happen if I am not perfect?
- How likely is this outcome?

2. After reflecting on these questions, identify some ways that you can “ditch perfect” in your life. Devise an explicit plan to increase your tolerance for “good enough” in yourself and others. Note that this does not mean settling for mediocrity—rather, it means shifting our focus of attention from outcome to process, the *how* to the *what*, and enabling ourselves to learn and grow, even through what may feel like a failure.



GROWTH CHALLENGE #8: EXPLORE YOUR DARK SIDE, EMBRACE POST- TRAUMATIC GROWTH

The latest research suggests the importance of not only cultivating positive emotions and events in our lives, but also, accepting and exploring our most difficult or uncomfortable emotions, acknowledging them non-judgmentally, and hopefully, finding a healthy outlet for them.¹⁴ For instance, emotions like guilt, anger, or embarrassment can serve as emotional cues that we may find utility in repenting, resolving a conflict, or evaluating the reasons for these negative emotions so that we may respond to them.

Similarly, features of our lives that may sometimes feel to us like ‘scars,’ such as struggling with physical or mental illness or harboring a particular insecurity can actually become sources of great strength, giving us a unique ability to help or understand other people, and grow ourselves. Further, experiencing negative life events such as loss of a loved one, personal or collective tragedy, or other forms of adversity can actually open us toward growth and greater wholeness.

This activity involves reacting mindfully to 1) our own uncomfortable emotions and 2) negative life experiences and reframing them for optimal growth and creativity.

¹⁴David, S. (2016). Emotional agility: Get unstuck, embrace change, and thrive in work and life. New York: Avery; Ivtzan, I., Lomas, T., Hefferon, K., & Worth, P. (2016). Second wave positive psychology: Embracing the dark side of life. New York: Routledge. Kashdan, T., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2014). The upside of your dark side: Why being your whole self—not just your “good” self—drives success and fulfillment. New York: Plume.

The Challenge

1a. Below, reflect upon your own “dark side” using some or all of the following questions to guide you:

- What comes to mind when thinking about your own dark side?
- What are a few situations in your life that might consistently bring forth negative emotions (e.g. guilt, anger, sadness, loneliness, frustration, etc.)?
- What is something in your life that you struggle with, or see as a potential ‘scar?’

1b. How has your dark side strengthened you? Helped you connect with another person?

1c. How might you deliberately channel these scars/ your dark side or re-conceptualize this part of you as a strength in the future (e.g. to be a better person, friend, partner, employee, etc.)?

2a. Reflect upon an experience of adversity or loss. What happened or what did you lose?

- Consider what “doors closed” as a result of this loss?
- How did you feel in that moment?
- How do you feel about this loss or adversity now?

2b. What doors might have opened for you as a result of this adversity or loss?

2c. Are there any new ways of acting, thinking, relating to others or yourself, etc. that have become more possible now?

- While you would have never asked for this adversity or loss to occur, what do you take with you from that in your life today that might be positive?
- How might acknowledging your dark side and/ or experiences of loss or adversity serve you in your journey toward wholeness?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #9:

BE SOCIALLY CURIOUS!

This growth challenge is about cultivating social curiosity in order to see the people in our lives for who they really are, rather than who we want them to be.

The Challenge

1. Choose someone in your life with whom you will practice your social curiosity. This can be someone you know very well, or it can be with a newer relationship (and can certainly be done in 'real life' or through electronic means). The next time you engage with this person, try to learn or notice something about them that you never knew before. You can start out subtly, by just paying more attention to their expressions, their smile, their voice, etc.
2. When you feel comfortable, start to ask questions that demonstrate your interest in this person. Some question suggestions might include:
 - What would your perfect day be like?
(Feel free to specify in general, and a perfect day now during the pandemic).
 - If you could have a meal with anyone in the world, who would it be with and why?
 - What would others say is your greatest strength, and why?
 - What is your biggest fear?
 - What is a dream you have for the near future? For the distant future?
 - Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years, 10 years?
3. Be sure to use your judgment about when showing this curiosity is appropriate and be ready to reciprocate and allow your partner to ask questions as well.
4. Reflect on what you notice about the quality of your connection and try to practice this curiosity with others in your life.
5. **Write a written reflection about the experience of pursuing social curiosity, what came of this exercise, and anything else that you might have learned.**



GROWTH CHALLENGE #10: BEING LOVE: SELF, OTHERS, AND THE WORLD

Practicing loving-kindness toward oneself and toward others is a powerful way to build our capacity for compassion and exercise our vagal tone, which is strongly associated with physical, mental, and social flexibility, as well as adaptation to stress.¹⁵ For some of us, it can be exceedingly challenging to send love inward toward ourselves, the way we might send kindness toward others. Indeed, our own inner dialogues are often cold, or even downright cruel—we can be our own worst critics!

For others, self-love or self-compassion is not the major hurdle, but sending love outward toward other human beings, especially those who may have different beliefs than we do, or who may have harmed us or those we love (directly or indirectly) seems impossible at worst, and disingenuous at best.

This exercise is not about forcing love or compassion, but rather, it is about opening our hearts and minds to a kinder, more compassionate view of others and the self, so that we may move toward greater equanimity with ourselves and our world.

¹⁵Fredrickson, B.L. (2013). *Love 2.0: Finding happiness and health in moments of connection*. Plume.

The Challenge

1. Use the space below as a contemplative, meditative space to reflect on the experience of going through this exercise.
2. Bring to mind someone in your life for whom it is relatively easy for you to love. This can be someone who brightens your day, someone you would call for help if you needed them, or someone who just understands you and sees you in a way that you want to be seen. **Write down their name,** (_____) and in your mind's eye, cultivate an image of this person. See them smiling at you. Perhaps you imagine what it is like to be physically in their presence, to share a cup of tea, to laugh together, to embrace.
 - Holding in your mind the image of this person you love, think about the emotions that arise and how these emotions feel in your body. Perhaps you feel a sense of warmth or lightness. In your mind's eye, send this person a blessing that feels genuine to you. Feel free to come up with your own loving blessing or you may use this one: "May you feel safe. May you be protected from harm and may you feel a sense of ease. May the challenges in your life serve as opportunities for growth that will enrich you with meaning. May you know how much I love you."
 - Reflect on how you feel sending this blessing toward your loved one. Have you shared this sentiment with this person before?

