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Connecting Through Circles: A Playbook for Cultivating Well-Being Between Wharton Women Alumni

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Abstract

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Disciplines

Adult and Continuing Education | Business Administration, Management, and Operations

Connecting Through Circles: A Playbook for Cultivating Well-Being Between Wharton Women Alumni

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A Positive Psychology Service-Learning Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for MAPP 714: Applying Positive Interventions in Institutions

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

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Service-Learning Project
MAPP 714: Applying Positive Interventions in Institutions
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April 6, 2020

Abstract

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Situation Analysis

1. Background & Sector Analysis: The Wharton Women's Circles (WWC) at the University of Pennsylvania is a ground-breaking alumnae program founded in 2019 as a partnership with the Wharton MBA Career Management Center and Wharton External Affairs. WWC is a school-led program aimed at cultivating meaningful connections to support alumnae through the arc of their lives. The intent is to have Circle members share their personal and professional backgrounds across generations, career domains, cultures, and experiences (Wharton Women's Circles Informational Deck).

The 400 WWC members meet monthly at 44 separate Circle meetings held in New York City and San Francisco. The Circles consist of 6-8 Wharton alumnae and 1-2 facilitators. All facilitators and participants are expected to participate in the Circle for one full year. The continuation of each Circle group after one year depends on the needs and desires of the members of that group. To date 50% of the membership are young alumnae, 37% coming from the C-suite, and various industries are represented. The response to WWC has been tremendous - events typically sell out within the first five hours, and 90% of the alumnae feel that the program has helped them connect with other regional Wharton peers (Wharton Women's Circles Informational Deck).

According to Caroline Simard (2017), Managing Director of Stanford's VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab, women typically endure extra scrutiny when being evaluated in the workplace. Women's networking events enable women to drop their superwoman personas in a welcoming and safe environment. Programs like WWC provide working women with a safe space to talk and share in an environment of support and encouragement. Through this process, women build community, confidence, inspiration and

produce desired results across personal and professional domains (Simard, 2017). Creating such programs seems to be the trend among the top tier business schools. For example, Stanford Business School (GSB) initiated a program for alumnae in 2013 and it is the fastest-growing alumnae program to date. Harvard Business School (HBS) started a similar program in 2016, modelled after Stanford's.

Much can be learned from Stanford and Harvard's experience leading women's networking groups. Based on this industry benchmarking, WWC has determined the following: (1) the circle format is effective and addresses a clear need from alumnae, (2) successful programs require significant support from school leadership and dedicated staff, (3) volunteers drive the programming but ownership should sit at the school level, and (4) the most effective growth model for these programs is 'slow and steady' (Wharton Women's Circles Informational Deck).

There is much to be learned within the corporate space too. Lean-In Circles and similar women's groups have grown at a rapid rate. They provide all-in-one guides, including videos discussing topics such as Power Posing, Managing Transitions, Work-Life Balance etc. (Resources for Lean In Circles, n.d.). There are also several available online videos that offer tips for women supporting each other and building confidence. However, topics such as increasing well-being, cultivating strong relationships and building resilience are generally missing from these circles, and therefore there is a great opportunity and need to infuse positive psychology into these conversations.

According to Terri Garton, Director of Alumni Affairs at Ivey Business School (personal communication, January 9, 2020), women's networks, like those created at Wharton, Stanford, and Harvard are a perfect fit for universities' desired strategic move to increase lifelong learning

and connection as part of the MBA experience. As Wharton looks to address this market demand and alumnae need, WWC aims to grow strategically and methodologically. As they tap into the needs of their members, they look to improve the Circles using the building blocks of positive psychology.

2. Organization Strengths & Needs: As mentioned, WWC is one of the pioneer programs in the field of MBA networking for alumnae. What sets them apart however is their simple, yet powerful mandate to 'cultivate meaningful connections'. Their passion for infusing positive psychology into their model sets them apart as a leader in the space. WWC prioritizes 'quality over quantity', meaning that their ability to facilitate a flourishing connection is more indicative of their success than membership engagement numbers. A core aspect of WWC, enabling this impact, lies in their local facilitator model. Each Circle is facilitated by 1 or 2 Wharton alumnae who ensure meetings encourage meaningful conversations and connections. These facilitators are likewise responsible for creating an environment of trust and transparency and for setting clear expectations for group behavior and norms. They oversee logistical meeting planning, agenda setting, and discussion moderation for each meeting. Exceptional facilitators are selected through an application and interview process and are trained in group facilitation and leadership. For ongoing learning, they participate in a monthly call with WWC administrators to address challenges and share best practices (Wharton Women's Circles Informational Deck).

Moreover, a crucial component of the Circles is the commitment and dedication of WWC participants. Circle participants are expected to follow the group's norms and behaviors and contribute to the meeting in a meaningful and authentic way. Regular attendance by participants is expected and imperative to each Circle's success. WWC intentionally seeks out participants from a wide variety of industries, such as Investment Banking, Consulting, Consumer Products,

Financial Services, and Internet Product and Services, to be part of their Circle community (Wharton Women's Circles Informational Deck). Through these backgrounds they bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise, establishing a strong foundation for vibrant networking, knowledge sharing, and friendship.

Looking forward to future growth and scalability, WWC leadership and administrators are passionate about refining the program's facilitator training materials by including elements of positive psychology— specifically increasing resiliency, expanding gratitude, identifying and capitalizing on character strengths, and improving overall well-being.

3. Opportunities to Apply Positive Psychology: According to the WWC survey administered to participants in September 2019 (retrieved from <https://app.box.com/file/599341148319>), the main reasons why women join a Circle are “to connect with Wharton alumnae in my region” (98%) and “to have a safe space to discuss professional issues” (90%), and “personal issues” (54%). Some of the benefits of Circles highlighted by members included themes, such as: “the importance of getting to meet women in a meaningful way” and “experiencing vulnerability not usually seen in professional networking sessions.” Following participation, 68% of women found that the Circles provided a safe space for them to discuss personal issues demonstrating Circles' ability to cultivate vulnerable and meaningful connections. Suggestions for improvement revolve around structure and content and include statements like: “there needs to be more formal facilitators/programming... that leads to deeper conversation;” and “more structure surrounding conversations”.

According to WWC leadership, success for our partnership includes 1) A better understanding of how positive psychology can influence the Circle experience; and 2) Development of concrete take-aways that can be implemented for future participants and

facilitators. Our mandate is to meaningfully integrate well-being topics into the facilitated discussions to expand Circle participants' contribution and sense of purpose both personally and professionally. Additionally, a successful outcome will include developing a tool to better understand and measure engagement and satisfaction of facilitators and participants (Costello, Swanson & Thomas, personal communication, January 16, 2020). Furthermore, given the emergence of the global pandemic COVID-19, positive psychology research can support WWC leaders and facilitators in supporting members as they continue to maintain quality connections and positive emotion during challenging times (Appendix G).

Literature Review and Application Plan

WWC's leadership wishes to use positive psychology to influence the Circle experience, developing concrete take-aways for future participants and facilitators. Leveraging research in positive psychology, our team developed five facilitator-led sessions, encompassed in an adaptable 'WWC Circle Playbook' format that includes various materials to support facilitators, engage participants, and drive discussions. Through the creation of these sessions, we aim to accomplish three goals: (1) Amplify participant connection and increased well-being, through infusing positive psychology in the curriculum; (2) Address survey feedback and the desire for more formal programming and structured conversations; and (3) Provide session resources to enable future growth and scalability.

