



Sustaining Ourselves, Sustaining Colorado: A New Way to Think About Work

Kelly Kandra Hughes, PhD

Let's Start at the Beginning!

- Who am I?
- Why am I the right person to talk to you about Sustaining Ourselves, Sustaining Colorado?

2007 - PhD in Psychology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

2024 - Teaching Faculty in the Psychology and Neuroscience Department at the University of Colorado, Boulder

Expertise in:

Positive Psychology

Conservation Psychology

Behavior Change

In 2007 ...

I loved my job!

I was good at it.

I gave it my all.

I began to confuse
my value with my
job.

That didn't go well...

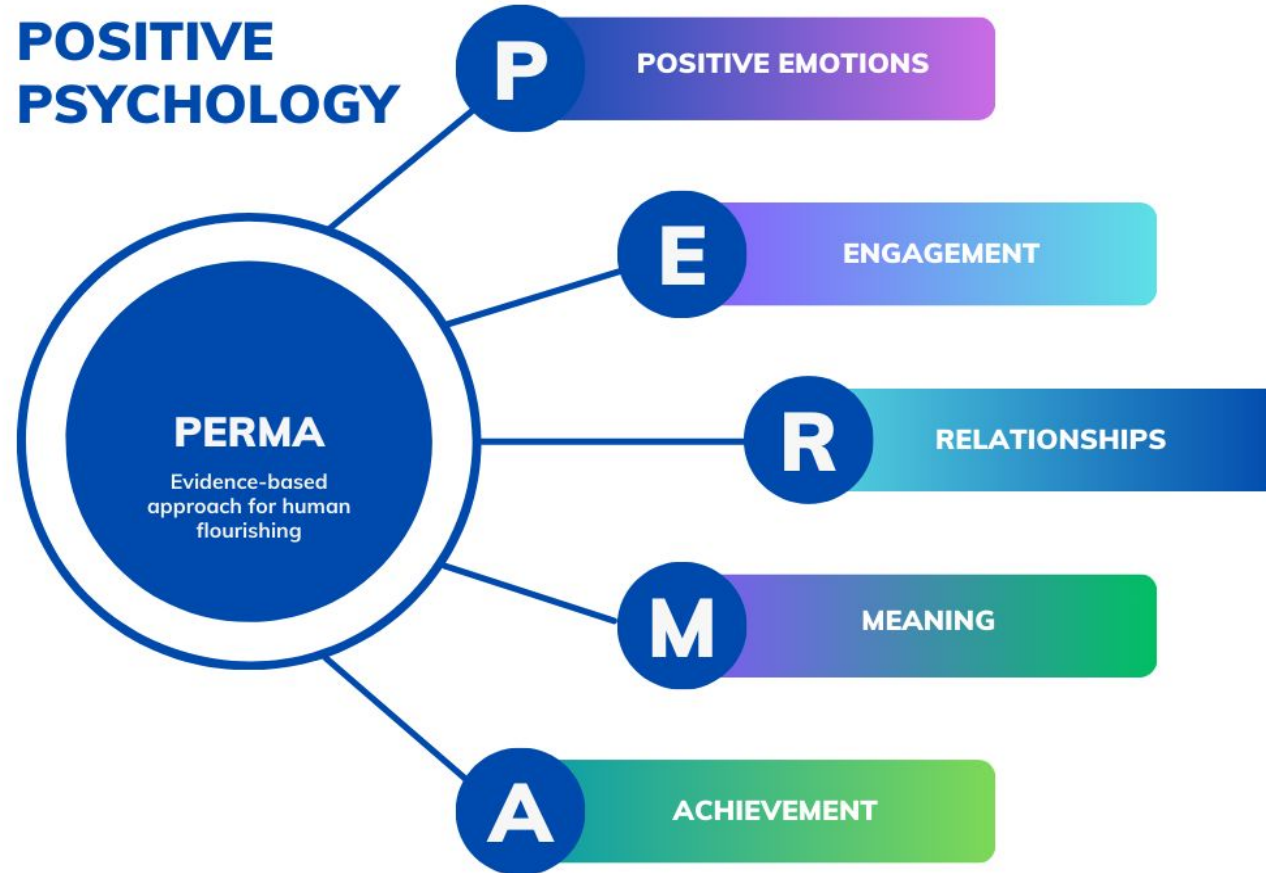
- I struggled with a lot of stress and health issues
- I began to hate a job I used to love





I overconsumed...
And I still didn't like my life very much.

**POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY**





I quit my job, got rid of 95% of my belongings, and became a nomad.

I became “consumed” with the concept of materialism

Why do we have so much waste?



What can we do about it?



My answer?

Return to teaching!

The Eco-Leader Network

Spreading care is how we make change in our communities, relying on **peer-to-peer connections** to spread the Zero Waste message.



It Is My Hope

That my knowledge, experience, and expertise can help you better sustain yourselves and, in turn, better sustain Colorado.

Now it's your turn

Your story matters!

Why are you here?