- Now, imagine that this person approaches you with a problem that they are experiencing. This can be something they've shared with you in the past, or feel free to be creative and make something up (for the sake of the exercise). **Write down how you would respond to this person being the best possible friend to them that you could be: what tone of voice you would use, and what you might do or say.**



3. Next, think about a challenge that you might be experiencing in your own life right now, or something you've experienced in the past. Perhaps you are struggling with an issue at home or at work—this can be a nebulous challenge or something more concrete. How are you responding to your own difficult situation? What tone of voice is your inner dialogue taking? What are you currently doing to help soothe yourself?

- Reflect: what are the differences between how you respond to your loved one and how you respond to yourself?

- Pause to send yourself a blessing. Feel free to come up with your own, or you may use this one: “May I feel safe. May I be protected from harm and feel a sense of ease. May these challenges in my life serve as opportunities for growth that will enrich me with meaning. May I always love myself.”
- Notice any feelings of discomfort or rejection in your body. For many of us, this does not come naturally and takes practice. For additional support, place a hand on your heart and feel your heartbeat, sending love physically through your sense of touch to your body.
- Now, re-visit the challenging situation that you are experiencing and try to respond to yourself with the same love, respect, and compassion that you would send toward your loved one from above. **Write down what you might say to yourself.** Observe any shifts in your emotional state or perspective.



4. Finally, bring to mind a person for whom you find it very difficult to love, or see eye-to-eye with. Perhaps this is someone with whom you have an outstanding conflict, someone who has harmed you in some way, or someone who you feel misunderstood by. (Note: this should probably be someone for whom your strained relationship causes distress to a family, social, or workplace dynamic, and with whom you would like to reconcile but may not know how.)
 - Take some deep breaths as you bring an image of this person into your mind's eye. Notice what feelings come up for you as you visualize this person. If you begin to experience sensations of tension, or feel your heart begin to race, continue to breathe, on each inhale, carry forward the love toward yourself that you just cultivated for a loved one and yourself, and on each exhale, attempt to breathe out the negativity that threatens to pollute your inner peace.
 - After you feel settled in your body, while still imagining this person, begin to think about their humanity, struggles they may have been through, the life experiences that may have made them into the person that you are in conflict with. Attempt to let go of the emotional walls or barriers that separate you from this person.
 - When you are ready, begin to send this person the following blessing in your mind: "May you feel safe. May you be protected from harm and feel a sense of ease. May the challenges in your life serve as opportunities for growth that will enrich you with meaning. May we begin to see the humanity in one another."
 - Meditate on the notion that we cannot change others, only ourselves, and only if we have the desire and motivation to change.
5. At the culmination of this three-part exercise, bring your awareness back into the present moment. Reflect on what it felt like to send loving-kindness toward a loved one, toward yourself, and toward someone you have conflict with. Which part was the hardest for you? What interesting sensations did you observe in your body? How might this type of visualization and meditation of loving kindness serve you in your daily life?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #11: TAKE THE VIA STRENGTHS SURVEY

Complete the VIA Survey of Character Strengths.

Do this by visiting viacharacter.org and clicking “Take the Free Survey.” Even if you have taken the survey before, please take the survey again now, as our strengths are not fixed across settings and time; rather, **strengths are malleable, subject to growth**, and largely **context-specific**.¹⁶

After creating an account and registering, take the survey. It should take about twenty minutes to complete.

Once you are done, review your results. You can see your rank-ordered twenty-four strengths with explanations of what each strength means. You do not need to purchase a detailed report, but you are welcome to if you would like.

Remember: lower strengths are not necessarily weaknesses! There is no judgment when it comes to strengths.

Complete a written reflection about the following:

- Do any of your top strengths surprise you? What about your lower strengths?
- What would your life look like if you were unable to use your number one top strength?
- If you have taken the VIA survey before, how do your results compare to these past results?
- What do your results say about the present moment we are living in?
- How might you be leveraging new strengths in light of taking this course?



¹⁶Biswas-Diener, R., Kashdan, T. B., & Minhas, G. (2011). A dynamic approach to psychological strength development and intervention. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 6(2), 106-118.

SET OUT TO USE YOUR TOP STRENGTHS IN NEW WAYS!

Feel free to use the template below to reflect on this process:

Using Strengths in New Ways

STRENGTH #1:

How did you use this strength in a new way this week?

How did this make you feel?

STRENGTH #2:

How did you use this strength in a new way this week?

How did this make you feel?

STRENGTH #3:

How did you use this strength in a new way this week?

How did this make you feel?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #12:

WHAT'S YOUR IKIGAI?

To find one's *ikigai*, or “reason for being,” requires an exploration of the things in our lives most central to who we are—that which excites us, brings us meaning, and helps us feel whole. Hopefully, through this course, you have and will continue to come to greater awareness of your own *ikigai* and learn new ways to deliberately engage in the things that sustain you most. This exercise is designed to move forward on this journey.

