Program Sessions

Year Two: Certificate Studies

1. Introduction to Year Two

The introductory course in positive psychology addressed the core components, ideas, and foundational assumptions of this field of research, with hands-on experience of research-supported practical applications. In the advanced course, we will continue to deepen our learning with an emphasis on applying content in a more profound way and integrating it into daily life. In this year, we will strive to influence reality and promote positive change through actions that hold personal meaning for each participant. In doing so, we will encounter practical tools from the world of evidence-based coaching and brief counseling, to develop communication skills and to promote an optimal narrative of ourselves and those around us. The first session will lay the groundwork for this year by introducing participants to the unique structure of the program.

2. Growth Mindset

In recent decades, researchers in motivation and personality have discovered significant individual differences in people's basic mindsets regarding intelligence. People with fixed mindsets believe that their intelligence is set and that their basic abilities cannot change. In contrast, those with a growth mindset see intelligence as a dynamic concept that can be cultivated through effort and education. These mindsets have been linked to the goals students set for themselves in learning, their willingness to invest effort, their relationship with feedback, and their motivation for learning and personal development. This session will focus on cultivating growth mindsets as a foundation for increasing motivation, drive, and openness to change.

3. Meaning

"He who has a 'why' to live can bear almost any 'how'..." — Nietzsche's well-known saying has received extensive empirical support over many decades of research regarding the psychological value of the experience of meaning. Feelings of purpose and meaning in human life have been strongly associated with many dimensions of mental well-being, physical health, and even longevity. In this session, we will look at the connection between finding meaning from life and finding meaning in life, and engage with deep questions related to the personal meaning of each participant.

4. Appreciative Inquiry

One of the central places for the expression of meaning in life is our workplace. Accordingly, research finds that people who feel meaningful in their workplace create better relationships with their environment, engage in and shape their work in more creative ways, and experience greater mental well-being. In this session, we will try to translate the idea of meaning from an abstract concept into a practical, "grounded" idea, aimed at enhancing the sense of meaning in professional work. To do so, we will use a personal four-step protocol drawn from the world of "Appreciative Inquiry." The Appreciative Inquiry approach seeks to draw upon past successes in order to inspire the present toward an optimal future. From the inquiry of each participant, a personal initiative will be derived to enhance the sense of meaning in their work.

5. Presenting Personal Initiatives

The initiatives are new rituals of behavior or thinking that have entered or will enter participants' ongoing routines during and following the course, and will influence both the lives of participants and their surroundings. Participants are asked to create an initiative that brings about positive personal, professional, social, or community change — drawing on the materials and research they have studied and will study. From the middle of the course until the final session, every 2–3 students will present their initiatives in a precise and creative 7-minute talk (in the style of a 'TED' talk). At the end of the talk, participants will receive feedback from the audience and instructor on the initiative and will make adjustments accordingly.

6 & 7. Empathic Listening

These two sessions will open the second part of the course, which will offer exposure to tools from the world of evidence-based coaching and brief counseling, for cultivating transformative and empowering dialogue with ourselves and those around us. The methods presented are scientifically grounded, rooted in research in the field of positive psychology. These two sessions will emphasize the power and characteristics of empathic listening as a basic and central foundation for a nurturing relationship. During the sessions, participants will experience and practice different listening styles, identify their own dominant listening style, and engage in the experience and practice of empathic listening.

8. Storytelling Festival

The art of storytelling has been part of human existence from its very beginnings. Stories served as a basic tool in human communication to convey messages, insights, and lessons from the past, as knowledge passed from generation to generation. This session will deal with storytelling and shaping positive personal narratives as a central tool in interpersonal counseling processes and in creating a desired reality.

9. Loving What Is

Margarita Tarragona, an expert in positive psychology and narrative therapy, said that "we can choose to embody, highlight, or perform different ways of being, different versions of who we are." How then can we promote an optimal story of ourselves and others? In this session, we will continue to be exposed to and practice diverse techniques and tools from the world of narrative therapy, which encourage appreciative stories and promote positive change through changing the narrative.

10. Applications of Appreciative Inquiry

In 1980, a young researcher named David Cooperrider conducted an organizational intervention in which he questioned managers about their past successes and allowed them to learn from their positive experiences in order to advance organizational goals. This intervention formed the basis of a popular and valid organizational and interpersonal intervention known as "Appreciative Inquiry." This session will include an in-depth personal inquiry protocol based on the practice of Appreciative Inquiry. This protocol traces moments of success within a space defined by the individual as a problematic or challenging area. By identifying and personally exploring moments of success, a perspective emerges that amplifies the resources for coping within the space of difficulty.

11. Inspiring Authenticity

"Know thyself and be thyself" — this was the prophecy of the Oracle of Delphi in Greek mythology. The ability of each of us to live in the most authentic way is at once so simple and so complex. Winnicott, an English child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst continuing in Freud's footsteps, saw authenticity as a source of spontaneity, creativity, and a clear sign of mental health. This session will enable participants to bring into awareness their experience of authenticity in their personal lives and professional work, to examine under what conditions it is possible and under what conditions it is not — and why — and how it can be promoted.

12. Personal Summary

Scientific research yields considerable insights about the concept known as happiness. After two years of learning, practice, and engagement with positive psychology, the term "happiness" takes on a unique meaning for each participant, intertwined with personal experiences and insights regarding the question of human happiness. This session will move from the pages of scientific research to the personal memory journals of group members. In this experiential session, participants will summarize the personal process they underwent throughout the program, reflecting on centers of growth and forward-looking personal insights.