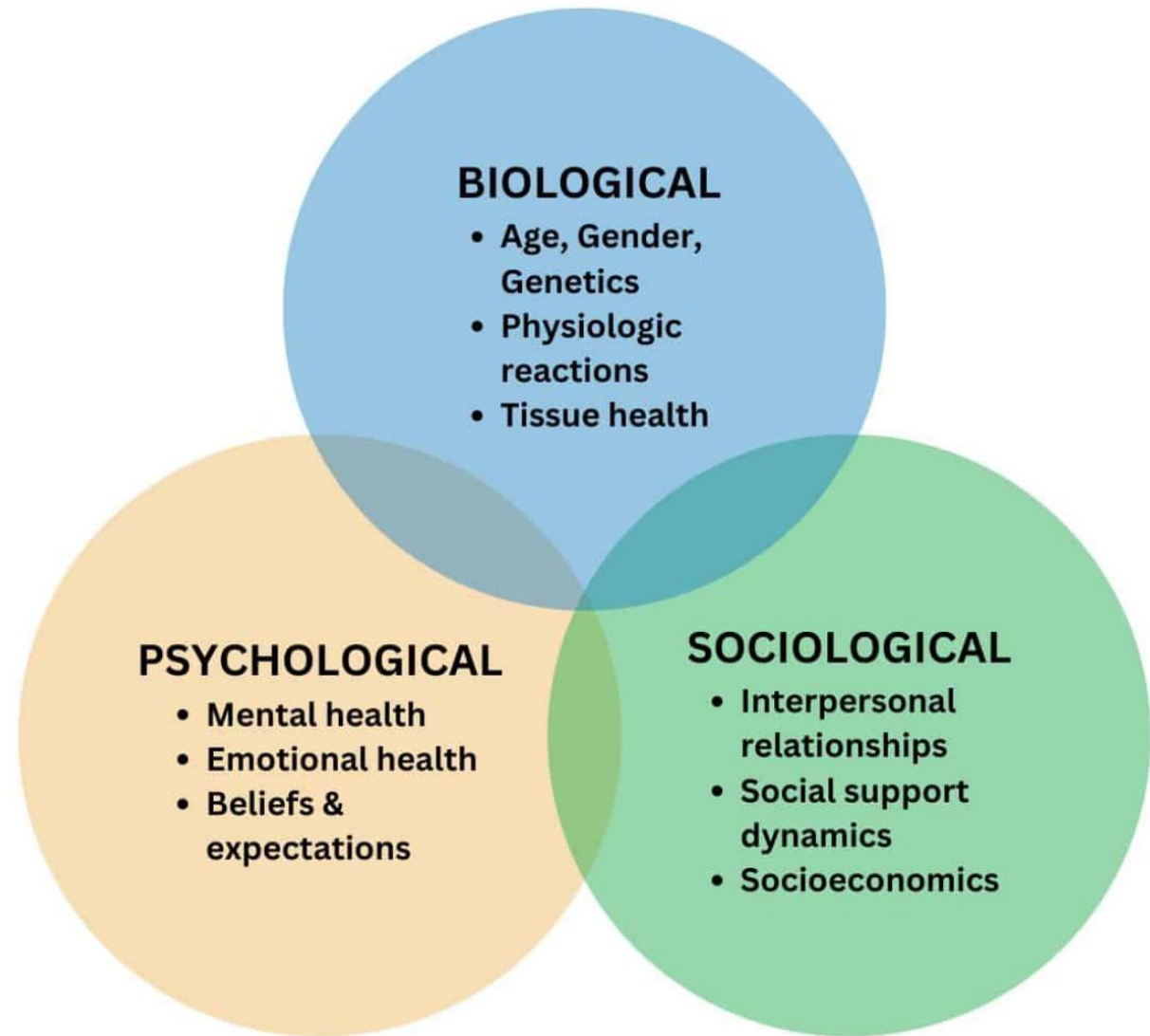
Take a few moments and think about why you got into recycling.

Turn to the person next to you and briefly share your stories

Keep this information in mind because we're going to use it later.

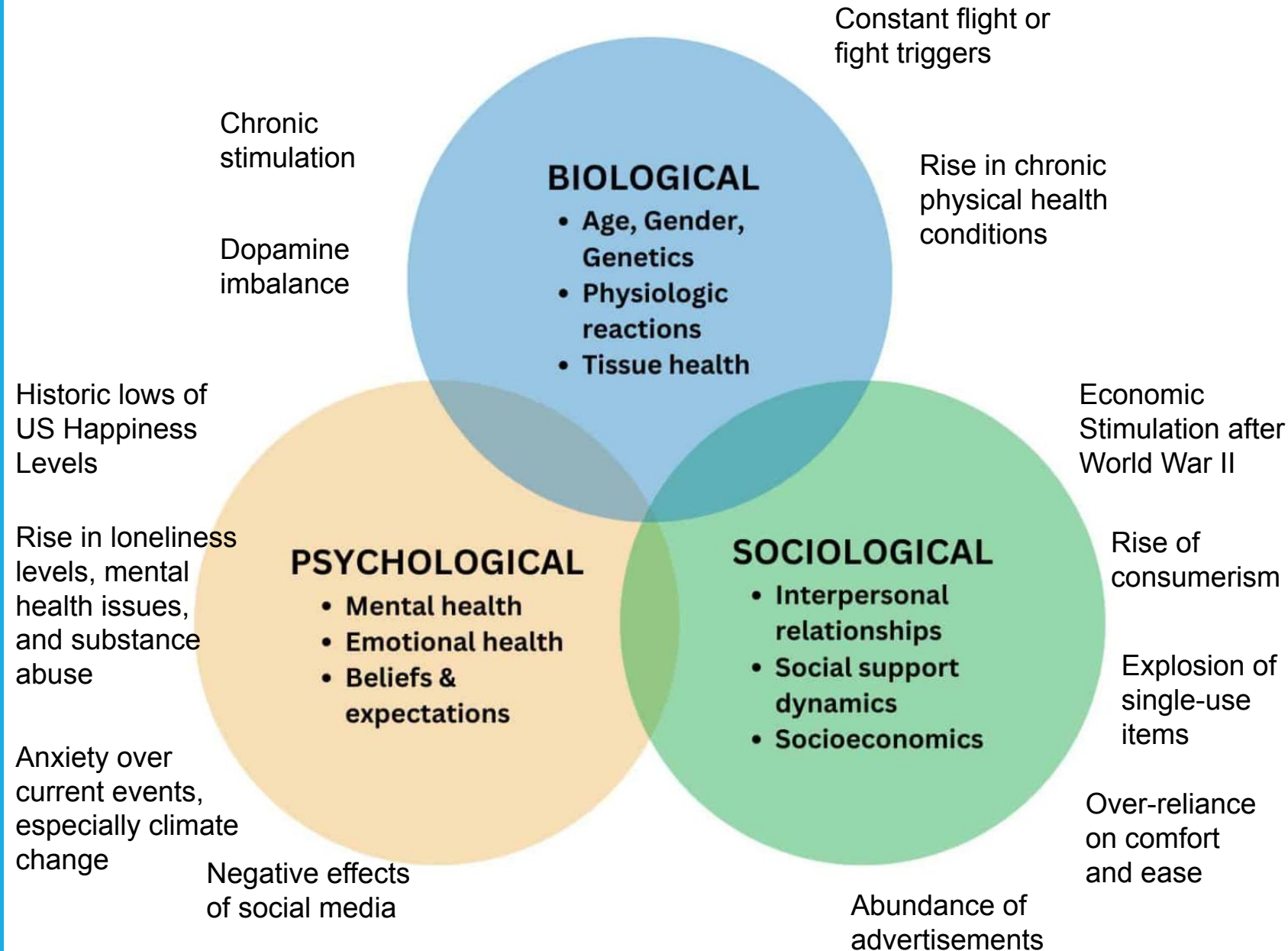
Where we go from here

If we were a general audience....