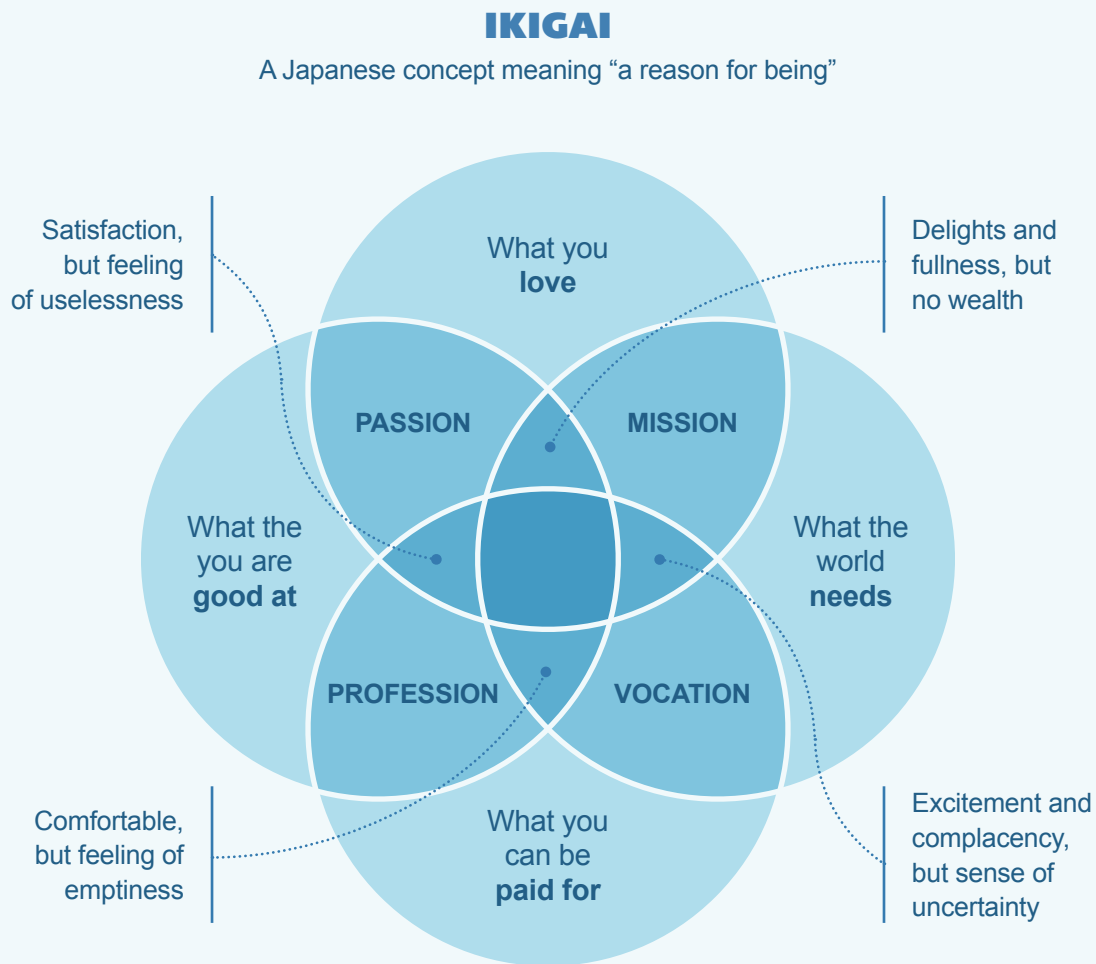


Figure 1: Ikigai: Adapted from Helgaknut | Dreamstime.com

The Challenge

1. In writing, reflect on the following questions:

- What in my life am I best at? What sorts of things feel effortless for me (i.e., they energize me and light me up)?
- What in my life do I choose to pursue, even though it is challenging?
- What in life do I most value?
- What in my life provides me with a sense that I am part of something larger than myself?
- What in my life focuses my attention most completely and allows me to enter the flow state of consciousness?
- If I could quit my job or was suddenly freed from my current responsibilities tomorrow and could do absolutely anything in the world, what would I do?

2. Reflect on any themes that emerge, attending to aspects that come up in more than one of these questions. Spend time before our final class reflecting on your ikigai, and how you are spending time in your life engaging in the things that bring you a sense of meaning and vitality.
3. How has this current moment in our history hindered your ability to live by your ikigai? How has it facilitated your ability to engage more deeply with your ikigai?

4. What is one thing you can do to live more in line with your ikigai? How can you attend to your ikigai on a daily, or at least weekly basis?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #13: CREATE A PEAK EXPERIENCE & LIVE IN THE B-REALM

This exercise is about increasing peak experiences in your life, in any domain of your choosing (e.g., at work, with family, friends, etc.). Maslow described peak experiences as “rare, exciting, oceanic, deeply moving, exhilarating, elevating experiences that generate an advanced form of perceiving reality, and are even mystic and magical...”¹⁷

While it may seem daunting to just dive into such an experience, which Maslow considered one of the most transformative experiences of our lives, we will start by understanding related concepts that can help facilitate peak experiences: **flow** and **awe**. We review each of these in turn.

Flow: Flow is about intense absorption in an activity in which you are fully concentrating, completely immersed, and even unaware of yourself.^{18,19} To induce flow, the idea is to find the optimal balance between skill and challenge: you do not want to do something that is so difficult that you are anxious while doing it, and you don’t want to do something so simple so that you are bored. Cultivating one’s ability to experience flow in as many circumstances as possible may lead to a happier, more fulfilling life. Ideally, one would be able to find flow in their favorite hobbies or activities, such as cooking, painting, or running, and also in their professional pursuits—where most people spend the majority of their waking hours.

Finding flow involves challenging the body and mind to its limits; striving to accomplish something new, difficult, or worthwhile; and discovering rewards in the process of each moment.

Awe: The concept of awe has been described as a complex mixing of the emotions of ecstasy and reverence. It can be deeply personal to experience awe, and researchers have explained two primary cognitive appraisals that are central to awe experiences: 1) the perception of vastness, and 2) a struggle to mentally process the experience.²⁰ Experiencing awe is associated with many positive outcomes, including enhanced life satisfaction, a feeling that there is more time available to experience the world, increased helping behaviors and generosity toward others, and decreased aggressive attitudes.