The WWC Circle Playbook will include materials for each of the 5 facilitator-led sessions, which will be approximately 30 minutes in length. The playbook content will first be taught to the facilitators by WWC leadership (via the PowerPoint slide), during existing monthly BlueJeans calls. The facilitators will then, per the usual Circle approach, disseminate the session material to their Circles before and during their group meetings. Facilitators should prioritize

page one of the session materials and time-permitting, they can move to page two which includes specific strategies, exercises and group discussion.

The WWC Circle Playbook addresses the need for more structured content while enabling WWC to continue to cultivate meaningful connections among members. Furthermore, the playbook format will provide WWC with a template for future growth and scalability as they identify and develop new topics. The five facilitator-led sessions and corresponding literature review are outlined below:

Session 1: Know Your Strengths - Literature Review

Incorporating character strengths, a foundational piece of positive psychology, at the start of the WWC curriculum will enable facilitators and members to learn a critical aspect of their own well-being and foster meaningful connections with each other. According to the WWC survey administered to Circle members in September 2019, participants listed “making new friends” (63.41%), “discussing personal issues” (53.66%) and “discussing professional issues” (90.24%) as the three most important intentions for joining a Circle. Applying the science of character strengths can be a meaningful approach to achieving these objectives across both, personal and professional domains.

Character Strengths: Character strengths are positive traits that are personally fulfilling, reflect our personal identity, are energizing when used, and are essential to who we are (Niemiec, 2018). Character strengths are ubiquitous, valued across cultures, and aligned with numerous positive outcomes for oneself and others (Niemiec, 2018). In studies examining the relationship between character strengths and the five PERMA dimensions of well-being (positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment), all strengths were positively related to PERMA (Wagner et. al., 2019). Using character strengths at work is correlated with

job satisfaction, productivity and engagement (Lavy & Littman-Ovadia, 2016), particularly the strengths of zest, hope, curiosity, love, and gratitude (Heintz & Ruch, 2019). Multiple studies suggest that people thrive at work when they are able to use their signature strengths and that using strengths is a key ingredient in making work meaningful, enjoyable, and engaging (Bretherton & Niemiec, 2018). When applied, character strengths can increase well-being, improve relationships, and create supportive cultures (Niemiec, 2018).

Know Your Strengths Session (Appendix A- Artifacts)

The *Know Your Strengths* session will consist of a brief introduction to the VIA character strengths survey and research supporting the importance of using strengths in daily life. It is recommended that facilitators become familiar with character strengths by reading the suggested VIA article, watching the TED talk, and reviewing the session materials in detail. Research citations are included to offer additional support as facilitators prepare for their Circle session.

The *Know Your Strengths* session offers multiple exercises for in-person or virtual discussions to support facilitators in leading the conversation while providing members with the tools to build awareness of and apply their strengths. These exercises include: (1) Instructions on taking the VIA survey to identify your strengths, or alternatively self-identifying from the provided VIA handout; (2) Questions to start exploring your strengths and how they influence your personal and professional life; (3) Identifying your signature strengths and conducting a mental subtraction thought experiment; (4) Five-minute signature strengths introduction challenge to foster relationship building and deepening connections through sharing of your best characteristics; (5) Introduction to the Aware-Explore-Apply model (Niemiec, 2018) to continue leveraging your strengths across all domains of life.

Session 2: Well-Being 101 - Literature Review

The *Well-being 101* session is designed to support WWC in their quest to foster well-being for their facilitators and Circle members, and to introduce positive psychology and the PERMA theory. By integrating well-being topics and offering multiple pathways for flourishing, this playbook will benefit WWC facilitators and members by increasing self-awareness and illustrating that we can control our stress, have more energy, and see improvement in our vitality and well-being (Ratey, 2008).

PERMA: PERMA is a theory of well-being developed and introduced by Dr. Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania (2011). The PERMA theory focuses on five essential aspects of well-being: Positive Emotion (P) – feeling positive and optimistic and looking for the good in life's events (Seligman, 1998); Engagement (E) – being engaged in something you are passionate about and finding purpose and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997); Relationships (R) – finding value, meaning, and joy in your relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances; Meaning (M) – people, places, projects, and ideas that allow you to express your most important values and connect to a fulfilling purpose (Smith, 2017); and Accomplishments (A) – setting and achieving goals that are important to you and help define your purpose (Seligman, 2011). PERMA is based on the belief that we can flourish by focusing on the positive side of the mental health spectrum instead of negative psychological states (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). When we aren't flourishing, we can examine our lives through a PERMA lens and adjust based on where we are lacking (Seligman, 2018).

Vitality: In addition to PERMA, an essential aspect of well-being is Vitality (V). Subjective vitality – from eastern perspectives and western psychology theory - describes one's self-reported energy, liveliness, and general well-being (Ryan and Frederick 1997). Our subjective vitality increases when we take care of our physical and emotional states through

exercise, mindfulness, stress management, and sleep. Dr. Ratey (2008) argues that when we exercise, we help our brains function at their best. We rarely give exercise credit for positive mental health, but Ratey (2008) believes that the most beneficial purpose of exercise is to build the brain. Daily exercise can help reduce stress and improve mental health, enhance alertness, attention, and motivation (Ratey, 2008), increase cognitive function, slow aging, and boost positive moods (Mandolesi et al., 2018). In contrast, a sedentary lifestyle leads to increased cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, and all-cause mortality (Rezende, Rodrigues Lopes, Rey-Lopez, Matsudo & Luiz, 2014).

In addition to exercise, meditation is an effective way to slow down our minds and focus inward (Smalley & Winston, 2010). Meditation (or mindfulness) can enable us to focus on the present, instead of obsessing or worrying about the past or future (Smalley & Winston, 2010). Instead of quickly reacting to situations, we can become more aware of our impulses and therefore have more control over our actions, while increasing compassion for ourselves and others (Smalley & Winston, 2010). People are happier when their minds don't wander – mind wandering is a cause, not a consequence of unhappiness (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). There is a clear link between mindfulness – attention regulation, emotional regulation, and body awareness – and subjective vitality (Wu & Buchanan, 2019).

Restful sleep is another important factor in managing stress and overall well-being, contributing to vitality. Sleep deprivation can be caused by stress, but it also contributes to stress, through increased cortisol, appetite, and blood glucose levels (Ratey & Manning, 2014). Sleep deprivation is also closely tied to depression, since we tend to focus on the negatives in our lives when we haven't obtained adequate sleep (Wills & Grandner, 2019). It also can lead to less productivity at work, increased disease, and social isolation and loneliness (Magnavita &

Garbarino, 2017). If we make regular exercise, daily meditation, and more restful sleep a priority, we will feel better emotionally and physically.

Session 2: Well-being 101 Session (Appendix B- Artifacts)

Given PERMA's helpful framework for cultivating personal and collective well-being, the *Well-Being 101* session will outline the theory, its benefits, and how to use it in practice. In addition to PERMA, the session will include theory and research on Vitality (V). We expect that the subjective vitality of Circle members will increase as they take care of their physical and emotional states through exercise, mindfulness, stress management, and sleep. The *Well-Being 101* session will provide facilitation tips for the facilitators and well-being tips for Circle members to prioritize regular exercise, daily meditation, and restful sleep to improve emotional and physical well-being. PERMA-V will educate Circle members regarding their own well-being and facilitate meaningful relationships by honing the Meaning and Relationship elements of the theory (Seligman, 2011). When Circle members aren't flourishing, they can examine their lives through the lens of PERMA and adjust based on the areas they identify as lacking (Seligman, 2018).