Where we go from here

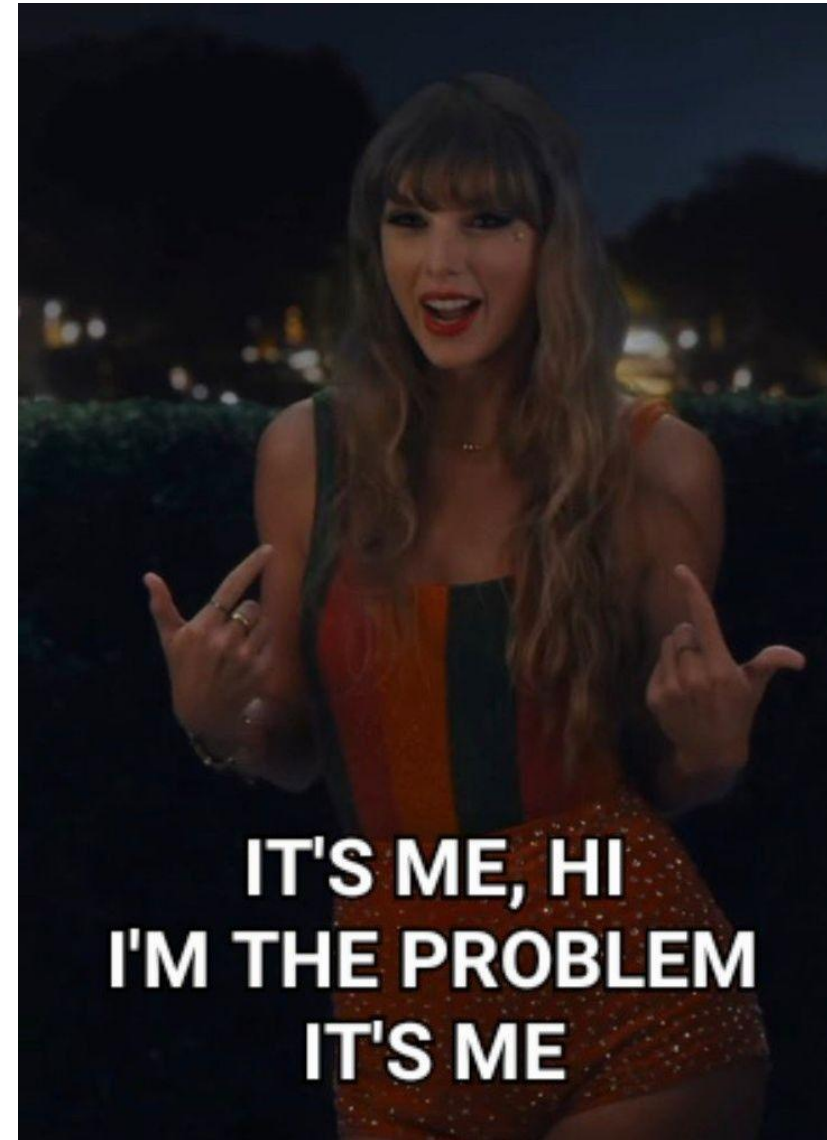
If we were a general audience....



I began to hate a
job I used to love.

