

# Reflections

Tanya, Shari, Denise, Julie, and Mark share notes from the Fairfax Strengths in Education Conference sessions they attended. Conference Power Points are available on the following link: <http://strengths.ning.com/forum/topics/siec-hope-022012>.



### Tanya's Conference Notes:

#### **The Impact of Strengths on Hope and Wellbeing-Learning Excursion, Top Three Learning Realizations**

It was during the Keynote speaker session "How We Hope," presented by Shane J. Lopez, Ph.D. Research Director, Clifton Strengths School, and Senior Scientist, Gallup; that I had my most impactful learning moments. As Dr. Lopez spoke about the positive impacts and student outcomes as a result of creating a hopeful organizational culture that I was able to see the potential for South Mountain Community College and the positive impact we could have within our organization, with the community we serve most of all with our students. <http://www.gallup.com/corporate/21925/shane-lopez-phd.aspx>

While listening to Dr. Lopez speak about the research showing that utilizing our strengths to build HOPE and ENGAGEMENT results in academic success of students and wellbeing within the organization, I then thought "What are our next steps and how do we get there?" From this came the realization that we need to create a comprehensive Employee and Organizational Development strategy. We also need human resources to support this new cultural direction to continue the efforts already started and to connect, expand and grow with our students and communities. This requires a creative communication plan as well as activities and events to engage staff, students and community.

One of the sessions I attended at the conference "**Weaving Strengths Development into a Careers Course**", presented by Roberta Burke, Mohawk College. During Roberta's session we participated in activities that further demonstrated how understanding all 34 Clifton Strengths empowers an organization to not only have better working relationships, but also a deeper appreciation and respect for other's gifts/talents. During this session Roberta provided the website for learning activities to further develop our understanding of strengths. (<http://www.strengthsquest.com/content/141365/Resources.aspx>).

These resources can be utilized as part of the college's next steps in Employee and Organizational Development activities to continue growth, engagement and enthusiasm.

It was during the closing session "**Our Wellbeing: The Importance of Positive Emotions for Physical Health**" presented by Sarah D. Pressman Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Kansas, that it all came together for me. South Mountain Community College can be the college where students and staff thrive in wellbeing and health. By creating a culture that engages and embraces our strengths rather than weakness, we achieve positive emotional health, therefore a more healthful organization and community. We've already begun to see this at South Mountain and a new synergy of health consciousness that didn't exist a year ago. The research presented during Dr. Pressman's presentation supports continuing our efforts to further develop our strengths and wellbeing through hope and engagement.

### Shari's Conference Notes: Learning Excursion to Fairfax, VA- Gallup Strengths and Wellbeing Conference, Feb. 9-10

#### Shane Lopez KEYNOTE: Hope, Engagement, Retention

**Bottom-line Motivators for students, STUDENTS WANT:**

- a. **GOOD JOB**
- b. **HAPPY FAMILY**

**c. “Live in the FUTURE”**

- I. Create opportunities for students that are “FUTURE-FOCUSED”
- II. Help students CREATE MULTIPLE OPTIONS
- III. Providing INTERNSHIPS...bolsters retention!

**d. Building Hope**

- I. Future Casting-stick.com
- II. Planning for ifs- challengepost.com
- III. Setting Action Triggers-futureme.org

**e. In higher education, we just DO Not move fast enough.**

**f. In higher education, we NEED TO Create a sense of URGENCY.**

**g. Hopeful Leaders**

- I. Figure out HOW
- II. Are more urgent in their actions
- III. SOLVE PROBLEMS

**Final Message: Larry Braskamp, Ph.D. – Keynote Speaker**

**To make a difference we must use our:**

- I. Heart, head, hands

**Julie’s and Mark’s Conference Notes:**

**SNAP! Strengths Nurturing Academic Progress (College Success Course)**

SNAP uses Strengths Quest and mentoring as intervention tools to retain “First time in college” students who are enrolled in a college entry course. Presenters described how they implemented programming through student mentoring and Strengths Quest, the Gallup 12, and the Hope Scale. They also described how they plan to measure student persistence and success.

**Engaging Students from Start to Finish: Using Strengths in New Student Orientation through Job Placement**

Student Engagement is the key to college success! Anoka Technical College implemented Strengths Quest in the fall of 2010. Since then, Student Affairs and Academic Affairs have collaborated to deliver Strengths-Based Student Services and academic programming throughout the college. This session provided practical and specific examples of how ATC uses Strengths Quest to empower students and employees, and create positive engagement and an inclusive environment for learning.