Session 3: Fostering Strong Relationships - Literature Review

As shown in the WWC survey, Circle benefits included: "getting to meet women in a meaningful way" and "vulnerability not usually seen in professional networking sessions." These compelling findings showcase WWC's demonstrated ability to support women in fostering strong relationships. To further hone this vision and bolster the Circle experience and member well-being, WWC can leverage the topics of positive psychology. As we know, strong relationships are an undeniable aspect of a life well-lived. To support WWC in achieving their

vision of cultivating meaningful connections, it is critical to arm Circle facilitators with positive psychology theory and research across topic areas related to social connection.

Loneliness: In their 'Loneliness in the Workplace' Report, Cigna (2020) found that loneliness has reached epidemic levels. In 2019, 61% of Americans reported feeling lonely compared to 54% in 2018. Loneliness, as defined by Williams and Braun (2019), is the subjective state of being alone and dissatisfaction with one's quantity and quality of social relationships. Comparatively, social isolation is an objective variable marked by having few social network ties and infrequent social contact (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015). Loneliness can produce social isolation when individuals withdraw from social relationships or loneliness can occur as a subjective result of social isolation (Williams & Braun 2019). Nevertheless, both loneliness and social isolation are associated with poorer health behaviors including smoking, physical inactivity, and lack of sleep (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). Loneliness increases blood pressure and cholesterol, activates physical and psychological stress responses, and suppresses the immune system (Williams & Braun 2019). Moreover, loneliness and the workplace experience are inextricably linked. Individuals who don't have good relationships with their co-workers reported ten points lonelier on the UCLA Loneliness Scale and those who felt that they didn't have a good work-life balance, reported seven points lonelier (Cigna, 2020). The cost of loneliness is significant for organizations spanning from missed days at work, lower productivity, lower quality of work, and higher turnover (Cigna, 2020).

The case to combat loneliness will be critical to consider when partnering with WWC. Not only will inclusion of these positive psychology topics in the Circle curriculum support cultivating meaningful connections, it will arm Circle participants with the research needed to curtail loneliness in their families, workplaces, and communities.

Positivity Resonance: Positivity Resonance, as defined by Fredrickson (2013), is the upwelling of three interwoven events including (1) a sharing of one or more positive emotions, (2) a synchrony of biochemistry and behaviors, and (3) mutual care and concern (Fredrickson, 2013). It can be experienced between romantic partners, long-time friends, co-workers and even strangers (Major, Le Nguyen, Lundberg, & Fredrickson, 2018). For Positivity Resonance to occur, two pre-conditions must be met: perception of safety and sensory connection with another living being. Moreover, Fredrickson (2009) offers ten positive emotions, which are necessary to satisfy event (1) shared positive emotion of Positivity Resonance: love, joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, and awe. Positivity Resonance is significant for the WWC population because it has been shown to elevate the quality of interpersonal relationships, thereby having a lasting impact on health and well-being (Major, 2018). More specifically, Positivity Resonance is associated with flourishing mental health, lower levels of depressive symptoms and loneliness, and fewer physical illness symptoms (Major, 2018).

Social Connection: Healthy social contact is essential for happiness; it is one of the most important evolutionary factors for our survival (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2011). So much so that Diener and Seligman (2002) found that happy people spend less time alone and more time socializing, compared to their unhappier counterparts. In Diener and Seligman's (2002) research, the identified happy group did not differ significantly in the amount of money they had, the number of objectively positive or negative events they experienced, college grade point average, or objective physical attractiveness compared to the unhappy group. The only clear differentiator for happiness was spending more time with others (Diener & Seligman, 2002). It is interesting to note however, that social relationships are a necessary but insufficient condition for happiness – happy people have social relationships, but social relationships don't guarantee happiness

(Diener & Seligman, 2002). A specific type of social connection that contributes to happiness is friendship. Friendships, defined by Craig and Kuykendall (2019), are close relationships that are freely and mutually chosen, founded in reciprocity, intimacy, and shared values or interests. Friendships that produce the most happiness are characterized by mutual understanding, care, and validation of each other's value (Craig & Kuykendall, 2019).

The process of forming friendships can look different for each individual however, it specifically differs across genders. While one study of self-disclosure on the internet showed that there are no gender differences in the breadth of self-disclosure, women disclose more deeply compared to men (Paluckaitė & Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė, 2012). Given this, friendships among women blossom around trust and intimacy whereas friendships among men focus on shared interests and activities (Stokes & Levin, 1986). Consistent with this orientation, men tend to value shared attitudes, values, and group-oriented behaviors, whereas women value emotional sharing and have stronger motivation to develop close, dyadic ties (Stokes & Levin, 1986). Regardless of gender, the close social connection of friendship has significant benefits for all individuals. For example, friendship has been shown to increase levels of self-esteem; when people choose to invest in a relationship with us, it shows that we have value and worth which increases our confidence (Craig & Kuykendall, 2019). This increased self-esteem helps people manage stress, supports the acquisition of other important resources, and helps maintain well-being when other resources are depleted (Craig & Kuykendall, 2019). It is also important to note that the frequency of meeting friends, compared to the quantity of friends, is more strongly correlated to subjective well-being, encouraging us to focus on quality and frequency rather than quantity of friends (Van der Horst & Coffé, 2012).

The benefits of social connection influence workplace experiences as well. Strong interpersonal connection, a friend at work, or simply increased social interaction, enables employees to feel more engaged, produce higher quality work, and experience less sickness and injury (Murthy, 2017). Additionally, the self-esteem that is cultivated through friendships is a strong predictor of job performance and satisfaction (Craig & Kuykendall, 2019). Not only are friends at work healthier and less isolated, Jehn and Shah (1997) show that groups of friends outperform groups of acquaintances in decision making and effort tasks. The intersection of social connection and wellbeing, friendship forming and benefits, and the importance of workplace friends will have a significant impact on our team's strategy to support WWC in cultivating meaningful connections among participants.

Active Constructive Responding: Communicating personal positive events with others, a process known as capitalization, is correlated with increased positive emotion and well-being, particularly when others respond in an active and constructive manner (Gable, Reis, Impett & Asher, 2004). When individuals rate their partner as an active and constructive responder, they experience intimacy and trust, are more satisfied in their relationships, report fewer conflicts, and engage in more fun and relaxing activities (Gable, Gonzaga & Strachman, 2006). When sharing positive events, individuals are revealing their strengths, and having strengths validated and appreciated can be particularly beneficial for one's well-being (Gable, Gonzaga & Strachman, 2006). Research indicates that teaching individuals to share positive experiences and to provide active-constructive, enthusiastic responses, promotes relationship well-being and satisfaction (Woods, Lambert, Brown, Fincham & May, 2015). Additionally, research indicates that being curious is another important aspect of creating positive social interactions, as highly curious people capitalize on intimacy opportunities (Kashdan, McKnight, Fincham & Rose, 2011).

Because WWC aims to promote meaningful relationships, active-constructive responding and curiosity skills can be incorporated into the curriculum to facilitate intimate connections.

Session 3: Fostering Strong Relationships Session (Appendix C- Artifacts)

The *Fostering Strong Relationships* session will include theory and research on social connection, loneliness, friendship, positivity resonance, and active constructive responding. It is recommended that facilitators become familiar with the importance of social connection by reading the suggested Harvard Business Review article and reviewing the session materials in detail. Research citations are included to offer additional support as facilitators prepare for their Circle session. The *Fostering Strong Relationship* session offers sample exercises for in-person or virtual discussions to support facilitators in the new COVID context, while providing members with the tools to build strong relationships during good and trying times. These exercises include: (1) Discussing how to authentically and vulnerably foster trust in your relationships; (2) Brainstorming every-day (big & small) ways to experience positive emotions with others (in family, at work, with friends etc.); and (3) Practicing Active Constructive Responding (capitalizing/encouraging when others share positive emotion). During the *Fostering Strong Relationships* Session, Circle members will gain access to strategies to build and maintain connection in their families, friendships, workplaces and communities.