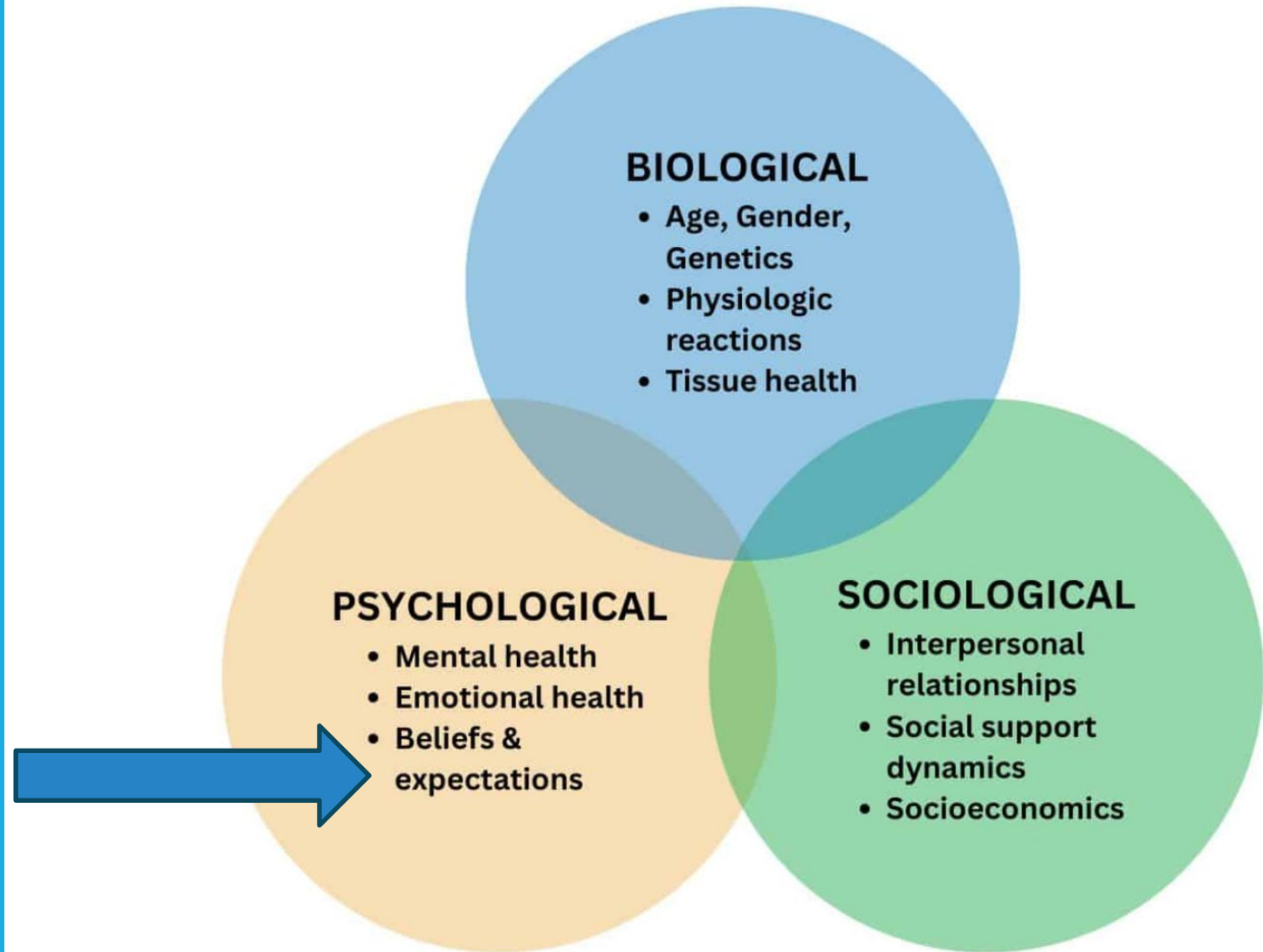
The other side of my story

To quote the immortal words of
Taylor Swift...



One of the most important parts of the story

Beliefs and expectations are under our control!



How Beliefs and Expectations Can Contribute to Burnout

Cognitive Distortions

- Faulty beliefs and perspectives we have about ourselves and/or the world around us (Beck, 1976).
 - They are irrational thoughts that can be subconsciously reinforced over time.
- All cognitive distortions (Beck, 1976):
 - Are tendencies or patterns of thinking or believing
 - Are false or inaccurate
 - Have the potential to cause psychological damage
- There are over 100 cognitive distortions listed on Wikipedia!

How Beliefs and Expectations Can Contribute to Burnout

SHOULD STATEMENTS

Assuming your behavior or others' behaviors should occur in a certain way

Cognitive and Emotional Effects

- Critical mindset
- Binary thinking
- Control issues
- Self-righteousness

How Beliefs and Expectations Can Contribute to Burnout

JUST-WORLD THINKING

Assuming everyone and everything is balanced and judged fairly

Cognitive and Emotional Effects

- Displacement of emotions
- Reduction of empathy

How Beliefs and Expectations Can Contribute to Burnout

FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR

Over-emphasizing personality-based explanations for others' behaviors while underestimating situational factors for their behaviors

Cognitive and Emotional Effects

- Faulty decision-making
- Reduced self-awareness
- Increased conflict
- Reduced empathy

How Beliefs and Expectations Can Contribute to Burnout

MIND READING

Jumping to conclusions and negatively interpreting another's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors

Cognitive and Emotional Effects

- Negative filtering/projection
- Social insecurity
- Social isolation
- Interpersonal conflict

Now it's your turn (again)!

How might these cognitive distortions be affecting your work?

Take a few moments and think about a situation or person you struggle with (maybe even someone in this room!)

Can you identify any of the cognitive biases I mentioned in how you view this situation/person?

Should Statements

- Assuming your behavior or others' behaviors should occur in a certain way

Just World Thinking

- Assuming everyone and everything is balanced and judged fairly

Fundamental Attribution Error

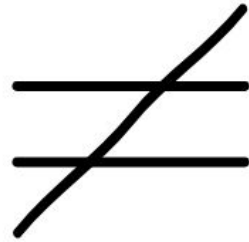
- Over-emphasizing personality-based explanations for others' behaviors while underestimating situational factors for our own behaviors

Mind Reading

- Jumping to conclusions and negatively interpreting another's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors

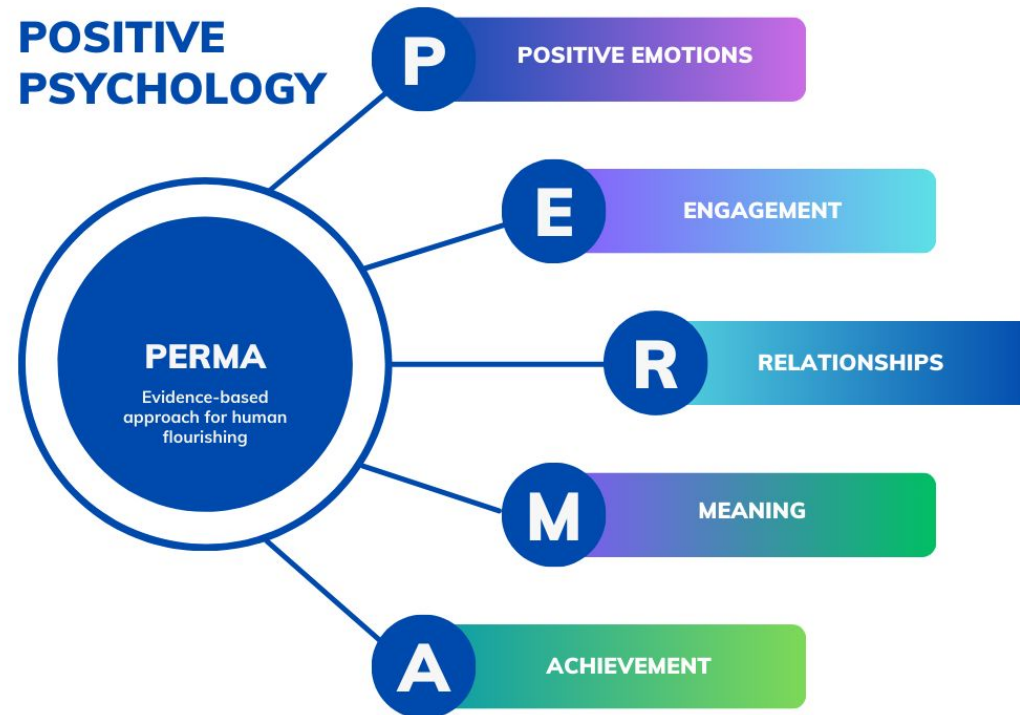
Knowledge

Knowledge



Behavior

Bridging the Gap Between Knowledge and Behavior

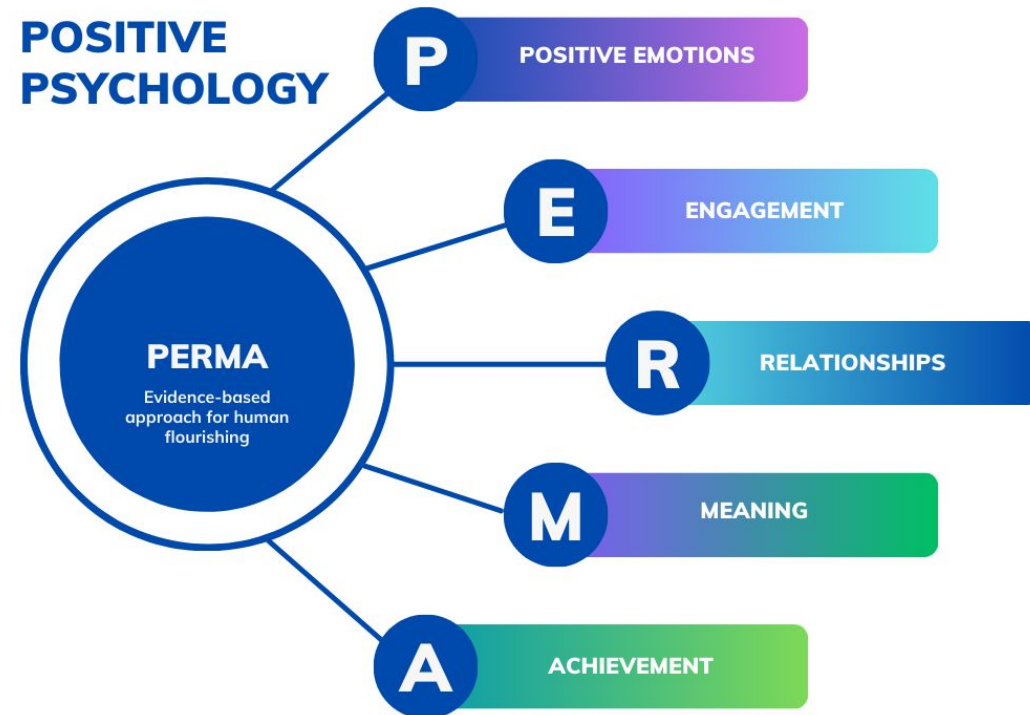


Bridging the Gap Between Knowledge and Sustainable Work Behavior

Strengthen Intentions

Reduce Barriers

Actionable Steps

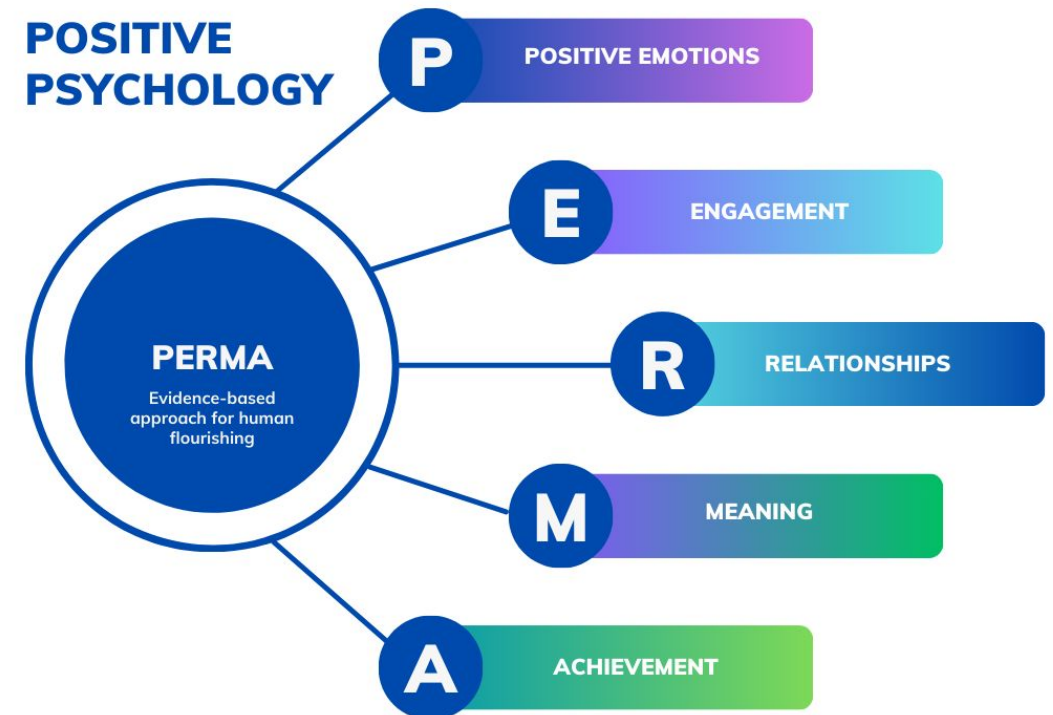


How to Strengthen Intentions

Identify your big “why” and “who” you will be in your organization/community

Create a mission statement for yourself

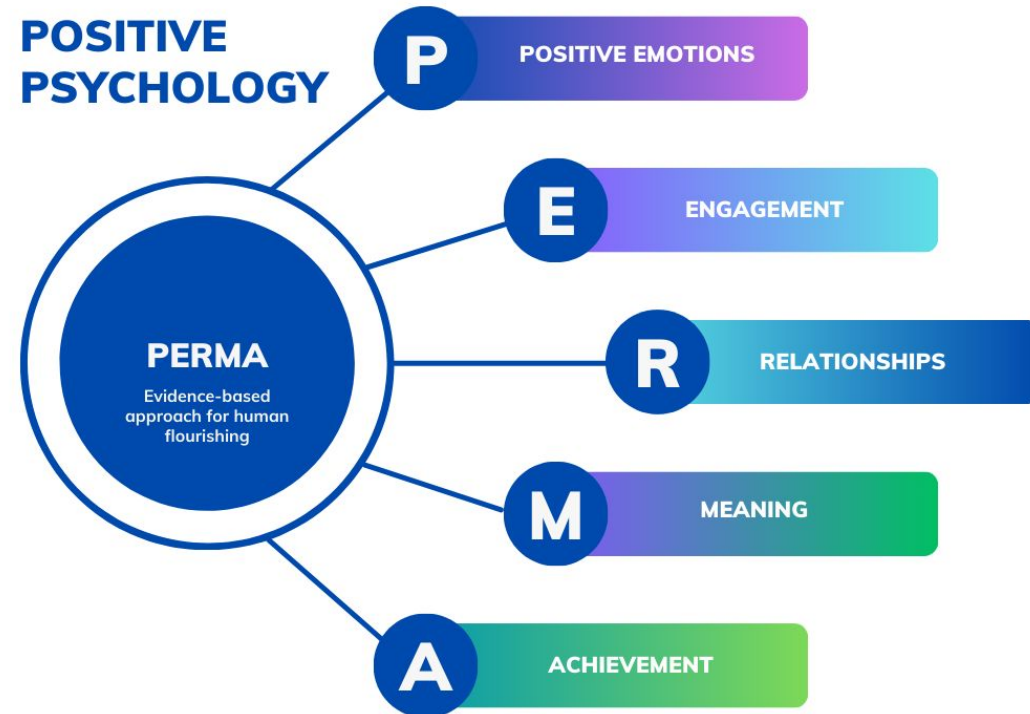
My mission statement: I will use my background, knowledge, and love of psychology to share with others how to flourish in their own lives (as a way to get them to consume less).



How to Strengthen Intentions

Center your work on your
key values

