

# Change Making:

## Personal Traits and Professional Skills

University of Pennsylvania  
Nonprofit Leadership Program  
NPLD 591-910  
Summer 2016

Instructor:  
Contact:

### **Course Description:**

Over the past decade, researchers have identified some of the key skills that people need to succeed in their work and in their lives. These are skills that anyone can develop with practice. In this class, we will teach three of the key skills: resilience (the ability to thrive in difficult times); creativity (the ability to come up with innovative solutions to problems); and productivity (the ability to make the best use of your time and find life balance).

During our first weekend together, we will learn the key skills. Over the course of the next three weeks, we will practice these skills to see significant improvement in important areas of our daily lives. By the final day on June 26th, we will talk about how to sustain these gains in our personal and professional lives long after the course has ended.

### **Texts:**

There is no required text for this class. You will choose your own readings (with guidance from the instructor), based on your specific needs and interests. This class will be tailored and personalized for each student.

**A note on the educational philosophy of this course:**

This course is not a traditional lecture course. (After all, it would be very difficult to sit through lectures all day on a Saturday and Sunday!) While we will review the best scientific research on the skills for effective change makers, the main part of the course is devoted to practicing these skills. In other words, this is a highly experiential, interactive, and dynamic course.

This is a class that requires enthusiasm, passion, motivation, and whole-hearted participation from the students. It is not a course for passive students, who simply want facts and information fed to them. It is about action, leadership, and empowerment. The course promises to be inspirational, fun, and challenging for everyone involved.

# CLASS SCHEDULE

June 4

10 a.m.

## **Introduction**

10:30 a.m.

## **The science of making the world a better place**

Currently the field of social change is being revolutionized. There are thousands of innovators, social entrepreneurs, and nonprofit leaders who are inventing creative new approaches to social change that are going far beyond the traditional strategies of protests, petitions, rallies, and lobbying efforts. At the beginning of this class, we will review the research on the skills of the most effective change makers.

11:00 a.m.

## **Practicing an initial skill: Building powerful relationships**

One of the most important skills for change makers is the ability to connect deeply and forge strong relationships with other people. In the opening hours of the class, we are going to present the scientific research on how people are most effective in connecting with others. And we will practice this skill right away. The objective is for us to form a strong sense of community among the 25 of us in the classroom. As we will learn in the afternoon, the support of others is one of the keys to successful behavioral change.

12:15 p.m.

## **Lunch break**

1 p.m.

## **The science of behavioral change**

Many social change advocates are attempting to get people to transform their behavior – whether through changing environmental practices, or protecting public health, or influencing other lifestyle and consumer decisions. However, most people are resistant to change. Therefore, the rest of today's class will discuss the scientific basis behind how people actually do change, and the best practices of change agents. This will include practical exercises that will relate to your own change experiments with productivity, resilience, or creativity.

4:30 p.m.

## **Wrap up and final comments**

## June 5

Today we delve into each of the three main skills that you will practice over the next several weeks. We will introduce you to all three skills, and then you will have the opportunity to choose which of the three skills you wish to develop.

10 a.m.

### **Skill 1: Productivity**

One of the most important skills for social innovators and entrepreneurs is achieving a sense of life balance and being able to manage their time effectively. Surveys reveal that a majority of people in nonprofits and social change efforts often feel stressed out, overwhelmed, and burnt out. The morning session will look at the most important scientific findings about how people best take leadership over their schedules, avoid procrastination, and focus on the priorities that will make the greatest difference.

Noon

Lunch break

1 p.m.

### **Skill 2: Creativity and innovation**

Einstein once said that the problems that we face could not be solved with the same type of thinking that created them. This week's class looks at how social entrepreneurs, change agents, and nonprofit leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century develop their skills of creativity. We will examine the scientific research and literature on the subject of innovation. Moreover, we will practice these skills.

2:45

Break

3 p.m.

### **Skill 3: Resilience**

Any movement for social change is inevitably going to face obstacles, setbacks, and failures. Campaigns for improving the world often take years or decades. A crucial issue for nonprofit leaders, therefore, is how to respond effectively to failure, and how to overcome barriers to progress. This is also a key skill for anyone in life. How do we respond to the troubles, adversities, rejections, and setbacks in our lives? How is that some people feel incredible stress and anxiety in the face of problems, while others rise to the challenge? There's a tremendous amount of scientific evidence – led by researchers at Penn – on how to train people to thrive even in the midst of life's most difficult challenges.