Session 4: Struggling Well - Literature Review

Understanding the protective factors of resilience and practice strategies to build resilience can help WWC members thrive through adversity and feel confident amidst life's challenges. Encouraging WWC participants to capitalize on strong social relationships and seek out mentors will reinforce WWC's goal to foster strong connections. Additionally, learning and implementing methods to strengthen an optimistic explanatory style can help WWC members

experience more positive events in their lives, build stronger connections with others, and achieve higher psychological and physical well-being.

Resilience: Resilience is the ability to navigate difficult circumstances and grow in the face of adversity and consists of core factors that help us to protect and restore our own human development amidst challenges (Masten, Cutulli, Herbers & Reed, 2012). These protective factors include self-awareness, self-regulation, mental agility, optimism, self-efficacy, connection and positive institutions. Specifically within the realm of our careers, important factors for resilience include belief in ourselves, boundaryless orientations, self-reliance and receptivity to change (Fourie & Van Vuuren, 1998).

In addition to resilience's protective factors, there are specific strategies to build resilience: knowing ourselves and our belief systems and honing our skills to make change (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). To build resilience, we must identify and understand our beliefs about our adversities, avoid thinking traps like jumping to conclusions, and detect the deeper-rooted underlying beliefs about who we are (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). The skills needed to make resilient changes in our lives depend upon our ability to identify problems, put things into perspective, and find better solutions. Additionally, social relationships are critical to our ability to be resilient. Specifically, mentoring relationships play an important role in influencing career resilience (Arora & Rangnekar, 2014).

Optimism: An optimistic explanatory style, one of the protective factors of resilience, is imperative to overcome adversity and ultimately thrive. An explanatory style is defined as the way we habitually explain the causes of events that happen to us (Peterson & Steen, 2009). Those with an optimistic explanatory style tend to fare better. Optimism and self-mastery, while overlapping constructs, were found to be significantly and negatively correlated with symptoms

of depression among a sample of 192 professional women (Marshall & Lang, 1990). While genetics play a role, we can improve our optimism by focusing our attention on potential positive outcomes, changing our self-talk to be more positive, spending energy on what we can control, taking purposeful action, and reaching out to others (Peterson & Steen, 2009).

Session 4: Struggling Well Session (Appendix D- Artifacts)

The *Struggling Well* session will cover resilience protective factors to help WWC members cultivate their own resilience and ability to thrive despite life's challenges. Using intentional methods to strengthen their resilience and optimism can help WWC facilitators and members build stronger connections and achieve higher psychological and physical well-being.

The *Struggling Well* session will consist of a brief introduction to resilience and optimism, as well as research supporting the importance of identifying your belief system when it comes to resilience. It is recommended that facilitators become familiar with the factors that make up resilience by reading the suggested *Ingredients of Resilience* article by Dr. Karen Reivich, watching Dr. Andrew Shatte's TED talk, and reviewing the session materials in detail. Research citations are included to offer additional support as facilitators prepare for their Circle session.

The *Struggling Well* session offers the following exercises for in-person or virtual discussion to support facilitators in leading discussion: (1) Questions for Circle members including a time when they demonstrated resilience and the factors they may have leveraged, (2) Asking members to identify a time in their lives when they felt uncertain about themselves; (3) Questions to be able to identify any counterproductive thoughts that occurred during that time; (4) Leveraging several strategies to be able to combat those counterproductive thoughts in real time (e.g. evidence, a plan, reframing the situation, identifying what they can control, or

leveraging their strengths); (5) Debrief with the Circle to discuss emerging themes, most common strategies, how to engage an accountability partner to put things into perspective, and how to continue pursuing resilience in their personal and professional lives.

Session 5: Positive Transitions - Literature Review

Transitions are a regular part of life and there are elements and stages of transitions that can be understood and embraced. The purpose of this session is to help Circle members understand that there are both small and large transitions in our lives. By providing transition tools informed by positive psychology, this session will help Circle members thrive through life's transitions.

Transitions: Transitions are a regular part of life. They can be both trying and triumphant. However, research shows that there are elements and stages of transitions that can be understood and embraced. By providing a roadmap and tools, we can become more successful at navigating transitions. Wittenberg Cox (2018) examines how individuals can struggle during transitional periods to let go of what was and to embrace what's next. There is a mixture of feelings during transitions, including fear, excitement, confusion and certainty. Interestingly, Bussolari and Goodell (2009) use the Chaos theory, from physics, as a model for life transitions arguing that disorder, unpredictability, and lack of control are normal parts of the transition process.

The definition of 'transition' is also essential to consider. Cowan and Hetherington (2013) examined individual and family life transitions. They believe the definition between transitional and non-transitional change is important. Is going on vacation a transition? There is a difference between change and transition (Bridges, 2004, 2019). Change is something that happens to people even if they don't agree with it, whereas transitions are internal. It is what

happens to people's mindsets as they go through change. The transition process occurs more slowly and involves three distinct stages. These stages are (1) ending and letting go, (2) the neutral zone (which is often unproductive) and finally, (3) the new beginning stage, which requires perseverance and understanding (Bridges, 2019). The primary dynamic in transitions is letting go of old values, relationships or beliefs and taking hold of new ones (Brammer, 1992). Key coping skills require support networks, cognitive restructuring, strong problem-solving and stress management techniques. These are important mediating variables that determine the course and emotional intensity of the transition. The attitudes or stories individuals tell regarding the extent of their control, perceptions of the challenges involved, and their commitment to change will influence transition outcomes (Brammer, 1992).

Job transitions are often an underexplored aspect of the workforce. Watkins (2009) found that 87% of senior professionals agree or strongly agree that transitions into new roles are the most challenging times in professional lives, and 70% agree that success or failure during the transition period is a strong predictor of overall job success or failure. Owen and Flynn (2004) examine individuals during mid to late-life transitions showing that advanced planning increases transition success. Additionally, there are transition times and elements that are unique to women. Women must understand both external signs and inner signals to navigate transitions effectively. Sherry, Tomlinson, Loe, Johnston and Feeney (2017) examined women's attitudes towards transitioning to retirement. They found that women have mixed feelings - both excitement and fearfulness. Moreover, they found that better quality relationships correlated with less fear and greater satisfaction during this major transition (Sherry et al., 2017).

It is important to understand the mechanics of successful transitions when partnering with WWC. Providing transition tools informed by positive psychology to Circle members will not only support individuals in making successful transitions but will improve members' well-being.

Appreciative Inquiry: David Cooperrider (2017) helps us understand how a strength-based framework, called Appreciative Inquiry (AI), creates lasting change. These ideas can be applied both at the corporate and individual levels (Gordon, 2008). The process of Appreciative Inquiry starts with defining where you want to go. What does success look like? You can examine the best from your past while creating vivid positive images of your future. Positive action is taken by creating as clear a picture as possible using hope, optimism and motivation. Using your character strengths and your proudest achievements, you can then design your future. New dreams turn into reality by prioritizing your energy and resources. You can then make a commitment to the changes required. These include some small wins to increase your confidence (Cooperrider, 2017). Wharton Women's Circle members can utilize the process of AI both within their organizations and their lives to create new positive futures.

