

A Meaning-Centered 12-Step Program for Addiction Recovery*

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This chapter provides a meaning-centered framework for addiction recovery based on Viktor Frankl's (1986) logotherapy and Wong's (2010a, 2012b) meaning therapy. For a more detailed discussion of this meaning perspective, please refer to Wong (Chapter 13, this book) and Thompson (Chapters 12, 14, this book). In this chapter, we emphasize that the primary motivation for meaning and self-transcendence is the most promising way to achieve full recovery and personal transformation.

At the 2006 Meaning Conference on Addiction, Paul Wong emphasized the need for recovering addicts to be awakened to their true purpose in life and their calling to pursue worthy life goals. This meaning approach is predicated on the belief that addicts not only need to be **free from** addiction, but also **free to** be fully engaged in life in a meaningful and productive way. Only a new passion for living is strong enough to replace the old addiction habit.

The following is an email letter from a recovering addict challenging Wong's meaning hypothesis. This individual seemed intelligent and knowledgeable about Viktor Frankl's work, but also seemed bitter and hopeless about life.

From the addicts' view, they sometimes can barely see today. Their future is very much making it through "just for today," sometimes just this moment. They all want the big picture, which is to get a new life like they dream it should be. Trial and error and time tell us that we can only grow one moment at a time and each new day clean is a victory... The biggest mistake an addict can make in recovery is to focus on the big picture too much and miss the steps needed to get there. It's just like learning a profession or trade, go to school one day at a time, one course at a time and make it the most important time of your life. Sometimes you get A's sometimes a D but you haven't failed the course just that test. Above all it takes Practice, Practice, Practice.

I think I must apologize for preaching to the expert. I didn't even know life was supposed to have a meaning. My life has just been something that happened to me. I've struggled alone all my life. That includes going through two bouts of cancer. And I've never had a goal in my life that was any further ahead than the next meal, or where will I sleep tonight. I have no mission, no goal, no purpose... That's my "existential vacuum," as Viktor Frankl puts it. And there's naught to be done for it... And I have no further expectations of life (other than 'eat more shit') neither do I find anything of life interesting, because nothing stimulates my imagination, curiosity, and therefore my interest... And there's no one, of either gender, to share it with.

This individual was correct in recognizing the need to learn how to realize one's vision step by step. His biggest problem is his existential vacuum and his hopelessness of finding any life goal. This chapter attempts to apply the meaning principle in a step-by-

step manner to facilitate recovery and transformation. We hope that the twelve steps outlined here can evoke our readers' innate motivation for personal growth and self-transcendence in spite of their painful past. We also hope that they will be inspired by Viktor Frankl's message that regardless of life circumstances, they can still have the freedom to take full responsibility for their lives and create a more rewarding and meaningful future.

Step 1: Who Are You? Discover the True Self You Never Knew.

Knowing one's true self is the most important first step for recovery. Most people identify themselves in terms of positions, roles, and relationships. But when everything is stripped away from you, who are you?

No matter how broken you are, and no matter what other people think of you, you need to develop the new conviction that your life has intrinsic value and meaning, because you are a worthy spiritual being with a unique calling to contribute to the greater good. This conviction can become not only the main source of motivation for positive actions, but also a new direction to rebuild your life. The foundation of your future will be built on knowing who you are and who you might become.

You Matter as a Unique Individual

Many people consider themselves to be failures or misfits. They have given up hope and are afraid to look in the mirror. Such a negative self-concept is based on performance rather than the inherent value of being a human. Viktor Frankl (1985), from his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, observed that even in these camps, some were able to live with human dignity and a profound sense of meaning. He also discovered that those who gave up hope and died on the inside usually succumbed to physical death quickly in the camp. Recent research (Wong, 2012a) has clearly shown that having a clear sense of meaning makes us less vulnerable to harsh realities and more likely to function optimally.