**How are Schools improving Hope, Engagement, and Wellbeing? Best Practices From Schools Implementing the Gallup Student Poll**

Research indicates that hope and engagement are related to student wellbeing and academic achievement. But how do we apply research findings to real-world classroom experiences? As part of her dissertation research, this presenter asked teachers from schools across the country, “How do you promote hope, wellbeing, and engagement in

your students?” Schools participating in this research study scored among the highest in the nation on the Gallup Student Poll, which measures hope, engagement, and wellbeing of students. The session provided specific examples of how to boost student levels of hope, engagement, and wellbeing.

**Denise’s Conference Notes: An Overview of the Strengths in Education Conference Sessions**

Notes from” GALLUP STRENGTHS IN EDUCATION CONFERENCE: “*The Impact of Strengths on Hope and Wellbeing*”  
February 8-10<sup>th</sup>, 2012

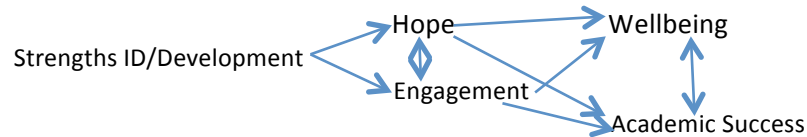
**Presenter:** Alan G. Merten, Ph. D President  
**Institution:** George Mason University  
**Welcome:** Message: *Leadership: What Does It Take?*

- Stamina/Energy-if we don’t have it, it doesn’t matter we still have to do what must be done.
- Passion-A passion for what we do/charisma
- Caring Attitude-People want you to care. People are watching-do we care?
- People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care!

**Keynote Address:** “How We Hope”  
**Presenter:** Shane J. Lopez, Ph. D, Research Director  
**Institution:** Clifton Strengths School and Senior Scientist, Gallup

**Keynote Message:** *The Path to Student Success*  
**“The How of Hope”**

Building Hope:



Hopeful Leaders: Assess the Future, Figure out how to make it better

- Four Things Needed from a Leader: Stability, Trust, Compassion, Hope
- Leaders must meet these four needs with urgency. We need to ask-Leaders, “What did they give you?”
- College students want a good job and a happy family-not scores and graduation. Our motivational scheme is skewed. We need to track where former students are. Did they get the job/family?
- Students have one plan-then an obstacle comes and most don’t have a Plan B. We never taught the majority of our students to have alternative plans. Our students don’t know how to develop alternative plans that sponsor hope.
- Hope matters: Showing up, Effort, Productivity, Health, Well-being; Longevity: Engaged students/engaged employees- there can be great talent and disengagement.
- Hope is necessary but not sufficient for well-being.
- A campus can be a “wellness Center”
- A campus can focus on “hope”
- A campus can focus on student engagement

- 85% of the people believe the future will be better but don't believe they have the power to make it so.
- Hope and Engagement explains student stop outs. Delayed gratification can help in the future and can cause positive outcomes now-what is the vivid image that you have to get what you want 6 months, 3 years, 5 years from now.
- We have to create vivid images of the future. The future pulls you forward-where there's a way there's a will. Motivation can be put on autopilot so that every decision made today affects tomorrow's outcomes. Enroll in spring and fall concurrently-creates the vivid image to help retain students.
- Future casting (preview the future), get students to live in the future of the job/internships, - stickk.com (students can type in future goals).
- Planning for ifs (borrow hope), challengepost.com- you post what you need and say I'll pay x amount of dollars, I need ideas and people all over the world will work on the problem to win the money.
- Setting action triggers (craft when/where plans). Futureme.org-create a "when/where" plans for creating an action plan for assignments.
- Give an assignment-when will you start? Where will you be? What will you bring? Create clues to remind motivate yourself-you can send yourself and email of what you need to do in the future.
- "We must think and act not only for the moment but for our time". JFK

**Conference Topic:** **Launching a Strengths-Based Work Environment: Doing for Employees What We Do for Students**

**Presenter(s):** **Gabrielle Lucke and Molly St. Sauveur**

**Institution:** **Dartmouth College**

**Presentation:** *Launching a Strengths-based Work Environment:*

**Highlights:** **Appreciative Inquiry**-In every system something works

Basic Principles of  
Appreciative Inquiry

Intentionally realize-something works-Asking questions about what works influences the group in some way.

Know what you do best to carry things in the past into the future.