¹⁷Maslow, A.H. (1964). *Religions, values, and peak experiences*. London: Penguin Books Limited. ¹⁸Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row ¹⁹Kotler, S. (2014). *The rise of superman: Decoding the science of ultimate human performance*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt ²⁰See <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/can-you-quantify-awe/>

Eight tools for enhancing flow are presented in the following table:²¹

Open Yourself to New Experiences	Be open to new and different experiences, such as: going camping, playing a new sport, traveling to a foreign place, or trying new types of cuisine. Keep challenging yourself, and do not become complacent!
Be a Lifelong Learner	Similarly to opening oneself to new experiences, learning and embracing new challenges throughout the course of life is a key component of finding flow when you've already mastered many skills.
Learn What Flows	Often, individuals fail to recognize when they experience flow. Pay close attention and establish precise time periods and activities during which you are in flow, and seek to amplify these activities.
Transform Routine Tasks	You can find "micro-flow" states even in mundane activities, such as running, doing errands, waiting for a train, cleaning up a workspace, or listening to a lecture. Transform routine tasks by solving puzzles in your head, doodling, rewriting song lyrics to tell a funny story, or writing a poem or riddle.
Flow in Conversation	Develop goals within your conversation to learn more about the person you're speaking with: What is on her mind? What emotions is she experiencing? Have I learned something about her that I didn't know before? Focus your full attention on the speaker and on your reactions to her words. Prompt with follow-up questions: "And then what happened?" "Why did you think that?"
Engage in Smart Leisure	Consider making your leisure time "smarter" by engaging in activities in which you are using your mind and exercising your skills – ideally different skills from the ones you use all day at work or at home.
Engage in Smart Work	Cater the tasks you need to do to align with your skills, passions, and values.

²¹Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press.

The Challenge

1. First, reflect on previous **peak experience** you have had in the past (if you've had one). Alternatively, think about a time that you felt immense **awe** or experienced a deep sense of **flow** in your life (these may not have been in the same instance). In short, think about the closest experience you might have ever had to a peak experience.
2. This experience can be from any part of your life but recent enough that you remember the details. Consider what has facilitated this peak experience or awe or flow state; i.e.) what features of the experience induced your "peak" state. Features might have included:
 - Vastness (being in the presence of something grand)
 - Self-diminishment (feeling small in a large universe)
 - Feeling challenged to mentally process the experience
 - Connectedness (having the sense of being connected to others and the world around you)
 - A distorted sense of time and space (time may speed up or move much more slowly than usual)
 - The feeling of being one whole harmonious self, free of inner conflict
 - Being without fear, doubt, or negative self-talk
 - Experiencing distinct physical sensations (feeling the chills, jaw drop, etc.).
3. Consider (a) what has facilitated the experience(s), (b) what, if anything, may have impeded the experience(s)? Then consider (c) how might you solve the potential obstacles to experiencing these peak states.
4. Then, intentionally set yourself up for a peak experience, to the best of your ability! **Go out and complete this activity if possible (safely) and reflectively write about this experience.** This may be a solitary activity or something you engage in with others.
 - What did you do (or seek to do), and how did it feel?
 - How might you share what you experienced with someone else? (Through engaging them or telling them about it afterward)
 - What aspects of your sailboat were in place to complete this activity? (I.e. did you feel: Safe? Connected? Self-compassionate? Creative? Was love present/ involved? How was this activity connected with your sense of purpose?
 - [If you could not complete this activity due to constraints related to the pandemic, work, or otherwise, what WOULD you do?]
 - What external (and internal) barriers did you face?
 - How can you overcome these barriers in the future to successfully complete this activity?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #14:

HARMONIZE YOUR IDENTITIES

As each of us has many dimensions to our identity, integrating these facets can sometimes feel like a tremendous task. We each play many different roles in our lives and bringing these roles into harmony can lead to experiencing a greater sense of wholeness.

The Challenge

- 1. Sit down in a quiet place and write down all of the different roles that you play in your life.** This list may include words like, parent, son or daughter, employee, spouse/partner, neighbor, brother or sister, friend, uncle, leader, community member, writer, teacher, musician, etc. You may also consider different parts of your personality that manifest in each role. For example, being an employee brings out your diligence, as a brother, you are very protective, as a significant other, you are goofy... etc.
- 2. Consider how these roles can come into conflict with one another in your daily life – be as specific as possible:**
 - “Sometimes it can be challenging to be a goofy friend when I also have to be diligent and serious while I run my business.”
 - “As a leader of my religious organization, I have to be constantly available for my congregants. As a father, I want to be completely available for my children. It sometimes feels as though I don’t have the bandwidth to do it all.”
- 3. Next, consider how these same roles can complement each other.**
 - “Being goofy with my friends and family recharges me so that I can be fully present and more serious in my workplace. It is also sometimes an advantage to be slightly goofy with my clients. After all, we are all human.”
 - “I can use my knowledge and growth from being a father to help my congregants in my role as a spiritual leader.”
- 4. For the next week or so, begin to focus on these reinforcing aspects of the roles in your life. Reflect on potential conflicts as opportunities to find new ways to harmonize the various parts of your identity and what it feels like to transform a challenge into an opportunity.**



GROWTH CHALLENGE #15: CREATE A POSITIVE PORTFOLIO

The Challenge

1. Select a positive emotion or affective state that you wish to cultivate and practice: e.g.) joy, serenity, interest, pride, gratitude, hope, amusement, inspiration, awe, love.
2. Brainstorm a collection of items, including photos, poems, songs, cards, letters, books, objects, etc. that bring about this particular affective state within you.
3. Curate a physical positive portfolio of these items, placing them in a folder, binder, container, online file, or whatever works best for containing these particular contents.
4. Once you have created your portfolio, spend ~10 minutes engaging with it for five consecutive days.
5. Reflect on the following:
 - How did it feel to create the positive portfolio?
 - Which did you prefer, curating the portfolio, or spending 10 minutes with it each day?
 - Was the portfolio effective in helping you achieve your desired positive emotion?
 - Did you feel any other, perhaps unexpected emotions from engaging with or putting together the portfolio?
 - What, if anything, did you learn from this exercise?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #16:

THREE GOOD THINGS

The Challenge

1. **Each night for five consecutive days, before going to sleep, write down three things that went well that day.** These things can be relatively small (I had a wonderful family dinner) or relatively large (I finally received the promotion I've been waiting for!).
2. **After each positive event on the list, answer in your own words, "Why did this good thing happen?"** You can speculate, for example, that you had a great time at family dinner because, "Everyone put our phones away and we were able to be fully present with one another" or because "I cooked my daughter's favorite meal." When asked why you got your promotion, you might say, "I advocated for myself and proved my worth and contributions."