Make decisions accordingly



Key Life Values - Examples

Achievement	Citizenship	Freedom	Inner Harmony	Peace	Self-Respect
Authenticity	Community	Friendships	Justice	Pleasure	Service
Adventure	Competency	Fun	Kindness	Poise	Spirituality
Authority	Contribution	Generosity	Knowledge	Popularity	Stability
Autonomy	Creativity	Gratitude	Leadership	Recognition	Status
Balance	Curiosity	Growth	Learning	Religion	Stewardship
Beauty	Determination	Honesty	Love	Reputation	Success
Boldness	Fairness	Humor	Loyalty	Respect	Trustworthiness
Compassion	Faith	Imagination	Openness	Responsibility	Wealth
Challenge	Fame	Growth	Optimism	Security	Wisdom

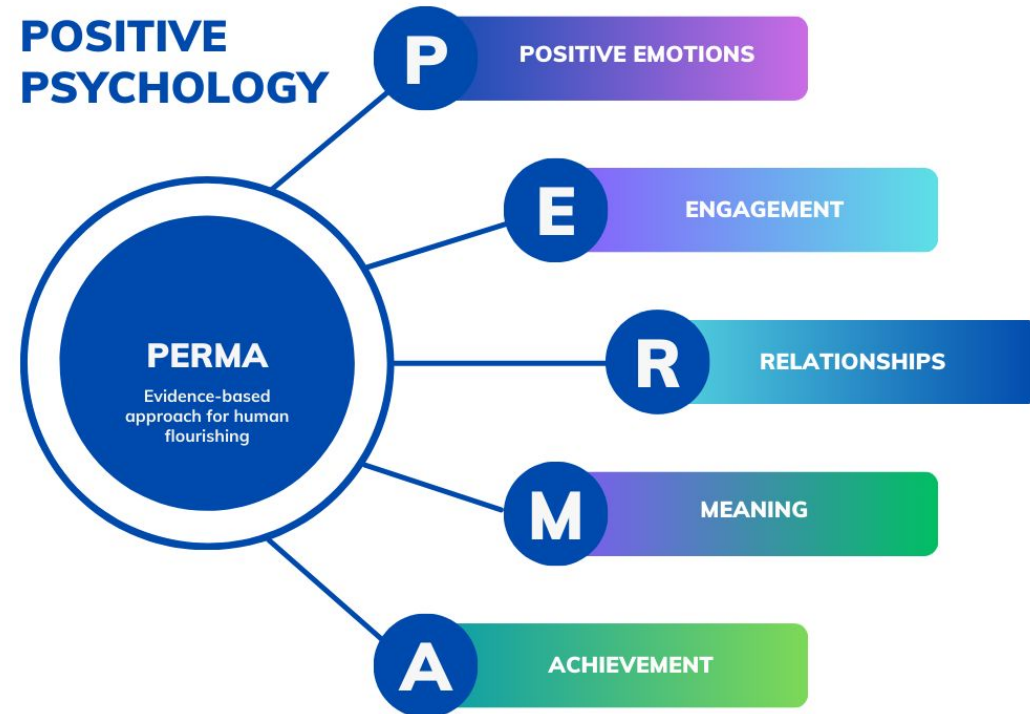
Source: <https://scottjeffrey.com/core-values-list/>

How to Strengthen Intentions

Recognize that the work is hard!