Design Thinking / Idealized Design: The concept of design has always been a vital part of the innovation process, but over the last decade, there has been an increased awareness that design principles should be levered for organizations and even for human life. Tschimmel (2012) provides an overview of the elements, process models, and tools for utilizing Design Thinking (DT). Leveraging five well-known models, he emphasizes DT's elements: empathy, definition, ideation, prototyping, and testing. Burnett and Evans (2016) highlight that a well-designed life is always changing and evolving - a complex problem that can benefit from the tools and frameworks of DT. The DT model is a useful practice for Circle members as it includes both design and positive psychology elements to help individuals prototype their lives and their well-

being. Both DT and Appreciative Inquiry can be effectively used during transitions for WWC members.

Session 5 - Positive Transitions Session (Appendix E- Artifacts)

The *Positive Transitions* session will begin with an introduction to transitions and guiding questions to elicit discussion among Circle members. Elements of positive transitions will then be introduced to help individuals thrive through life's transitions and become more intentional about their outcomes. Positive transition elements include: (1) Plan and design your transitions - creatively defining where we want to go and planning and designing for new beginnings is essential (Cooperrider, 2017); (2) Connect well - connections are vital to support success during the transition process and women value and benefit from close ties and emotional relationships (Stokes and Levin, 1986); (3) Clarify your contribution - it is important to remember during the transition process that you have many strengths to bring to the table; and (4) Re-story and optimize your mindset - understanding thoughts that get in the way is important during transitions (Brammer 1992).

Limitations

Scientific studies, including those in positive psychology, tend to focus on WEIRD (western/white, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic) populations. Given the United States, MBA landscape, the majority of WWC Circle facilitators and members fall within the WEIRD identification. However, as with any organization, there are always exceptions. It will be critical to consider how to caveat the session discussions as Circle member demographics become more and more diverse. WWC facilitators can leverage the following questions to promote inclusivity throughout implementation of the five facilitator-led sessions: (1) In what ways does this research resonate with you?; (2) In what ways does this research not align to your personal

experience?; and (3) What are the limitations of the research we discussed?

We have also identified a two-step barrier between positive psychology expertise and the delivery of material by facilitators to the Circle members. The facilitators, who act as middle (wo)men, may or may not be familiar with the principles of positive psychology. Without expert knowledge, “buy-in”, or available time to familiarize themselves with the playbook, facilitators may not deliver content with fidelity or expertise to Circle members. Therefore, if a facilitator is lacking effort, interest, or time the effectiveness of the information and the intervention may not resonate with Circle members. To address this concern, WWC leadership should feel empowered to review playbook materials, resources, and related activities during facilitator calls. It is suggested that time on calls is set aside to practice exercises and gather inputs and feedback from facilitators to ensure they feel confident using the materials. (Appendix F)

Measurement

The efficacy of the five facilitator-led playbook materials in supporting WWC in achieving its mission of ‘cultivating meaningful connections’ should be empirically tested through several mediums of data collection. It is proposed that the following questions be added to the bi-annual WWC Program Survey to measure the effectiveness of the five facilitator-led sessions on increasing well-being and social connection among Circle members.

Well-Being Questions:

The following question asks how satisfied you feel, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel not at all satisfied and 10 means you feel completely satisfied (adapted from [Satisfaction with Life Scale](#))

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole?

The following question asks if the Circle experience contributed (in a positive way) to your well-being, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means not at all contributed and 10 means significantly contributed.

2. The Circle experience positively contributed to my well-being.

Meaningful Connection Questions:

1. Through my engagement in the Circles, I was able to foster meaningful connections.

[Yes or No response field]

2. For you, what are the characteristics of a meaningful connection? [Open Text]

3. In what ways did the Circle experience enable you to foster meaningful connections?

[Open Text]

4. What can we do to better foster meaningful connections in the Circles? [Open Text]

Additional Measurements

We proposed that during the monthly facilitator BlueJeans calls, WWC leadership check-in with facilitators to gauge progress on the desire for more formal programming, structured conversations and fostering meaningful connections. Collecting this data monthly is important as it can inform if the delivery of the playbooks is effective and measure what the facilitators are experiencing. Furthermore, it allows WWC leadership to be adaptive and adjust as needed. We propose that WWC use an interactive survey tool like Poll Everywhere to collect data in real time during the calls and encourage discussion. Sample questions for these calls are included below. As Circles expand and goals evolve, WWC leadership can revise questions to address current goals and needs.

1. Do you feel like, as a facilitator, you have the tools and support that you need to effectively lead your Circles?

2. Have you observed that relationships are deepening in your Circle? For example, are participants moving beyond small talk and engaging in meaningful discussions?

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CHARACTER STRENGTHS

Discover and activate your strengths to create your best life!



What are character strengths?

Character strengths are part of our identity. They are positive traits that are personally fulfilling, come easily to us, are energizing when used, and are essential to who we are¹. When we know and use our strengths, we can improve our lives and flourish.

Why do strengths matter?

Research shows that people who use their strengths consistently, are nine times more likely to thrive than those who don't. Using strengths at work is positively correlated with job satisfaction, productivity and engagement². Studies also suggest that people thrive at work when they use their signature strengths - using strengths is key to making work meaningful, enjoyable, and engaging³. Additionally, appreciation of character strengths in relationships leads to many positive outcomes - higher relationship satisfaction, commitment, and increased use of one's own strengths⁴.

How about you?

- When are you at your best? What strengths do you recognize in your story?
- What is something positive in your life? How do your strengths influence it?
- What went well this week in your personal life? Did your strengths play a role?
- Share a recent good experience at work. What strengths did you use?

Character Strengths in Action

1. Before the Meeting:

Share the link to the VIA Character website (<https://www.viacharacter.org/>) and ask Circle members to take the free survey and bring along their results. If not possible or desired, facilitator can print one-page document outlining each of the 24-character strengths ([Appendix A](#)) and distribute to Circle members at the meeting.

2. Identify Your Signature Strengths:

Ask Circle participants to identify their top 5-7 strengths, either from the survey results or to self-identify from the handout. These are known as your signature strengths. Research has found a strong connection between well-being and the use of signature strengths. Signature strengths help us make progress on our goals and meet our basic needs for autonomy, relationship, and mastery¹.

Thought exercise (mental subtraction): Pick one of your signature strengths, perhaps the one you believe is most central to who you are. Now, imagine that for the next week, you are not able to use this strength. For example, if you chose love, you would not be able to express love in your relationships. You would not be able to hug, kiss or touch those you love. You would not be able to express care, concern and warmth. What would it be like? How would you feel? Discuss as a group.

3. Pair & Share – 5 Minute Challenge:

Ask participants to partner up and take turns sharing with their top five signature strengths. Instructions:

- Spend 1-minute describing each of your top 5 strengths (facilitator to keep time)
- **Debrief:** What strengths did you know best? Least? What challenges came up for you? Are there any blind spots in your awareness and self-knowledge?
- Switch and complete the same steps once more with the other person sharing

4. Applying Character Strengths in Your Life

Awareness is only the first step to using character strengths to thrive. Now that you are aware of your strengths, you can use the Aware-Explore-Apply model to leverage your strengths across all domains of life¹.

- **Aware** – Name and describe your signature strengths
- **Explore** – How have you used these strengths in good times? In times of stress? To solve problems?
- **Apply** – What is one way you might use this strength more in your personal life? In your professional life?

Additional Resources:

- A short (8 min) [video](#) about the science of character strengths
- [An article](#) with 340 ways to use your character strengths

“You’ve always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself.”