	THREE THINGS THAT WENT WELL	WHY DID THIS GOOD THING HAPPEN?
DAY 1		
DAY 2		
DAY 3		
DAY 4		
DAY 5		

3. Reflect: Does completing this exercise for five days change anything about the way you go about your days? How might you be slightly more attuned to positive events as they unfold?

4. Feel free to continue this exercise beyond five days; however, do stop after five days if it begins to feel burdensome.

Helpful Hint: It might be helpful to set an alarm or a repeating calendar event in your phone to remind yourself to complete this exercise.



GROWTH CHALLENGE #17:

GROW TOGETHER, CULTIVATE A SECURE RELATIONSHIP

At one time or another, we have all felt insecure in a relationship, whether due to external stressors, or because of our own more deep-seated tendencies toward avoidance or anxiety. However, when couples express their fears and needs with one another, previously silenced concerns can be tackled directly, and partners may be relieved of the pressure to mind-read or assume how their partner might be feeling.

This exercise is designed for dyads (couples, friends, siblings, etc.) to engage in to deepen your most valued relationships, demystify hidden feelings or anxieties, and secure a foundation of trust and acceptance.

The Challenge

1. Sit with a partner (a significant other, close friend, etc.) in a comfortable setting without distractions (put cell phones away and bring your full presence to the moment).
2. Together, start by coming up with at least two to three elements of your relationship that you cherish the most, and which bring you the most satisfaction. I.e.) the fun you have together, your common vision of the future, what you learn from each other... etc. Feel free to really delve into these elements that make your relationship successful, citing specific memories or stories, perhaps sharing feelings you have not expressed before.
3. Once you feel that you have sufficient list of the strongest parts of the relationship, allow each partner to share one concern or insecurity that they may harbor. As you share, try to use only “I” statements, rather than “you” statements, sharing your experience without placing blame on the partner. The listener should wait to respond in any way until the speaker is entirely done sharing. The listener should then repeat back their partner’s statement to ensure mutual understanding.
4. Together, devise a plan to address this concern, drawing upon your mutual strengths from the first part of the exercise to formulate a solution.
5. Note: you will likely not be able to ‘solve’ these problems or concerns in one sitting. The goal of this exercise is to create an environment where it is safe to share your insecurities, in which both partners commit to being more mindful of their partner’s needs. Drawing upon your strengths together and as individuals can be a great approach to dealing with insecurity and anxiety.
6. Switch places so that each partner has had a chance to share, and that you have a plan for beginning to address each partner’s concerns.

GROWTH CHALLENGE #18:

UNPLUG CHALLENGE

This exercise is about detaching from the virtual world of cell phones, television, tablets, email, smart-watches, and anything with a screen, and plugging into the present moment—being with yourself, your friends, your family. Not only do phones and other electronic devices get in the way of quality time during meals, other quality time with family and friends, and time alone decompressing from a difficult day or savoring a great one, but these devices may also hamper our sleep quality. The blue light in our cell phones and televisions interferes with melatonin and may disrupt our circadian rhythms. Therefore, unplugging from electronic devices at least two hours before bed, and sleeping in a dark room, may greatly enhance sleep quality.

The Challenge

1. Set an evening to unplug. Invite friends or family to participate in the Unplug Challenge with you. You, alone or with your family members/friends, will shut off all electronic devices including television, cell phones, tablets, computers, etc. Use clean socks as “sleeping bags” for participant’s cell phones.
2. Set yourself up to complete an activity while you are “unplugged.” This can include cooking dinner, reading, writing, going for a walk or hike, or creating a piece of art. If you are completing the unplug challenge with others, you can cook together, discuss a book, co-create art, play board games, hike, play charades, or create a family tree if completing the challenge with family.
3. After an evening of unplugged fun, remain unplugged until bedtime. Resist the temptation to turn on your phone or browse the web before bed. Get to bed at a reasonable hour so that you can get as close to eight hours of sleep as possible.
4. **Complete a written reflection, detailing your experience of unplugging with either yourself or others.** What did you do while unplugged? How did you feel? How do you feel now? What did you learn from this exercise?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #19:

TIME TRACKING

The Challenge

1. For three to five days (ensure at least one weekend day in addition to weekdays), either complete the Daily Time Tracking Table on the next page or use a smart phone app like iTrackMyTime to track your daily activity. If you are using the table, check the column if the majority of that half hour was spent in the specified activity. Note that it is possible to have completed two activities simultaneously (for instance, if you ran with a group of friends outdoors, you'd put a check mark next to exercising, outdoors, and connecting with others.) This exercise is not about assessing how you spend your time; rather it is about raising awareness of how you spend your time.
2. At the end of each tracking day, reflect on your mood, affect, and energy level as a result of each activity, to determine if what you were doing had any influence on how you were feeling.
3. After completing the challenge for about three to five days, and reflecting each day, reflect on the overall experience: Were there any patterns that you saw, for instance: How many hours of sleep are you typically getting? Is this enough sleep to optimally function during the day? Are you finding the time to exercise? (Remember, guidelines suggest getting at least 30 minutes for five days in a week, or 150 minutes spread over the course of a week.)
4. Are there any tweaks that you are feeling inclined to make to be more active? (For instance, can you opt to take the stairs instead of the elevator?) What can you do to spend more time with others? Are there any changes you think you could make in the way you structure your time to maximize your pursuit of vitality?
5. What, if anything, did you learn from tracking your time and the way that you structure your day?

