

ASSIGNMENTS AND READING MATERIALS FOR MODULE FOUR

“Creating Meaningful Connections”

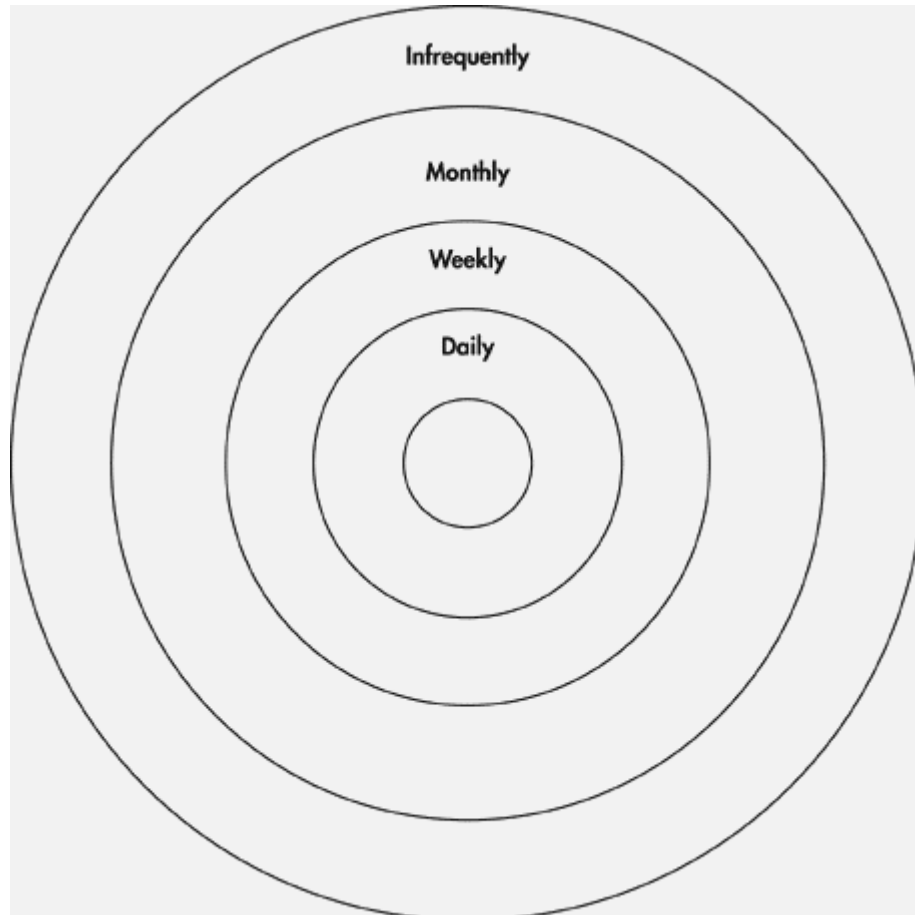
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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write your name in the middle of the circle below. Then write the names of the people you see on a daily basis within the innermost circle. Write the names of the people who you see on a weekly basis in the next circle. Write the names of people you see on a monthly basis in the next circle. Finally, write the names of people you see infrequently in the last circle (the one farthest out). When you're finished, go back and put a plus sign (+) beside each person that makes you feel good (i.e., that helps light up your life and brings you positive energy). Put a minus sign (-) by each person in your life that drains you (i.e., brings you negative energy). Of course, the goal of this exercise is to begin to shift people around so that you surround yourself with people that bring you positive energy and brighten up your life.



Below is a **Resilience Assessment Tool** that contains all three components we've been working on: 1) Taking responsibility; 2) Focusing on empowering interpretations; and 3) Creating meaningful connections. Use this tool over and over again to help you resolve stressful situations in your life and create a strong foundation of resilience.

The Resilience Assessment Tool

Taking Responsibility

Identify an issue or stressful situation in your life that you would like to work on.

Identify your position(s) on the Responsibility Model (denial, lay blame, make excuses, shame).

How will you take responsibility? (in ways that are within your circle of influence and keep you in control)?

Focusing on Empowering Interpretations

Write down all your negative beliefs or thoughts regarding the stressful situation.

Disempowering interpretations of the stressful situation (negative beliefs or thoughts)

Use the ABCDE Thinking Model to create empowering interpretations for each negative thought you wrote in the above box. Write these empowering interpretations in the box below.

**Empowering interpretations of the stressful situation
(positive, yet realistic perspectives on the negative thoughts you listed above)**

Creating Meaningful Connections

Who do you talk to about the stressful situation (e.g., to get advice, affirmation, information, support)?

READING MATERIAL

Creating Meaningful Connections

Throughout our lives, we depend on others for our survival and success. The old phrase "no man is an island" has never been more true. If you think about some of the most important moments in your life, you will usually find someone who was very influential during those times. A person's ability to create and maintain meaningful connections is a critical factor in how stressful situations are handled.

The results of several research studies indicate that a person's health and well being are directly related to how well they connect with others and allow support during stressful situations. Conversely, people who tend to disconnect during stressful situations do not do as well. Apply this concept to your own life as you reflect on the three activities below.