4:45 p.m.

**Wrap up and final comments**

At the end of class today, students will form accountability teams to focus on one of these three skills. Over the next week, you will delve into the scientific literature, and practice one of these skills. Your goal is to gain a measure of proficiency during the next three weeks.

## June 11

Today we come back together to see what progress everybody has made.

10 a.m.                    **Review of progress**

For the first 60 minutes, we will review how much progress you have made. We will discuss the challenges that you have faced and how best to respond.

11 a.m.                    **The science of persistence and perseverance**

Most initial attempts to change are unsuccessful. It's difficult to develop new skills. It's very likely – and completely natural – for most of you to have stumbled multiple times in your attempts to develop your skills of productivity, creativity, or resilience. Indeed, scientific research indicates that more than 95 percent of people who make “New Year’s Resolutions” or other attempts to change their behavior will not be able to sustain this change more than a few days. What are the lessons of the 5 percent of people who do succeed? How do people rise after each fall, and learn from their mistakes? What are the strategies that are most effective for sustaining and maintaining behavioral change in the face of repeated lapses? We will review – and start to put into practice – some of the key lessons.

12:15 p.m.                **Lunch break**

1 p.m.                      **Newest lessons about productivity, creativity, and resilience**

For the rest of the class, you will share the greatest lessons you've learned in your independent research on the three skills. Over the past week, you have started to become experts in your issue area. Not only have you practiced these skills, but you will also have done literature reviews of the best practices.

Each team will have 75 minutes to present what they have discovered about developing these skills. These presentations should be as creative and participatory as possible.

4:30 p.m.                **Wrap up and final comments**

## June 12

Today we will explore three emerging bodies of scientific research that can help students improve over the final weeks of the class.

10 a.m.                    **The science of mindsets**

Dr. Carol Dweck, a researcher at Stanford, is the pioneer in studying mindsets and how they influence success. We will look at the work of her, as well as her colleague, Dr. Heidi Grant Halvorson of Columbia. We will do a number of interactive exercises to help you grow from your failures. We will also look at the research of Mullainathan and Shafir on the mindset of scarcity, how it affects people's capacity, and how to change it.

11:30 a.m.                **The science of optimal human performance**

Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a researcher at Claremont Graduate University in California, is a leading researcher on the science of flow – the peak experience in which humans perform at their best. We will not only study the lessons of this research, but also put them into practice.

12:30                      Lunch break

1:30 p.m.                 **The science of luck**

Most people are surprised to hear that there is scientific research about luck. But not only can we measure people's ability to experience good fortune, this is also something we can teach. People can practice this as a skill, and see statistically significant gains in their "luck quotient." We will end the class with an introduction to the academic research on these intriguing findings.

4:45 p.m.                **Wrap up and final comments**

## June 25

Today we come back together to review the results of this three-week experiment.

10 a.m.                    **Student presentations (10 to 20 minutes each)**

The entire day today will be the opportunity for each of you to present the results of your experiments. You will have 20 minutes to present what you learned. We encourage you to make the sessions both entertaining and intellectually stimulating. You will have the chance to present the biggest challenges that you have faced, and the entire class will be able to brainstorm solutions and give advice for continuing on into the future.

The goal is for everyone to support each other and hold each other accountable. In essence, we are serving as each other's personal board of advisors – giving advice, references, and resources to help your fellow classmates succeed.

12:15 p.m.                **Lunch break**

1:15 p.m.                 **Student presentations (continued)**

4:30 p.m.                 **Wrap up and final comments**

## June 26

Hopefully your initial experiments have been successful; hopefully you have seen statistically significant and measurable progress; hopefully you have developed some proficiency in a skill that will make the biggest difference in your life.

Now we wrap up the class by introducing you to three new skills that you might practice in the future.

10 a.m.

### **The science of storytelling**

Great leaders are storytellers. They are able to engage and entertain their communities, and tell a compelling narrative about how the world works. They use language powerfully and communicate in ways that uplift and inspire others. Today we will look at the power of telling great stories, and learn how to do it most effectively when promoting your social change campaigns. We will also look at the skills of framing language in ways that will win over an audience.

Noon

Lunch break

1 p.m.