DAILY TIME TRACKING TEMPLATE (FOR 1 DAY)

TIME	SITTING	STANDING	RECLINING (AWAKE)	EXERCISING	SLEEPING	EATING	INDOORS	OUTDOORS	CONNECTING WITH OTHERS	TIME
12:00AM										12:00AM
12:30AM										12:30AM
1:00AM										1:00AM
1:30AM										1:30AM
2:00AM										2:00AM
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10:30AM										10:30AM
11:00AM										11:00AM
11:30AM										11:30AM

TIME	SITTING	STANDING	RECLINING (AWAKE)	EXERCISING	SLEEPING	EATING	INDOORS	OUTDOORS	CONNECTING WITH OTHERS	TIME
12:00PM										12:00PM
12:30PM										12:30PM
1:00PM										1:00PM
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GROWTH CHALLENGE #20:

PRACTICE YOUR ABCS

This exercise is about understanding that the underlying beliefs we hold about the world and about ourselves can have distinct consequences for our emotional states, behaviors, and even our physiology. By understanding the cause-and-effect relationships between our beliefs and the consequences that result, we can begin to question the validity of our underlying beliefs and intervene on maladaptive belief-behavior patterns in order to cope more effectively through challenges.

Practicing our ABCs involves thinking through how an **activating event** might trigger certain underlying **beliefs** or automatic thoughts, which then trigger **consequences** for our emotions, behaviors, and physiology.

The Challenge

1. In a written reflection, explore the following, following the A, B, C, D, E (use the worksheet on the next page to guide you).
 - A. Think about a recent event that was particularly **activating** (or stressful) for you. Describe what happened in detail.
 - B. What were the **beliefs** or **automatic thoughts** that came to your mind in the moments after this event occurred?
 - C. Describe the **consequences** of those beliefs: What did you feel like in your body? What was your emotional state? What did you do/ what behaviors did you engage in?
 - D. How can you **dispute** potentially maladaptive beliefs and thoughts? Compare evidence for and against the thoughts that you had. Are there potentially other ways that you could have viewed the situation to lead to different, perhaps more favorable consequences?
 - E. Examine the results: What happens when we question our underlying beliefs and combat maladaptive thoughts?

ACTIVATING EVENT

What was the stimulus?

BELIEF

What is your underlying belief about the situation?

AUTOMATIC THOUGHT

What are you thinking in the moment?

CONSEQUENCES

What are the resulting emotions, behavior, and physiology?

BODILY SENSATIONS

EMOTIONS

BEHAVIORS

DISPUTE

What evidence do I have to support my thoughts? Is there another way to look at the situation? (How can I balance these thoughts to better serve me?)

EXAMINE

What do you feel like after disputing your thoughts? How do you want to act moving forward?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #21: CREATIVITY CHALLENGE

Research reveals many ways that small changes in our lives can make a big difference in our capacity for creativity. Activities such as listening to classical music, using a pen and paper to write rather than a computer, spending time in nature, daydreaming, meditating, exercising, and laughing all may enhance our capacity for creativity. However, not all methods may work for all people. Thus, in this exercise, you will have the choice in how you experiment to enhance your creative potential.

The Challenge

1. Set yourself up for a creativity experiment. First, with no priming whatsoever, sit down and set a timer for 2 minutes. In 2 minutes, think of as many possible uses for one of the following common objects: a **brick**, **Ping-Pong ball**, **spoon**, or **mug**.
2. For example, let's say you were completing this test with a **paperclip**. You might think about the following uses:
 - Cufflinks
 - Earrings
 - Something to unlock a jammed door
 - Bookmark
 - Toothpick
 - Twist-tie

3. After you write down as many alternative uses for the object of your choice, set yourself up for a “creativity-enhancing activity.” For example, you can listen to Mozart or other classical music for 10 minutes, go exercise for more than 20 minutes, spend 10 minutes just daydreaming, meditate, go spend time with friends and laugh, watch a funny television show, or go spend at least 30 minutes in nature.
4. Immediately following your “creativity-enhancing activity,” complete the Alternative Uses exercise again, this time, with one of the other objects (do not just repeat the exercise for the same object). Set a timer for 2 minutes and think of as many uses of the new object as possible.

5. At this point, you should have two lists for two distinct objects. Looking at these lists, write a reflection in which you address the following: What creativity-enhancing activity did you choose to complete? Do you think that the activity helped you to be more creative at the Alternative Uses test?

6. To assess whether the activity “worked” assess the following:
 - Which of your lists is longer?
 - Which list has more original or uncommon uses? (i.e. uses that do not resemble the intended function of the object).
 - Which list is more “flexible” or covers more areas? (i.e. a paperclip used as both earrings and cufflinks are both “accessories”, which is only 1 area).

7. Whether or not the creativity-enhancing activity helped you with this task, reflect: what types of things do you think will help you to increase your creativity in the future? In what situations might you want this enhanced level of creativity? What, if anything, did you learn from this exercise?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #22: PRACTICE FORGIVENESS

The capacity for forgiveness is an immensely important life skill. As humans, others will inevitably hurt us, and we will inevitably—consciously or unconsciously—hurt others and even ourselves. Experiences of hurt, regret, sadness, etc. can re-afflict us again and again when we hold onto these negative emotions after the point of infliction. When we do not forgive others or ourselves, we actually “add insult to injury” by ruminating on negative events rather than letting go of and learning from them. Forgiveness is not about condoning hurtful behavior; rather, it is about letting go of the emotional baggage so we do not become crippled by anger and resentment. While hurt is an inevitable part of the human experience, it is up to each person to determine whether to forgive and foster compassion, or whether these painful events stay with us and define us.