-The Wizard of Oz

¹ Niemiec, R. (2018). Character Strengths Interventions: A field guide for practitioners.

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WELL-BEING 101

Create a flourishing life by accessing tools and resources to improve your health and well-being.



What is PERMA-V?

PERMA – V is a theory of well-being which focuses on five essential aspects of well-being, including Vitality. It includes: Positive Emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), Accomplishments (A), and Vitality (V)¹.

Why does PERMA-V matter?

When we aren't flourishing or feeling at our best, we can examine our lives through a PERMA lens and adjust our priorities and behaviors based on the areas of PERMA that are lacking². Additionally, if we make vitality a priority - including regular exercise, daily meditation, and more restful sleep - we will feel better, emotionally and physically. We can begin control our stress, increase our energy, and improve our overall health and well-being³.

How about you?

- Are there any areas of PERMA which need improvement in your life (positive emotion, relationships, meaning, engagement or accomplishments)?
- How is your vitality? Do you find time for exercise, sleep, and meditation? What areas could be improved?
- How do you find time for these important "self-care" activities?



PERMA-V IN ACTION:

When we cultivate all five areas of well-being through the PERMA model, we enjoy Positive Emotion (P) – feeling positive and optimistic and looking for the good in life’s events⁴ Engagement (E) – being engaged in something you are passionate about and finding purpose and flow⁵; Relationships (R) – finding value, meaning, and joy in your relationships with family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances; Meaning (M) – people, places, projects, and ideas that allow you to express your most important values and connect to a fulfilling purpose⁶ and Accomplishments (A) – setting and achieving goals that are important to you and help define your purpose¹. If your well-being isn’t what you would like it to be, can you identify which areas of your life could be improved?

Vitality

Vitality is defined as self-reported energy, liveliness, and overall well-being⁷. As busy women, we don’t always find the time for exercise, adequate sleep, meditating, or managing our stress. When we take the time for these essential “self-care” activities, not only do we feel better physically, but our brains function better; we can manage our stress and negative emotion more efficiently and effectively³.

Sample Exercises

1. PERMA Reflection:

- a) Take a moment to reflect on which area of PERMA is your strongest source of your well-being (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, or accomplishments).
- b) How do you nurture this area of well-being? What things/people unlock this aspect of your well-being?

2. Vitality Reflection:

- a) Identify an activity that you aren’t currently doing regularly – exercise, obtaining enough sleep (7-9 hours), or practicing meditation.
- b) Commit to trying this activity consistently for one week. What expectations will you need to set with yourself and others? What existing habits can you tie this new activity to?
- c) After one week, determine if this change improved your well-being. Did you notice a difference in how you managed your stress?

Additional Resources:

- Exercise [benefits and best practices](#)
- A [3-minute](#) and [5-minute](#) meditation
- [Dr. Martin Seligman](#) discussing PERMA and well-being
- [Emily Esfahani Smith](#) on Meaning
- [Latest research](#) on the importance of

“ Well-being is attained little by little, and nevertheless is no little thing itself.”

— Zeno of Citium

¹Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and wellbeing.

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⁶Smith, E. E. (2017). *The Power of Meaning: Finding fulfillment in a world obsessed with happiness*.

⁷Ryan, R. M., & Frederick, C. (1997). On energy, personality, and health: Subjective vitality as a dynamic reflection of well-being.

FOSTERING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Social connection and friendship are an undeniable aspect of a life well lived.



What is friendship?

Friendships are close relationships that are freely and mutually chosen, founded in reciprocity, intimacy, and shared values or interests. The friendships that produce the most happiness are characterized by¹:

- (1) Mutual understanding
- (2) Care
- (3) Validation of each other's value

Why does friendship matter?

Healthy social contact and connection are essential for happiness². Research has shown that the only clear differentiator for happiness is spending more time with others³. While levels of loneliness continue to increase (in 2019, 61% of Americans reported feeling lonely⁴), strong relationships boost mental health levels⁵, improve immune system functioning, reduce stress⁶, and strongly predict job performance and satisfaction¹.

How about you?

- What does friendship mean to you?
- What resonates with you in the definition? What might you add to the definition, based on your friendships?
- Think of a connection you want to make stronger. What strategies will you use?
- What benefit of friendship (health, reduced stress, job performance etc.) could you unlock through stronger social connection?



STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Cultivate Trust

The process of forming friendships differs across genders – friendships among men tend to focus on shared interests and activities while friendships among women focus on trust and self-disclosure. Consistent with this orientation, women tend to value emotional sharing and intimacy and have stronger motivation to develop close, dyadic ties⁷. What are intentional, authentic ways in which you could cultivate trust with your friends? Brainstorm with the group.

Experience Positive Emotion

Positivity Resonance has been shown to elevate the quality of interpersonal relationships, thereby having a lasting impact on health and well-being⁵. **Positivity Resonance is the upwelling of three interwoven events, including⁸:**

- (1) a sharing of one or more positive emotions
- (2) a synchrony of biochemistry and behaviors (i.e. smiling, movement, singing etc.)
- (3) mutual care and concern

To unlock #1 of Positivity Resonance, engage in activities with friends that allow you to share in positive emotion: love, joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, and awe⁸. What activities could hone all three elements for you and your friend? Brainstorm as a group.

Use Active Constructive Responding

How do you respond when a friend shares good news with you? Communicating personal positive events with others is known as *capitalization*. Capitalization is correlated with increased positive emotion and relationship longevity and quality, particularly when others respond in an active and constructive manner. Active constructive is characterized by: **enthusiastic support, eye contact, and authenticity**⁹.

Example Active Constructive Responses:

“Great news! I knew you could do it! How do you feel?”

“I know how important this was to you, you deserve it! How do you want to celebrate?”

“Congrats! I am so happy to celebrate with you! Tell me more about when you heard!”

Sample Exercises:

- Discuss how to intentionally and authentically foster trust in your relationships
- Brainstorm every-day (big & small) ways to experience positivity resonance with others (in family, at work, with friends etc.)
- Practice Capitalization and Active Constructive Responding in pairs

“A friend is one that knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts what you have become, and still, gently allows you to grow.”