1. Recall some situations where significant change or stress occurred in your life. Write about how one or more meaningful connections made it easier for you to handle the situations.

2. Recall a time when you disconnected from someone because of a conflict. Write about the impact of that disconnection.

3. Describe ways you can seek out greater meaningful connections in your life.

Practice and Your Life Will Change for the Better

I promise that if you practice using the material you have learned so far, your life will change for the better in three ways.

First, as you work through the course and enhance your foundation of resilience, you'll notice that stressful situations that once disrupted you a great deal will not disrupt you as much. Stressful situations that bothered you before you took this course will not bother you as much after the course.

A **second** key benefit you can expect as you enhance your foundation of resilience is that although some stressful situations may still bother you just as much, you will be able to *bounce up* and return to your previous level of functioning much more quickly. In other words, you may still feel slammed down just as hard, but what previously took two days, or two weeks, or two months to recover from, will now take less time for you to return to your previous level of well-being. You can expect to shorten the amount of time you feel disrupted following stressful situations in your life.

Finally, a **third** key benefit is that, as you enhance your foundation of resilience you will begin to notice that it takes a much more intense stressful situation to disrupt your level of well-being in the first place. There will be more and more moments in your life in which you are willing to *step up* to the plate and do what it takes to transform stressful situations into challenges, or opportunities for personal growth and development. You will experience more and more moments of thriving in your life.

Of course, being resilient and thriving doesn't make you immune to pain. You will still experience stressful situations, but what you think and what you choose to do in response will be different, and thus your level of well-being will not be diminished, and will often be enhanced. You'll feel calmer, more secure, and more productive. Even in the case of traumatic events, such as the devastating death of a loved one, it is possible to gradually *bounce up*, rather than *give up* on life.

The Essential Component Needed to Thrive... Characteristics of Self-Leadership

It's as simple as this: Your Self is who you really are. Without the energy of the Self, you'll be unable to sustain a strong foundation of resilience. Take a minute and think about who you really are at your core. How would you describe your true Self? You might reflect back to some moment of success in your life that you felt good about and recall that you felt confident. Or perhaps you recall a time when you were helpful to someone else and you felt a sense of compassion. Whatever the situation, how would you describe your Self? What are those core characteristics of your Self that reflect the real you - who you really are? Please list 3-4 characteristics below: (Example: confident, compassionate)

I hope you realized that who you really are, your Self, is an active, assertive, yet compassionate inner leader. Your Self is not a passive observer or witness of what goes on in your life. Rather, your Self is more like the best teacher, coach, mentor, or parent you have ever experienced or can imagine. And this teacher, your Self, is living inside you. I learned the concept of Self-Leadership from Dr. Richard Schwartz in 1999. Dr. Schwartz, former professor at Northwestern University, currently is Director of the Center for Self-Leadership in Chicago. His work is without a doubt, the most powerful and helpful learning I have ever experienced, and continue to learn about. I highly recommend his books to you. Being in Self-Leadership is the essential ingredient for building resilience and learning to thrive.

Perhaps the best analogy of Self-Leadership is the conductor of a symphony or orchestra. Although the conductor makes none of the actual music, the conductor is the leader. The music is made entirely by the orchestra members who all function together as a coordinated cooperative whole. Similar to an orchestra, each of us is a system composed of various parts or personalities. For example, I know that each of you could describe various parts of your personality, such as the achiever, the caretaker, the critic, the clown, the rebel, the distracter, the serious part of you, the anxious part of you, etc. When your Self is leading your life (e.g., leading your orchestra, so to speak), the various parts of you develop and relate to one another in a harmonious way.

It is this active leading by the Self that provides a safe and nurturing environment within us, and thus enables each of us to bounce up and maintain homeostasis and well-being, as well as transform stressful situations into opportunities for enhanced resilience and personal growth or thriving. When the Self is leading in our daily lives, we experience the following nine characteristics. Hopefully, they will be easy for you to remember because they all start with the letter "C":

Calm. The first characteristic of Self-Leadership is a sense of calm. Self-led individuals react to stressful situations in the environment in less extreme and automatic ways. Rather than being overwhelmed by the common fight or flight stress response, self-led individuals do not experience an impulse to fight or to run away, nor do they feel frozen. Self-led individuals hold a calm, steady center. Although waves of painful and joyful feelings are experienced, this calm center remains undisturbed.

Clarity. The second characteristic of Self-Leadership is clarity. Clarity is defined as the ability to perceive situations without distortions. When individuals see through the eyes of the Self, they see with clarity; they see things as they really are. The experience of clarity reflects what the Buddhists call "beginner's mind", a view in which there are many possibilities. Without this clarity, it is easy to become confused or overwhelmed in stressful situations. This can lead to adopting extreme beliefs and emotions in order to try to cope.