Be mindful of your biases/cognitive distortions

Always return to your values and identity

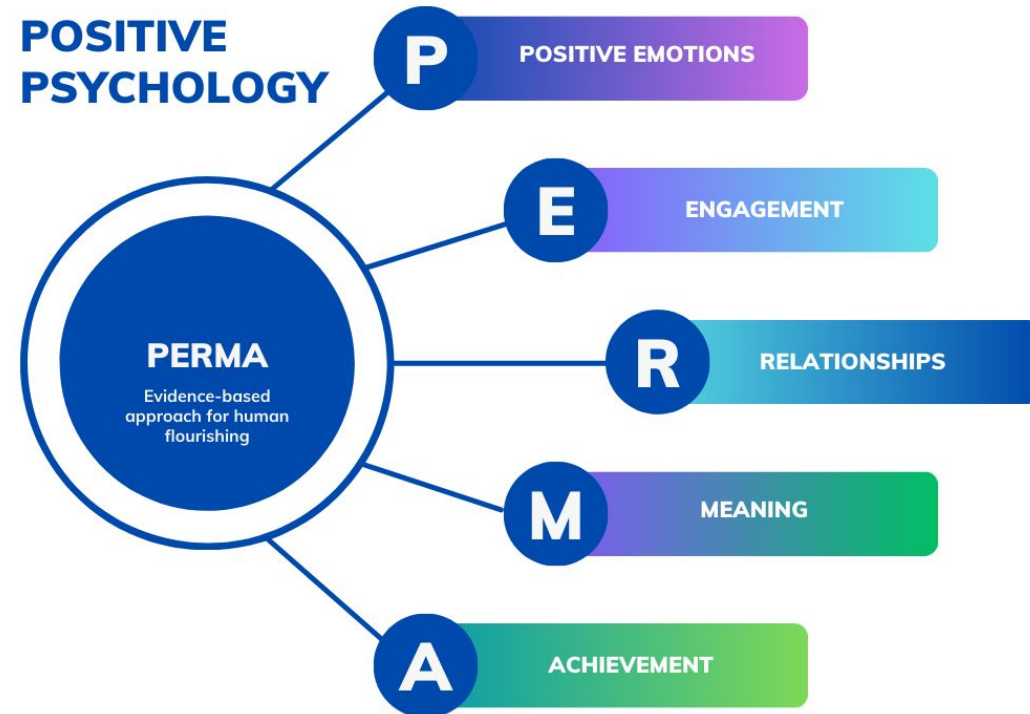


How to Reduce Barriers

Check your expectations
at the door

For Others

AND FOR YOURSELF!

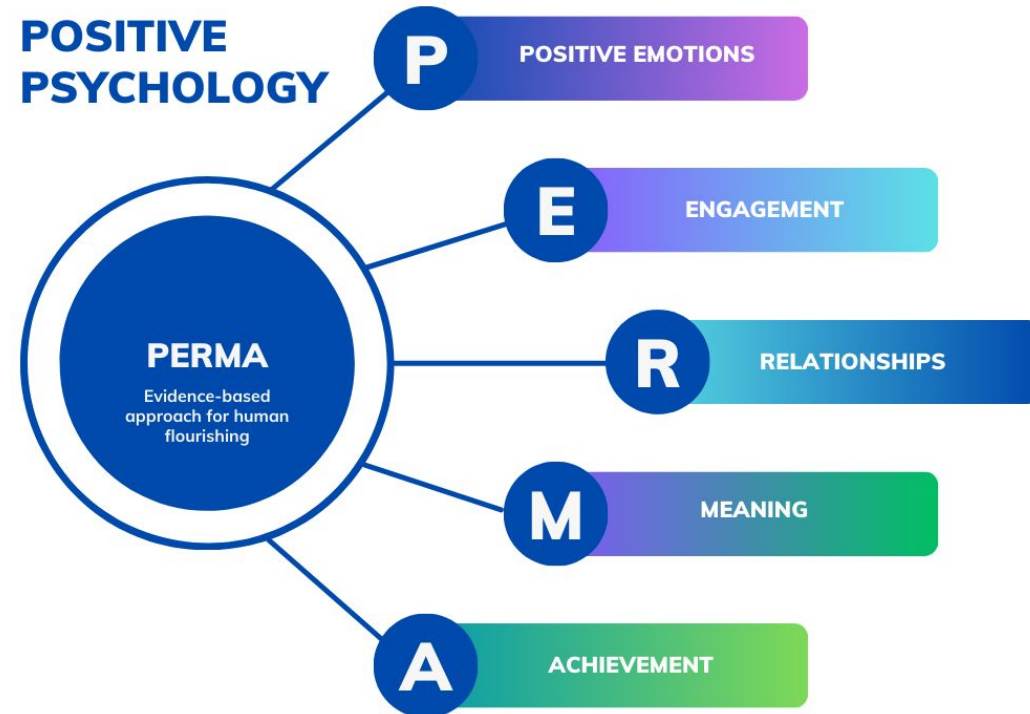


How to Reduce Barriers

Listen to understand

We often communicate with an agenda to change/inspire/coerce others into our way of thinking