Group Exercise: think about a time in our professional career when you were at your best: where were you? Who were you with, what were you doing, what did others contribute, what prompted powerful feelings?

Tap into the energy: new employees take Strengths quest, Gabrielle has a map so new employees see where their strengths lie before they start working.

**4 D's of Appreciative Inquiry:**

- Discovery, (Appreciate the best of what already is-what works) Ex. Staff-formal communication, planning-research for "discovery".
- Dreaming, (Imagine what it could be), Imagine your perfect place; what would governance look like, what would people working there experience?
- Design, (Discuss what can be and get to work), Discuss what should be; create the plan, timelines, work within employees timelines (registration etc.). How: they had coaching for people who had questions. How do we make it our philosophy and practice? By creating a culture: common language, restructured job assignments allowed people to sign up for training. They did a staff retreat overview-reflected on motivation, execution of work and learning-had people work together outside of job roles.
- Destiny, (Create the future), Create what will be/sustain it-Resources-"How Full is Your Bucket"; they raffled off Strengths codes for family members.

**Final thoughts:**

What do we need from each other?

How do we continue to build a better understanding of our unique talents?

Do we do for our employees what we do for our students/clients?

**Conference Topic:** Using Strengths-Based Advising With Students With Disabilities to Promote Student Success”

**Presenter(s)** Megan Eigenbrod and Tehra Yosifi

**Campus/ Institution** California State University, Northridge

**Presentation** - *Strengths helps students self-advocate*

**Highlights:** - *Strengths counseling progression: Strengths introduction, awareness, reflection, application, integration into self-concept*

**Incorporating**

**Strengths;**

**5 Sessions**

**Session 1-Build Rapport-Handwriting activity from Strengths quest;**

“Explain the background of the assessment and the philosophy of positive psychology. Discuss current academic standing, needs, issues and motivation to participate in Strengths counseling. Talk about disability management, goal development, adjusting to college life demands, decision making, school/life balance, time management, career exploration.”

**Session 2-Describe feelings before, during, and after taking 2.0.**

Read descriptions out-loud-ask do you want to read it or me? Pause-ask open-ended questions to discover the student’s personal connection to each strength theme. This is a student /counselor collaboration-identify goals for Strengths counseling. Often the student looks different from the description based on the student’s disability.

**Session 3-Explain the student’s Strengths themes (must be positive).**

Activities/Discussion: the “Challenge of affirming my Strengths”, the Secret of my Success” create a “talent connection”.

**Session 4-application to future tasks**

Check in with the student-are we on track? Reassess goals if needed. To connect Strengths to activities-“A Fresh Perspective” “Realizing my Potential”, SMARTE Goals and Strategies.

**Develop SMARTE goals**

specific, measurable (how long), attainable (realistic), relevant (with other goals), time bound (target date), evaluation-go back, assess goals-reflect on successes. Break down large goals into manageable steps-how do/can students help you achieve goals.

**Session 5-Review.**

**Discuss goal setting initiatives** - Ask students to share their experience with their strengths quest counseling; tell them the growth you see-thank them. Administer the post-test survey-pre/posttest. They did pre-post testing at the same time.

**Strengths Counseling Process** - Megan has students sign a contract and meets with students 5 times or more if needed.

Doing the pre/post-test at the same time allows the student to reflect on what they know then and now.

**Presenting Strengths Strategies for Populations –**

**Students with Depression:** self-reflection building self-awareness

**ADHD**-Present in an interactive format;

**LD**-Customize the activity to the student’s learning style, use visual or repetitive activities;

**Mental health**-ownership activities;

**Autism**-give homework, no surprises-give questions ahead of time so they can think of them overnight;

**Physical disabilities**-adjust for limitations and help students break anxiety by role playing. Don’t tell them their Strength-try to get them to see how their Strength is applicable in a situation and encourage them to name their Strength.

**Time Management - Ask student: What Strength will help you schedule your day start to finish?**

“Shadow Strengths”: How is this Strength involved in not getting things done? Use “how” language.

Prioritize the student’s Strength-get students to identify the strength that will help them use/follow a schedule

Students may not always see the payoff right away. Combine knowledge, skill, w/Strengths. Show them “this is for and about you” not about what strengths you need to be a (teacher, accountant, doctor, etc.) Most important for

Counselors/Advocates: Become familiar with the 34 Strengths. Identify the behaviors associated with each of the 34 Strengths.