Curiosity. The third characteristic of Self-Leadership is curiosity. Curiosity is defined as listening to another individual or to our own feelings and thoughts in a non-judgmental manner with the intention to understand. Similar to the inquisitiveness of a child, the self-led individual is very interested in other people and their reactions. For example, Self-led individuals are curious about someone else's anger or sadness. This kind of non-judgmental curiosity results in dialogues that are enlightening as well as growth producing. When people sense no fear of judgment, just genuine interest and intent to understand, they become less defensive and are often happy to share their story with someone who is not judging them. The same is true for each of us as we work with our own thoughts and feelings regarding the stressful situations in our life.

Compassion. The fourth characteristic of Self-Leadership is compassion - defined as being open-hearted and understanding with other people's feelings and thoughts without having the urge to rescue them or to distance from them. We can also experience compassion toward ourselves by being aware and understanding of our own thoughts and feelings. As we learn to relieve our own suffering, we learn to trust our Self as well as understand whatever lessons the suffering has to teach us. Compassion, then, reflects an understanding that the power is in the patient rather than the healer, and thus the healer does whatever possible to foster the leadership of the other's Self. Often, simply being in the presence of a Self-led individual with such open-hearted compassion will help other people begin to lead their life.

Confidence. The fifth characteristic of Self-Leadership is confidence. The experience of confidence refers to the ability of the Self to handle situations in the present moment rather than worrying about the future or reliving past hurts. If situations involve danger, Self-led individuals take steps to protect themselves without becoming defensive or overreacting. In addition, if Self-led individuals encounter stressful situations, where a part of them feels hurt, they will take the necessary steps to nurture their feelings. Over time, such interactions result in more and more confidence in the Self.

Courage. The sixth characteristic of Self-Leadership is courage. While Self-led individuals are compassionate, they also have the strength to be forceful and protective without judgment when necessary. Courage is defined as the experience of looking at present situations and then acting in an open-hearted manner congruent with the needs of the situation. Self-led individuals have the courage to move towards happiness and joy. They also have the strength to move towards difficult or painful experiences, such as witnessing an upsetting event of the past rather than trying to minimize its impact or forget about the event entirely. Particularly in these situations, it takes courage to look and then courage to act.

Creativity. The seventh characteristic of Self-Leadership is creativity. Creativity is defined as the innate wisdom and truth that one experiences when the mind is quiet and the noise from our own inner critical voice is diminished. This quieting of the mind and of one's inner critical voice makes space for intuition and for creative expression to spontaneously emerge. However, having said that, it is also true that the path to real creative self-expression is not to avoid or shut out emotions such as anger, grief, jealousy, or fear. Rather, these feelings allow individuals to speak their truth and experience creative self-expression.

Connectedness. The eighth characteristic of Self-Leadership is connectedness. Connectedness is defined as experiencing more and more Self energy, as well as being in the presence of other individuals who also are Self-led. Relief is experienced because you are in the company of someone with whom there is no need to impress or to hide from, because you won't be judged or controlled. In this extraordinary moment, each of you can be who you really are.

Contentment. The ninth characteristic of Self-Leadership is contentment. Contentment is defined as being at peace with yourself and with what is going on in your life at any given moment. Being content is not the same as being complacent. You can be at peace and feel a sense of contentment, yet still work to achieve the goals and objectives you desire in your life.

The nine characteristics of Self-Leadership that we have discussed are all inter-related. An individual who has a **calm** center is able to perceive situations with greater **clarity** and less influence from extreme beliefs and emotions. This combined sense of calmness and clarity allows an individual to listen to others with non-judgmental **curiosity**. The sincere interest in, and witnessing of, another individual helps foster **compassion**. We notice we tend to live life more open-handed and open-hearted. Over time, these Self-led experiences result in individuals having more and more **confidence** in their ability to effectively handle a variety of situations with **courage**. This courage enables one to move toward strong, emotional experiences that provide opportunities for **creative** self-expression as well as greater **connectedness** to others. As a result, we feel a greater sense of **contentment** with our lives.

We begin to understand that although each of us is an individual, we are all the same. For example, we are each a wave in the ocean, yet we are also the ocean. We are not one, yet we are not two. We are both the individual wave and we are the ocean. And since our Self is who we really are, and each person has the same Self, we are all the same, and yet we are all different. Whew! That's a little heavy, but what that has come to mean for me is that if I really look in the eyes of another person, even though I know we are different, I can see myself, and that knowledge allows more Self energy to be present for both of us.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this course. I want to personally thank you. My hope is that it has been a worthwhile experience and resulted in your foundation of resilience becoming stronger and stronger. Please feel free to e-mail me at msteinhardt@mail.utexas.edu or call me at 512/232-3535.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Das, Lama Surya. (2003). *Letting go of the person you used to be: Lessons on change, loss, and spiritual transformation*. New York: Broadway Books.

The Dalai Lama & Cutler, H.C. (1998). *The art of happiness: A handbook for living*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Fredrickson, B.L. (2009). *Positivity*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Goleman, D. (2006). *Social intelligence: The new science of human relationships*. New York: Bantam Dell.

Ornish, D. (1997). *Love and survival: The scientific basis for the healing power of intimacy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Pennebaker, J.W. (1997). *Opening up: The healing power of expressing emotions*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Schwartz, R.C. (1995). *Internal family systems therapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.