- Shakespeare

1 Craig, L., & Kuykendall, L. (2019). Examining the role of friendship for employee Well-being.

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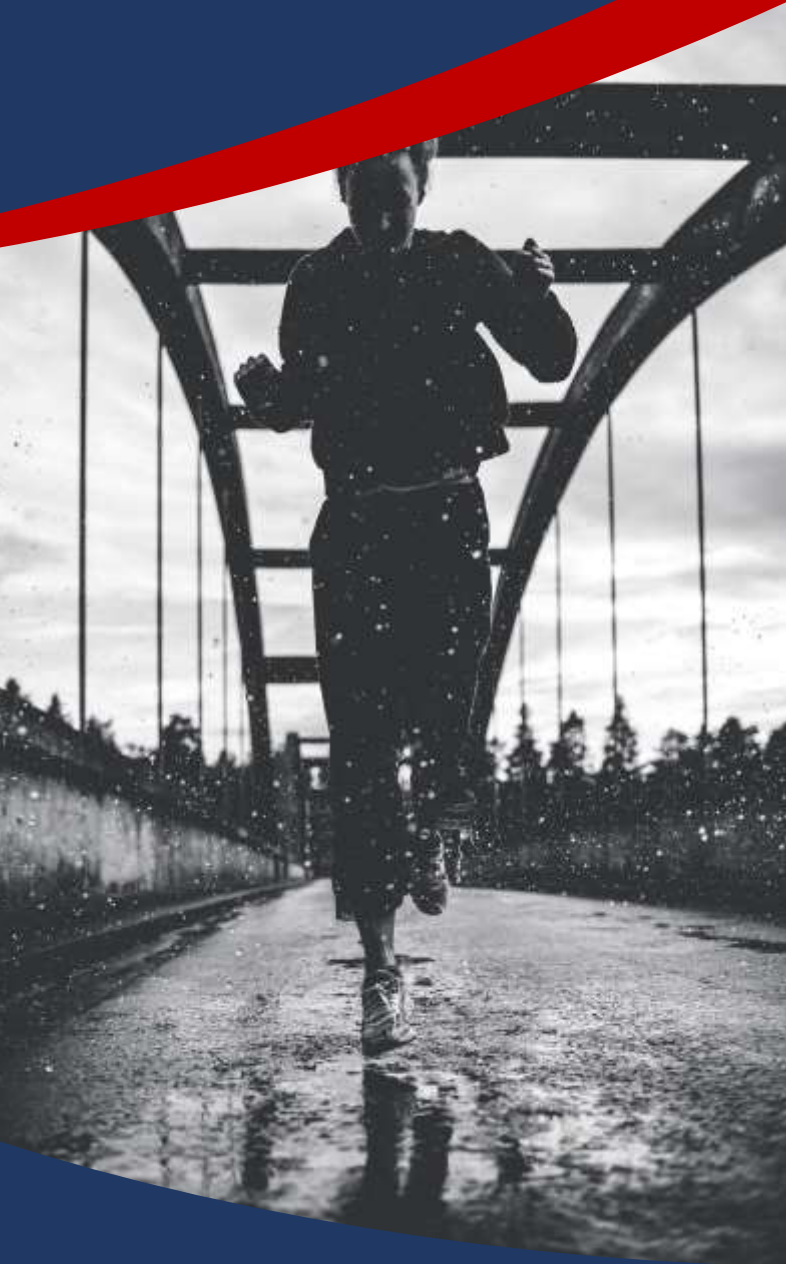
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STRUGGLING WELL

Learn to grow in the face of adversity.



What does it mean to struggle well?

Resilience is the ability to navigate difficult circumstances and grow in the face of adversity. Resilience has core factors that help us protect and restore our own human development amidst challenges¹. These protective factors include self-awareness, self-regulation, mental agility, optimism, self-efficacy, connection, and positive institutions.

Why does resilience matter?

Leading scientific research reveals that resilience is not only a mindset, but a teachable skill. It can help us improve relationships, increase self-confidence, and boost our well-being. Optimism - one of the protective factors of resilience - is important to overcome adversity and thrive. We can improve our optimism by focusing our attention on potential positive outcomes, changing our self-talk to be more positive, spending energy on what we can control, taking purposeful action, and reaching out to others².

How about you?

- Think of a time when you worked through something difficult. Why were you resilient?
- What protective factors are your strongest? Which would you like to develop more?
- Do you think you are naturally an optimistic? Why or why not?
- What are strategies you could use to increase your levels of optimism?

RESILIENCE IN ACTION

1. Choose a Situation

In addition to resilience's protective factors, there are specific strategies to build resilience, including knowing ourselves and our belief systems, and honing our skills to make change³. To build resilience, we must first identify and understand our beliefs about our adversities. Ask your Circle members to think of a situation in which they doubted their own abilities. It could be before a major event, a project at work, or any time they felt uncertain.

2. Identify Counterproductive Thoughts

Ask Circle participants to identify any of their counterproductive thoughts during that situation. Maybe they were thoughts about not feeling competent enough, deeper-rooted beliefs about their ability to succeed longer term, or about their skill set. No thought is too big or too small. Ask them to write the thought down.

3. Now, Combat Those Thoughts!

The skills needed to make resilient changes in our lives depend upon our ability to identify problems, put things into perspective, and find better solutions³. Five strategies to help us combat our counterproductive thoughts include: (1) EVIDENCE ("that's not true because..."), (2) PLAN ("if X happens, I will Y"), (3) REFRAME ("a more productive way to see this is ..."), (4) CONTROL ("one thing I can control is ..."), and (5) SIGNATURE STRENGTHS ("I can use some of my strengths like ...").

Activity: Ask participants to find a partner and take turns sharing the ways they can combat counterproductive thoughts by using the strategies in #3.

- Spend 1-minute describing the situation when you felt uncertain, and identify 3 counterproductive thoughts that occurred at that time
- Spend 3 minutes using the strategies described above to combat each of the identified counterproductive thoughts.
 - E.g. instead of "I'm not qualified to do this task," try "EVIDENCE: That's not true because I have robust experience and successfully completed [another project] with very positive results!"
- Switch and have the other partner complete the same process

4. Debrief as a Circle

Now discuss the experience as a Circle and some of the learnings that emerged. Ask the following questions of the group:

- Did you notice a theme(s) that emerged when you identified your counterproductive thoughts?
- What strategies were most commonly used among the group?
- How did it feel to combat those negative thoughts in real time?
- How might you use a trusted partner in the future to help you gain perspective?

Additional Resources:

- [An article](#) on *The Resilience Ingredient List* by Dr. Karen Reivich
- [TED talk video](#) about *Resilience and Connection*

"I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it."

– Maya Angelou

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POSITIVE TRANSITIONS

Learning the tools to triumph through transitions.



What are transitions?

Life is about growth and change. There are both small and large transitions in our lives. Transitions are the emotional stages of change that should be understood and embraced¹.

Why do transitions matter?

Transitions are a big part of our lives. They are speeding up and at times, increasing in intensity. Utilizing tools and frameworks during the process can be useful. These “Good Transition Elements” can help us thrive through life’s transitions and become more intentional about their outcomes.

How about you?

- What are your daily transition moments? *For example, coming home after work.*
- How do you manage them? What could you do to prepare more effectively for them?
- What are some of your major transitions – past and future?
- How have you approached major transitions? What have you learned?
- How will you define ‘transition success’ in the future?

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD TRANSITION

1. Plan and Design Your Transitions:

Life transitions can be divided into unique stages. They begin with an ending that needs to be mourned, understood, and acknowledged. The second stage in the transition process is the core - when the psychological and repatterning behaviors occur. We then need to be creative as we consider new beginnings. We must define where we want to go and then design for that new beginning².

2. Connect Well:

Connections are vital during the transition process. Support networks are a substantial source of well-being during this time period. Throughout transitions, many women value close ties and emotional relationships³.

3. Clarify Your Contribution:

It is important to remember during the transition process that you have many strengths to bring to the table. Strengths reflect our personal identity and are energizing and essential to who we are⁴. Utilizing your strengths, keep your sense of meaning top of mind. Prioritize those things that lead you closer to your sense of passion and purpose and make the most of your strengths along the way.

4. Re-story and Optimize Your Mindset

The attitudes or stories that individuals tell themselves and others regarding the extent of their control, perception of the challenges involved, and their commitment to change will influence transition outcomes. Understanding your thoughts and thinking traps that get in the way of your success, is important during transitions⁵.

“ Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.

To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.”