You may wonder: How can I really believe that my life has worth and I can have a good future, given all the failures I have gone through? How can I change my poor self-concept to a positive one? Frankl (1985) has made the case that you actually matter as an individual in spite of your setbacks and failures, because of your singularity and potential for growth. As long as you have life, you have the spiritual and psychological potential to become what you were meant to be. It may take hard work and determination to discover your unique calling. Your quest for meaning will keep you moving forward through the dark valleys and obstacles until you become what you were meant to be.

Discover Your Authentic Self

The idea of singularity is important for personal meaning in times of suffering, according to Frankl. You are one of a kind because of a unique combination of personal talents, temperament, and experiences. You need to embrace and celebrate your singularity and

be true to your unique calling in spite of social pressure towards conformity. The challenge is to find out your true purpose in life. This may be a long and difficult process, but at least you need to start with the conviction that you were born for a reason and there is a special task, a mission, waiting for you to fulfill.

During your quest for meaning, you may need to hold down various jobs to make a living, but a sense of calling may make your work more meaningful, regardless of the nature of your job. A big part of searching for your calling is self-knowledge of what you are best at and where your passion lies. It also entails knowing how you should respond to the demands of various situations in life in a responsible way.

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of wisdom,” said Aristotle. If you do not know who you are, how can you know what you really want? “To thine own self be true,” wrote Shakespeare, if you are not true to your calling, who will be? That is why self-knowledge is the first step on your journey towards healing and flourishing. Once you see yourself as an autonomous, authentic person, free to choose your own destiny and create your own future, you will not easily get confused and overwhelmed by life.

Knowing & Accepting Your Dark Side

Just as important as recognizing the positive, spiritual aspect of your being, it is also important to be aware of the dark side of your personality. If you do not confront your vulnerability, it can trip you and defeat your best effort. Happiness is to know and accept the real you in totality – the good, the bad, and the ugly. There is a dark side to every human being. This has been well documented historically, scientifically, and experientially. We are capable of cruelty, atrocities, and evil. If you cannot confront and accept your weaknesses, you will waste a lot of your energy in defending and hiding the real you. In your futile attempts to escape from yourself, you will feel lonely, alienated, fearful, and miserable.

The brutal fact is that you cannot escape from yourself all your life. You may seek temporary escape through distractions, addictions, or sleep, but such escapes may make your life more painful. Your dark sides are your points of vulnerability, the areas where you need help and remediation. Addiction is clearly a point of vulnerability, a problem that needs to be overcome. It may be helpful to separate you as person and your addiction problem. You are a person with a history of addiction, but addiction is not your identity. Your true identity is a human being with a spiritual core and the potential for growth and making a unique, meaningful contribution to society. However, your weaknesses can become your strengths, when you learn to accept, transcend and transform them. You will learn some of the skills in coping with the dark side of life later in this chapter.

Summary:

You are a unique worthy human being in spite of your dark side. You are defined by your intrinsic value and inner strengths rather than by your addiction problem.

Exercises:

Self-Reflection

- Many people in their moments of crisis and despair may wonder: “Who am I?” “What am I doing here?” Such self-reflection often leads to self-awakening to the new possibilities in life. Spend some time reflecting on these questions.
- What kind of person do you want to see yourself be five years down the road?
- How would you describe your self-identity?

Self-Acceptance

- What are the parts of me that I try to hide or escape from? What parts of me are most difficult for me to face?
- What are some forces that have shaped you?

Life Review of Past Success

- Name at least two of your strengths.
- Name at least one thing that you have done in your lifetime that you are proud of – it doesn’t matter how big or small.
- Think of someone who really values you, and cares for you, either in the past or present.

Step 2: What Really Matters in Life? Set Your New Life Goals.

If self-knowledge is the first step towards change, then knowing what you really want in life is a logical next step. Part of your identity is your core values, which can be either self-centered or self-transcendent. What matters most to you reflects your core values. You are defined not by your past, nor by your present circumstances, but by your choice of what really matters in your life.

You may feel too tired to think about your future, having only enough energy to fight for sobriety one day at a time. But sobriety cannot be your sole life purpose. You need a meaningful and achievable life goal to motivate you to move forward. Sobriety would no longer be a problem, when you are preoccupied with the passion for living

In this step, you will learn two important lessons: (1) You are responsible for deciding on your core values and priorities, and (2) You can make your past mistakes and pain into assets in planning for your future.