The Challenge

1. This exercise is based on Everett Worthington’s REACH model of forgiveness.²² **For each of the following letters, engage in written reflection in which you explore your feelings.** If you do not feel comfortable submitting your notes on each letter, that’s okay.

²²See Dr. Worthington’s website at: <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness-of-others/>

R = Recall the hurt

In order to heal and subsequently forgive, you must acknowledge that you have been hurt. Recall what happened and why you were hurt. Make up your mind not to treat yourself like a victim, and not to view the other person like a monster. Decide that you will not pursue “payback” but will treat the person as a valuable person.

E = Empathize with the person

Make an effort to put yourself in the other person’s shoes. Imagine what could have possibly been going on in that person’s life to cause you the hurt that he/she did. Really try to imagine the best-case scenario of what may have been at play when you were hurt. Imagine how he or she feels to have hurt you; imagine the possible pain that this person might be going through his/herself. Empathizing enables you to feel compassion or loving kindness to the other person, allowing you to give of yourself.

A = Altruistic gift

Determine to give your forgiveness as an unselfish, altruistic gift. To do this, imagine a time when someone in your life forgave you for wrong-doing (perhaps a friend, sibling, parent, or teacher). Remember how you felt when you were forgiven by that person—it likely felt quite light and freeing—and you did not want to do wrong by that person again. By forgiving unselfishly, you can allow the person who hurt you to feel that same lightness and freedom.

C = Commit

Commit to forgiveness. Write a note to yourself to affirm this forgiveness, something simple such as: "Today I forgave [Person's Name] for hurting me." You can keep this note to yourself, or share it with the person.

H = Hold onto forgiveness

If/when you are feeling in doubt about your forgiveness, re-read your note and re-commit. Remember, forgiveness does not necessarily mean forgetting, it simply means letting go of additional pain and hurt after damage has already been done.

2. After going through this REACH acronym, and reaching inside yourself to forgive, complete a reflection in which you explore the following: What did it feel like to engage in this exercise? Was there a particular letter that was the most challenging? Did you share your Commitment with the person who hurt you? If yes, how did that go? If no, why not? How do you feel toward this person now? What else, if anything, did you learn from this exercise?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #23: PRACTICE ACTS OF KINDNESS

The Challenge

1. In the next week, engage in at least five acts of virtue or kindness for another person (a partner, friend, colleague, boss, mentor, stranger, etc.) These do not need to be for the same person, and the person does not need to be aware of the act.
2. Try to mix and vary the types of kindness activities that you perform, and if possible, try to chunk them together between one or two days, rather than sprinkling them throughout the week, as research shows that chunking good deeds shows greater psychological benefits to the giver.
3. Anonymous acts can include simple gestures, like washing someone else's dishes, picking up litter on the street, making an anonymous donation, or leaving chocolate on a colleague's desk. More relational acts of kindness can include helping a neighbor with work at home, giving your time to help a friend with errands, cooking a meal for friends, visiting or calling a relative, or volunteering for a charity or philanthropic organization.
4. At the end of each activity, log your acts of kindness with the date of completion and exactly what you did.
5. Reflect on your kindness log: did your acts of kindness bring you closer to other people? Did your acts of kindness make others feel good? Did they make you feel good? If so, how long did these benefits last? Did any of your acts of kindness proliferate other acts of kindness, either within yourself or within others? What, if anything, did you learn from this exercise?

GROWTH CHALLENGE #24:

PLEASURE VS. PHILANTHROPY EXPERIMENT

The Challenge

1. In the next week, you will plan and carry out two activities. One will be a pleasurable activity, and the other, a philanthropic activity.
2. For the pleasurable activity, plan something fun that you expect to make you feel good (joyful, excited, contented, interested, amused, etc.). This must be an activity that you intentionally plan for the purposes of the challenge, rather than something that you were planning to do anyway, or simply transpires as the week goes on. It should also probably be legal!
3. For the philanthropic activity, plan to do something that will improve another person's well-being. This might include giving your time to someone else (tutoring, volunteering, helping a family member or neighbor) or using your unique talents or abilities to do something special for another person. Again, make sure that this is something that you plan intentionally, rather than something you were always planning on doing, or just comes up.
4. **Write a reflection briefly describing what you did for each activity.** Reflect upon how each activity made you feel:
 - What were some similarities and differences between these experiences?
 - How might these activities differentially tap into your sense of "happiness" versus a sense of "meaning?" How, in your eyes, do happiness and meaning differ from one another?
 - When looking to enhance a sense of well-being or wholeness in the future, which type of exercise would you be more likely to engage in? Why?
 - What, if anything, did you learn from engaging in this experiment?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #25: DEVELOP A PERSONAL OATH

Research demonstrates great psychological, work-related, and societal benefits for individuals who possess and cultivate their unique sense of purpose in life. Working toward meaning-oriented goals such as supporting family and friends, serving a higher power, living life to the fullest, being successful, helping others, and doing the right thing, among others, helps us to see the “big picture” in our daily lives and may prevent us from “sweating the small stuff” or focusing on the minor negative situations or annoyances (pardon the clichés).

Meaning and purpose are powerful drivers of both our daily experiences, and what we choose to do with our lives personally and professionally in the long-term. This exercise is aimed at helping you identify and reflect on your unique sense of purpose in life and create a plan forward for keeping these goals at the forefront of our minds.

The Challenge

1. Begin by reflect on the following questions:²³

- What matters to you most in life, and why?
 - [For example: social justice, environmental sustainability, family, community service, helping to heal sick people.... etc. Make sure to explain WHY?]
- What would you like to see different about the world?
 - Why?
- Are you doing anything about this problem?
 - If not, why not?
- Think back to some of your signature strengths: How might your personal strengths equip you to deal with this problem?
- What do you want to be remembered for?
 - What are you doing now to make sure that happens?