True listening is **WITHOUT** an agenda

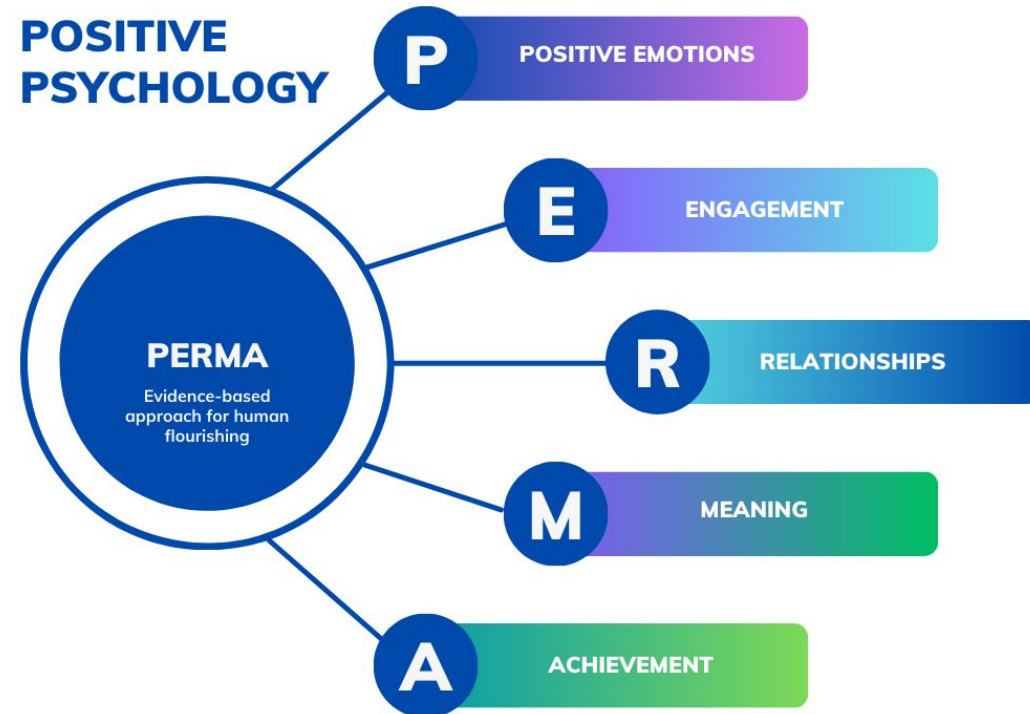


Actionable Steps

Maintain boundaries

Your passion is good ...
for you!

Others will be motivated
in different ways



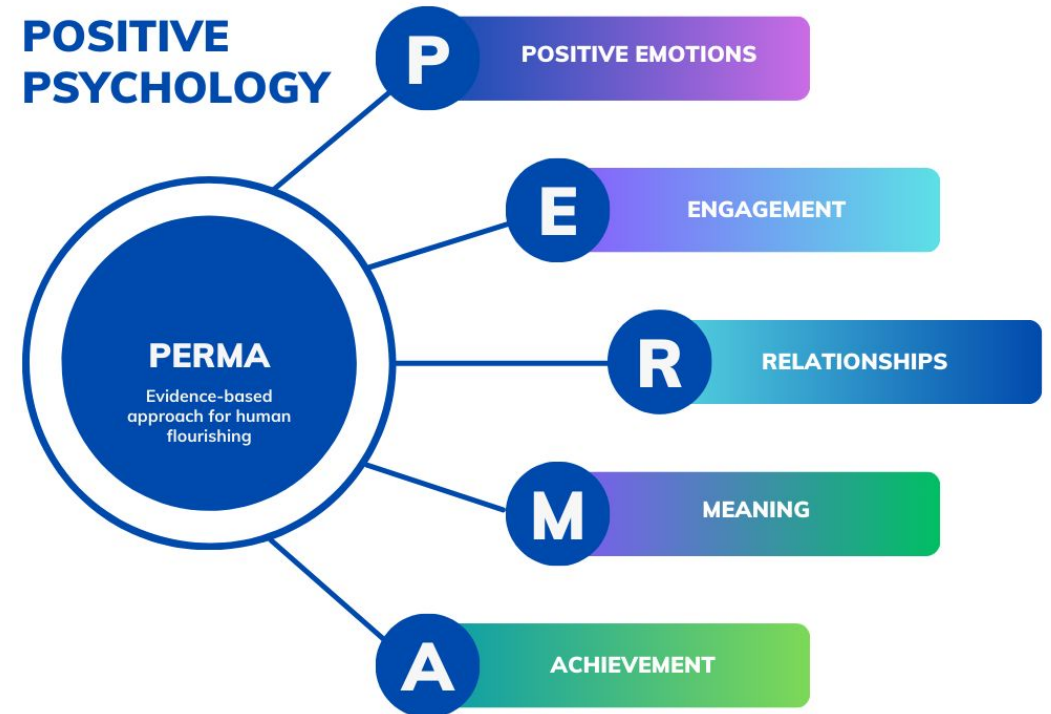
Actionable Steps

Lead by example

There is negativity in the field that we need to accept and acknowledge

At the same time, we need to elevate the positive (in an authentic way)

- 3 to 1 Rule (Dr. Barbara Frederickson): We need to experience at least three positive emotions (e.g., joy, gratitude, curiosity) for every one negative emotion (e.g., anger, fear, sadness) to flourish and remain resilient
- 5 to 1 Ratio (Dr. John Gottman): In relationships, stable couples have at least five positive interactions (compliments, laughter, appreciation) to counteract every one negative interaction during conflict



Next Steps

Focus on ONE of these ideas over the summer

1. Identify your why/who you will be
2. Center your key values
3. Recognize that the work is hard
4. Check your expectations at the door
5. Listen to understand
6. Maintain boundaries
7. Lead by example

Step 1: Pay attention

Step 2: NO JUDGMENT!

Step 3: Look for patterns

Step 4: Keep paying attention

Step 5: Take a step forward

Key Takeaways

We all have our reasons for being here, and that influences our work

The work is hard!

- Our current systems and society make it harder
- We make it harder, too, with distorted beliefs and expectations

Strengthening intentions, reducing barriers, and taking actionable steps under the PERMA framework can help sustain us in our work

Acknowledgements

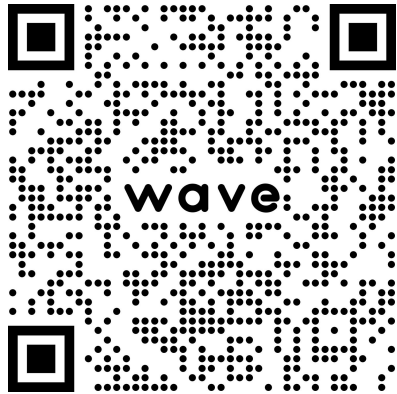
Eco-Cycle, especially Zan Jones, Lex Shannon, and Molly Briggs

Recycle Colorado, especially Ally Byzewski and Brandy Moe

Tim & Lisa Merkel, Amrita George, Sydney LaSasso, Eco-Leaders,
Mary DePasquale

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of
Colorado, Boulder

Thank you!



Kelly Kandra Hughes, PhD
Kelly.kandrahughes@colorado.edu
919-260-9231 (text/call)

DO NOT FOLLOW ME ON SOCIAL MEDIA BECAUSE I NEVER
DO ANYTHING ON THERE!

However, do please reach out via email, text, or phone because I
am always happy to talk to anyone about the intersection of
psychology and conservation, especially as it relates to well-being
and flourishing.