### **The science of win-win conflict resolution and negotiation**

In both our professional and our personal lives, one of the biggest sources of dissatisfaction is experiencing difficult relationships with others. Scientific research indicates that people's complaints in the workplace mostly revolve around personal conflicts with others. How do we resolve such conflicts in a way that uplifts all sides? How we negotiate through people's divergent needs and interests in a way that everyone feels satisfied? In our limited time, we will introduce you to the latest findings on successful conflict resolution and negotiation.

4 p.m.

### **Conclusions and dinner**

# The major assignment for the course

## **Developing one of the essential skills of change makers**

In this class, you will be developing one of three key skills of effective agents of transformation:

- Productivity
- Resilience
- Creativity and innovation

You will keep a journal for the entire three weeks, tracking your progress. This will be akin to a scientific experiment, where you will be continually monitoring and measuring the results. At the end of the first day of class, we will offer you a template for creating these scientific journals.

You will also have a team of people who are keeping you accountable, supporting you during difficult periods. Finally you will be researching and documenting the best practices of the experts in the field.

Indeed, as mentioned on page 2 of this syllabus, you will be responsible for finding the most valuable readings that apply to your experiment. The instructor and your teammates will help point you in the right direction. We want you to find readings that are based on rigorous scientific and peer-reviewed academic research – i.e., the best practices for developing the skills that we are highlighting in this class.

We don't want you to waste time on anything that you feel is meaningless and irrelevant to your life. Everything you should do in this class should be deeply important to you. If there is any part of the class that you feel is not worth your time, we encourage you to engage in civil disobedience! We don't want you to do this exercise simply because an instructor is telling you to do so. The objective is for you to do this out of intrinsic motivation – because you are passionate about learning and about improving your skills.

At the end of the class, you will turn in your journal. Of course, if there is anything that you wish to keep private, that's fine. We want to respect your privacy. Ultimately you are doing this experiment for yourself, not for a grade in a class. This entire course should be tailored to your personal and professional needs.

## **GRADING POLICIES**

There are no tests in this class. Instead the grade breakdown is as follows:

Attendance and participation (see next page for criteria):	25 percent
Presentations in class:	25 percent
Journals:	50 percent

We will not accept late work.

## **STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Students are expected to conduct themselves consistent with the University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity, which presents standards regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions, and other actions. Students are expected to be familiar with the Code, which can be found at <http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/>

## GRADING CRITERIA

### Participation grading scale:

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**A** - You are an outstanding, invaluable contributor to class discussions. The class would be considerably poorer without your presence. You speak often, engage your fellow students, and always offer intelligent, thoughtful opinions. Your level of energy and enthusiasm is very high. You are passionate about learning; you always show great motivation and interest. You complete all the assignments, and you do an excellent, thorough job on each one. You come to every class session and you are always on time. You know the names of all of your fellow students and empower other people to do their best. You care about your classmates and how they are doing in class.

**B** - You are an active participant in class discussions. You seem to be showing a great deal of interest, even if you are a naturally quiet person. You are a very active listener, and you appear to respect the opinions of your fellow students. You often contribute many intelligent ideas to the class discussions. You complete all the class assignments, and it appears that you put a great deal of thought and effort into them. You go beyond what is required of you. You are absent or late to no more than 1 class. You know at least 80 percent of your classmates' names.

**C** - You have an acceptable level of class participation. You occasionally participate in a class discussion, although not very much. If you are a naturally quiet person, you at least seem to be paying attention and showing interest. You complete all the assignments and you do what is required of you. You are absent or late to no more than 2 classes. You know at least 67 percent of your classmates' names.

**D** - You are physically present in class, but your mind seems to be somewhere else. You do not seem to pay attention (or even to disguise your boredom). You rarely participate in class discussions. Even when called on to answer a question, you have very little to say. Sometimes you seem to be on the verge of sleeping, or melting into your chair. You complete the assignments, but it appears like you put little time or effort into them. You are late or absent more than 2 times. You know less than 67 percent of your classmates' names.

**F** - You miss class often. You do not participate at all. You show no interest whatsoever in the subject matter, the readings, or the opinions of your fellow students. You do not complete many of the assignments. Overall, you put no effort into the class. You are absent or late to class more than 3 times. You know less than 50 percent of your classmates' names.

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