2. After reflecting on these questions, write a personal oath in which you dedicate yourself to the causes that mean the most to you. Oaths may take any form you choose, but should include affirmative statements of how you hope to pursue the areas that mean the most to you. One example is included here:

*"I will
Use my strengths of curiosity and wisdom
To pursue life-long learning,
Never being complacent with the knowledge I possess
I will read news and books, memoirs, novels,
That challenge my preconceived notions
I will bring an open mind and heart to new people and experiences
And maintain my awareness that my worldview is shaped by the life
I have lived thus far.
I will listen to others' opinions, and be careful not to judge others or myself
I will practice mindfulness. I will study hard.
I will give my time and resources to help those in need
I will take care of myself, so that I may take care of others."*

Keep your oath handy: type out your oath and make it your computer desktop or phone background, keep it on a keychain, or put it somewhere where it will be visible to you every day.

²³Questions retrieved from Matthew J. Bundick's research from the Institute on College Values Conference:
https://studentvalues.fsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Bundick_College_Student_PurposeD.pdf



GROWTH CHALLENGE #26: PRACTICE SAVORING

SAVORING ²⁴		
	Internal Self	External World
Cognitive Reflection (Thinking)	BASKING (PRIDE) <i>Being receptive to praise and congratulations</i> <i>ex.) Enjoying the afterglow of winning a soccer game, acing an exam, etc.</i>	THANKSGIVING (GRATITUDE) <i>Experiencing and expressing gratitude</i> <i>ex.) Spending the afternoon with your mother, expressing gratitude that you have such a beautiful, close relationship</i>
Experiential Absorption (Doing)	LUXURIATING (PLEASURE) <i>Engaging the senses fully;</i> <i>ex.) Enjoying a relaxing bubble bath, slowly eating a piece of delicious chocolate or sipping a glass of fine wine</i>	MARVELING (AWE) <i>Losing yourself in the wonder of experience</i> <i>ex.) Waking up early to watch the sun rise, going outside during a thunder storm to marvel at the sky's action</i>

²⁴Bryant, F. B., & Veroff, J. (2007). Savoring: A new model of positive experience. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

The Challenge

1. Of the four types of savoring (basking, luxuriating, thanksgiving, and marveling), which type(s) are you most inclined to do naturally?

2. Think through the three temporal forms of savoring (savoring something about the past, savoring the present, or anticipatory savoring the future); what type(s) are you most inclined to do naturally?

3. Set yourself up for a savoring experience using a temporal form and savoring type of your choice. Further, implement at least one strategy to enhance savoring from the table on the previous page.
4. For example, if you are a reminiscer and naturally are inclined toward gratitude, take out an old photo album and look through photos of your childhood. Engage a sibling or parent to do it with you for your savoring strategy of “share good things with others.”
5. **After savoring an experience, write a brief reflection, being sure to answer the following questions:** What did you savor? What savoring strategy did you use? What was your subjective experience like while savoring? What, if anything, did you gain or learn from this exercise?



GROWTH CHALLENGE #27: REVAMP INVENTORY

In order to set out to improve our whole-person well-being, it is important to have a coherent framework for what it means to thrive. In class, we learned about REVAMP from Jordyn Feingold, which proposes six ingredients for optimal well-being, including relationships, engagement, vitality, accomplishment, meaning, and positive emotions.

The task at hand is to reflect on each of these elements in our own lives, how we are already thriving, and how we can deliberately make small changes to enhance our sense of overall health and well-being.

The Challenge

1. Complete the chart on the following page to the best of your ability. Please reflect on both questions for each of the six elements: How am I doing now? And how can I do better?

REVAMP ELEMENT	How have I been doing?	How can I do better?
RELATIONSHIPS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with my family members • Relationships with friends • Relationships with colleagues (clients, if relevant) • Relationship with myself 		
ENGAGEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement in professional work • Engagement in leisure activities • Engagement with mindfulness • Engagement with strengths • Flow 		
VITALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity • Nutrition & diet • Sleep • Energy level 		
ACCOMPLISHMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting goals for myself • Asking others for help • Helping others achieve their goals 		
MEANING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General sense of purpose • Sense of interconnectedness with others, with the universe • Sense of transcendence in my life 		
POSITIVE EMOTIONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savoring positive experiences • Practicing gratitude • Cultivating resilience • Taking note of positive emotions, without suppressing my dark side 		

GROWTH CHALLENGE #28:

WRITE A GRATITUDE LETTER

Practicing gratitude is a cornerstone of positive psychology associated with several beneficial outcomes for well-being. In correlational studies, expressing gratitude is associated with increased savoring of positive life experiences, bolstering self-worth and self-esteem, more effective coping with life stresses and trauma, better adjustment to loss and chronic illness, enhanced moral behavior, nurturing new social bonds and strengthening old ones, inhibiting envy and comparison with others, lessening negative feelings, and reducing our tendency to adapt to positive events.²⁵

This exercise, the gratitude visit, has been empirically shown to induce positive changes in happiness and a decrease in depressive symptoms for up to a month.²⁶

The Challenge

1. Choose a person in your life who has been especially kind to you but may not have ever heard you express your deep gratitude to them.
2. **Write him or her a letter, with the intention of reading it out loud to this person if at all possible.** Describe in detail what the person has done for you and exactly how it has affected your life. Mention how often you remember his or her efforts and how you may plan to pay this kindness forward somehow.
3. If possible, read the letter out loud to the recipient. If this is not possible, you can read the letter over the phone or mail the letter and follow-up with a phone call.²⁷
4. **Complete a written reflection detailing what it felt like to engage in this gratitude intervention.**

²⁵Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. New York, NY: The Penguin Press. ²⁶Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410–421. ²⁷If you are not comfortable reading or sending the letter, that is okay. Just writing the letter may be enough to produce substantial boosts in your well-being. However, sending the letter will maximize the benefits of gratitude to enhance the relationship quality between you and your letter recipient.



CHOOSE GROWTH!