**Conference Topic:** Strengths and Neuroscience: Building Capacity for Engagement and Wellbeing

**Presenter** Adrienne Hamcke Wicker

**Campus/ Institution** University of Maryland

**Presentation** *Threat and Reward*

**Highlights:** *The brain's limbic system is where emotion/memory is centered-we can't think in the limbic area and the prefrontal (higher level thinking system) at the same time.*

The Brain's Natural

Tendencies/the

SCARF Model

The foundational organizing system of the brain is "maximize reward minimize risks".

Our brains are naturally negative-if we don't know what something is our brain registers "bad" (thing).

Amygdala-always assessing threat, threat=run, push, avoid-any reward=-pull, walk toward, approach

David Rock's SCARF Model 5 Domains Threat/Reward: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, Fairness

**Status**-Relative importance to another, Reward: an infinite scale. Threat: Better to defend than to lose. Feedback is a status threat equivalent to hearing footsteps behind you in the dark. Learning is a status reward.

Activity: Is status important to you? On a scale of 1-5 rate how important status is to you. Now think about a "status trigger" something that caused you to feel or not feel status. Ask yourself why did you think about that? How did that make you feel? Now look at your rating-how important is status to you?

#### **Certainty**

The brain craves certainty-uncertainty fires the limbic system small amounts equal an "error message" to attend to whatever is making us feel uncertain. To increase certainty make the implicit explicit.-agendas help people feel certainty think about your Strengths-where you're right on with it-with what gives you certainty.

#### **Autonomy**

The brain wants to predict and have a say in the future. Decrease in stress=increased stress. Perception of control. Encourage insight. **Autonomy threat**=non-communication; non-fairness **Autonomy rewards**=input in process; chance to do more.

#### **Relatedness**

Friend or foe; closely linked to trust. Process circuits in brain, encourage social communication at work-poor social support is a difficult as a physical danger.

#### **Fairness**

Fairness makes feelings of relatedness go up. Unfairness makes feelings of relatedness go down. Unfair exchanges activate the limbic system; kindness of strangers has a high reward factor. Transparency and clear expectations=fairness rewards.

Activity: Balcony/Basement and rewards/threats: Draw a stick figure label it with one of your Strengths draw a Balcony box and write my \_\_\_ Strength makes me... identify which "reward" you feel (SCARF). Draw a "threat" Basement box write in it one way it doesn't help you or is a barrier to someone else; identify which "threat" SCARF you experience from the Strength basement. Use "laser statements" 10 words or less to make you express yourself clearly and succinctly.

#### **Manage your own threat responses:**

- Calm the amygdala by labeling what you're feeling, focus on the present, notice what's happening-breathe-allow it to be,



- Control interpretations through reappraisals, avoid why questions-ask who, what statements,
- Take charge of your own mental statements.

**Conference Topic:** **Strengths Quest as an Engagement Strategy**

**Presenter** **Kyle Robinson**

**Campus/ Institution** **Gallup**

**Presentation** *Behavioral economics-70% of our decisions are emotionally based. When interpreting Gallup data a “3” is not a neutral number Gallup interprets “3” as a soft “no”.*

Activity: What does engagement look like? Thinking/consideration, excited, energy communication verbal and non-verbal, feedback, expanded topic etc.

Engagement is more active than satisfaction. Engagement is memorable while satisfaction is “ok” (no one recommends the restaurant they ranked a “3”). Satisfaction is necessary but not sufficient.

What do engaged staff look/sound like? What do engaged students look/sound like?

Gallup has a hierarchy of engagement: basic needs of managers: engagement, support, teamwork, growth.

“Individuals join organizations they leave managers.” 60% of an employee’s engagement depends on the relationship with their manager.

Investing in Strengths model (on the scale engagement was only from the answers that were 5’s), 2010 Fall Gallup Student Poll- 12<sup>th</sup> grade number goes up because students are getting out and student drop outs. Student engagement decreases every grade from 9<sup>th</sup> until 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The question “My teacher makes me feel my schoolwork is important accounts for the engagement decline among grade levels.

- Implementing Strengths on campus: manage staff and students at the same time (why? Students interact with staff). = common/complete Engagement.

Questions to ask yourself:

- The student buzz is not enough-how are you infusing Strength-based development throughout campus?
- What are you aiming Strengths at on campus?
- How will you know if you are making progress or if you’ve accomplished your goal?
- Is Strengths occurring in isolation on campus? If so, who else can you bring in and collaborate with on campus?
- Sometimes the best way to infuse Strengths in with “intentionality” staff/faculty/students and student leadership- student leaders and students create language with faculty and staff.