- Helen Keller

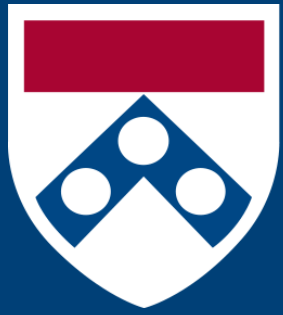
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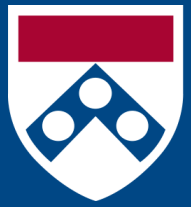
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WHARTON WOMEN'S CIRCLES

Facilitator Playbook

A One-Stop-Shop for Circle Topics, Resources, and Discussions



WHARTON
WOMEN'S CIRCLES

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Session Topic: Know Your Strengths

Article: <https://www.viacharacter.org/topics/articles/research-backed-strategies-to-help-you-flourish>

TED Talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMWck0mKGWc>

Questions to Discuss in Your Circles:

- When are you at your best? What strengths do you recognize in your story?
- What is something positive in your life? How do your strengths influence it?
- What went well this week in your personal life? Did your strengths play a role?
- Share a recent good experience at work. What strengths did you use?

Session Topic: Well-Being 101

Article (PERMA):<https://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/learn-more/perma-theory-well-being-and-perma-workshops>

Article (Vitality):

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/newsletters/authentichappinesscoaching/vitality>

Questions to Discuss in Your Circles:

- Are there any areas of PERMA which need improvement in your life (positive emotion, relationships, meaning, engagement or accomplishments)?
- How is your vitality? Do you find time for exercise, sleep, and meditation? What areas could be improved?
- How do you find time for these important “self-care” activities?

Session Topic: Fostering Strong Relationships

Article : <https://hbr.org/2019/07/to-be-happier-at-work-invest-more-in-your-relationships>

Ted Talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_pinker_the_secret_to_living_longer_may_be_your_social_life?referrer=playlist-the_secret_to_lifelong_friendship

Questions to Discuss in Your Circles:

- How can we prioritize social connection in our daily activities?
- What are tactical strategies to remind us to be intentional about the relationships that we cultivate?
- In what ways do relationships contribute to your fulfillment at work? In what ways do they detract from it?
- What can you do to build stronger connections to boost your well-being?

Session Topic: **Struggling Well**

Article: <https://www.cnbc.com/id/25464528/>

Ted Talk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iUs3ZEBDjo

Questions to Discuss in Your Circles:

- Think of a time when you worked through something difficult. Why were you resilient?
- What are factors that can help us to be more resilient?
- What are your strongest factors, and which would you like to develop more?
- How can you use the power of connection to improve your own resilience?

Session Topic: Positive Transitions

Article: <https://hbr.org/2018/07/learn-to-get-better-at-transitions>

Questions to Discuss in Your Circles:

- What are your daily transition moments? (*For example, coming home after work.*)
- How do you manage them? What could you do to prepare more effectively?
- What are some of your major transitions – past and future?
- How have you approached major transitions? What have you learned?
- How will you define transition success?



Maintaining Quality Connections & Positive Emotions During Challenging Times

Tips for Maintaining Quality Connections

Reach Out: Loneliness is at epidemic levels and social distancing could have detrimental health effects. Because people are social creatures, connecting with others is vital to our well-being. Plus, happiness has a network effect meaning that it spreads through social connection – protecting us from the harming effects of trauma, adversity, and stress¹.

Prioritize Connection: Spend time with family and friends, however you can - through texting, Facetime, WhatsApp, Zoom, or writing a note of gratitude. Staying connected will help us stay healthier – physically and psychologically².

Turn on Your Camera: Use Video chatting whenever possible with co-workers, friends, and family. Seeing faces and smiles increases positive resonance - having the same positive experience at the same time³. This shared positivity broadens our awareness to notice novel thoughts, activities, and relationships while building enduring resources like skills, social support, and resilience⁴. Listen well, be genuinely concerned, and communicate supportively.

Remember These Connection Strategies:

- Foster Trust – follow through on commitments and be loyal
- Help Others - especially those who are the most vulnerable (sick, old, depressed etc.)
- Find Opportunities for Play – infuse creativity into daily tasks
- Engage Respectfully – express the value and worth of the other person⁵

Conversation Starters to Foster Connection:

Convey Genuine Interest: *What has been the most meaningful part of your week? What do you most care about in your work? What do you most love to do?*

Offer Help and Assistance: *In what ways can I assist you? What are your biggest needs right now? What have others done for you that you have found most helpful?*

Uncover Common Ground: *What is your favorite hobby? What are you most looking forward to in the next three months? Where have you traveled that you most enjoyed?*

Inject Positivity: *What gives you joy? Who are you most grateful for? What makes you feel valued? What are you proud of? What are you excited about? For more [click here](#).*

Tips for Maintaining Positive Emotions

Practice Meditation: Research shows that meditation and mindfulness reduce activity in the part of brain where anxiety resides, decreases depressive symptoms, improves sleep and concentration, and strengthens the immune system⁶. **Check out Meditation Apps:** Insight Timer, Headspace, Calm, Simple Habit, 10% Happier

Smile: Some people smile while facing adversity while others don't. A research study showed that those who smiled during a sad video recovered 20X faster than those who never smiled⁴. To nurture your well-being and infuse others with positivity, don't forget to find the micro-moments of joy, gratitude, hope.

Authentically Engage: Encouraging and supportive responses increases mutual trust, positive emotion, belongingness, and life satisfaction⁷. When others share positive emotion with you during challenging times ...lean in, ask questions, smile – you have the power to multiply joy!

Listen to Music: Sonya Lyubomirsky (researcher in the field of happiness) created a [Well-Being Playlist](#) to boost positive feelings. Listen in or create your own 'Positivity Playlist'⁸.

Set Time Aside to Play: Play is part of a life well-lived for kids as well for adults. Play that is varied and focused on fun rather than utility - hide and go seek, board games, art, sports - can promote reasoning, curiosity, creativity, and persistence⁹.

Savor the Good: Just as you savor food, you can savor your positive emotions! Savoring is thoughtfully engaging in your past, present, and future positive emotions and events. It boosts positive emotion, builds resilience, and buffers against depression¹⁰.

Change Your Negative Thinking: Recognize negative thinking and ask yourself if your thoughts are helpful or unhelpful? Stress is constructive when it motivates us to meet our challenges. It is harmful when we can't control it and it overwhelms us. Luckily, how we interpret and respond to stressful events greatly influences how much stress we actually feel¹¹. When intrusive thoughts arise (I'm not good enough; I can't get anything done, etc.)

Utilize the following strategies to unlock real-time resilience¹¹:

- Evidence - That's not true because...
- Plan – If X happens, I will Y...
- Reframe – A more positive perspective is...
- Control – One thing I can control is...
- Signature Strength – I can use my signature strength X to... (to take the scientific strengths survey, check out [The VIA Institute](#))

By maintaining quality connections and positive emotions during challenging times we can overcome feelings of loneliness, fear, stress, and anxiety. We will build connection, hope, focus, and resilience and help others do the same.

¹Carver, Scheier, & Fulford, 2009); Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Haidt, Seder, & Kesebir, 2008); Lyubomirsky, 2007; Reivich & Shatté, 2002

²Carver et al., 2009; Fowler & Christakis, 2008; Haidt et al., 2008; Lyubomirsky, 2007; Reivich & Shatté, 2002

³Huppert, Baylis, Keverne & Fredrickson, 2004

⁴Fredrickson, 2013

⁵Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011

⁶Baime, 2019

⁷Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011

⁸Lyubomirsky, 2007; Westgate & Oishi, n.d.; Tay, Pawelski, & Keith, 2018

⁹Lee et al., 2012; Mackey et al., 2011; 2017

¹⁰Tugadeand Fredrickson, 2007; Fredrickson et al., 2003

¹¹Reivich & Shatte, 2002