Taking Ownership of Your Life

If you pause to review your life, you will recall that once upon a time you had dreams and aspirations. Perhaps too many bad things have happened in your life or you have experienced too many broken dreams. You may still be suffering from the aftermath of traumas over which you had no control. Focusing on blame and injustice will not be productive, but taking ownership of your own life will. Ultimately, you are responsible for your own life, if you want to live an authentic and fulfilling life. Your past does not

need to be a liability; it can be an asset. Everything that has happened so far in your life can become part of a new story, a story of triumph rather than tragedy. Only you can learn from your painful experiences – mistakes can make you wiser, pain can make you stronger, and faith can make you more hopeful. You can start reviewing your life and writing a new life story.

Setting New Life Goals

After assuming full responsibility for your own life, you may find the task of setting new life goals daunting, either because of too many options or the lack of opportunities. Whatever your circumstances, you can start by setting a clear and achievable life goal on the basis of your past lessons, your best strengths and values, and what life demands of you in your present station of life.

Steve Jobs' epiphany is a good example:

“When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: 'If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right.' It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been "No" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

As a young man, Jobs already learned to follow his heart and he became what he was meant to be. We need to become aware of our own calling, either from a transcendental source or from our own inner voice. Awakening is both a turning point and a process. Many things can trigger an awakening – a tragedy, a sermon, a time of reflection, all have the potential to make you realize that there is more to life than everyday busyness and striving for money or fame. Once you are awakened to the true purpose of your life, you will continue on the path of enlightenment. Research and experience have shown that several areas can endow life with meaning (Frankl, 1985; Peterson, 2013; Wong, 1998); these include family and friends, helping others, developing one's full potentials, and contributing to society. You may notice that the common denominator of all these domains is self-transcendence – transcending self-interests and self-limitations to serve a higher purpose and the greater good.

Summary:

Your life goals may evolve over time, changing across different life stages and stations, but you need a meaningful life goal to keep you moving forward. No matter how menial your day-to-day work is, the idea that you are moving towards a meaningful life goal will

make your work more enjoyable and meaningful.

The take-home lessons for Step 2 are to make your past stepping stones for moving forward and to choose a life goal that really matters.

Exercises:

Choices

Try to answer the following questions concisely:

- What would you love to do most, if you were free to pursue anything you want?
- What do you really care about? What matters to you? What are the things you have been passionate about?
- What dreams did you cherish before addiction took over your life?

Goal-Setting

We can begin with where you are at this moment. Think of the kind of projects you want to do. Write down a list of worthy projects you want to pursue. Select one that reflects your interests and values most, for examples, reconciliation with your loved ones or going back to school to complete your education, etc.

It is important that you start engaging in an activity that has intrinsic value— something that is worth doing in its own right, such as volunteering, learning, etc.. The more intrinsic your core values, the less dependent you are on contingencies or external circumstances. The more self-transcending your life goal is, the more meaningfulness you will experience.

Stepping Stones

- Name one or two most helpful lessons you have learned from your painful addiction experiences.
- Name one or two helpful lessons from your journey of recovery.
- How do these lessons help you decide on your future life goals?

Step 3: How Do I Live a Good Life? Discover Your Mindset.

In Step 2, we emphasize the importance of doing what really matters and setting worthy life goals. In Step 3, we make it explicit that meaningful life goals are primarily based on the life orientation of self-transcendence—a life of serving the greater good.

There are different assumptions of what constitutes a good life. Most people equate the good life with worldly success, but a success mindset will lead you to the same frustrations, despair, anger, and pain that led you to addiction. We propose an alternative life orientation, which is called the Meaning Mindset (Wong, 2012d).

The Meaning Hypothesis

Since antiquity, in both East and West, human beings have been actively engaged in the quest for the good life. Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, and Chinese philosophers, such as Lao Tse and Confucius, have wrestled with such questions as "What are the highest human values for society?" "What is the nature of the good life?" and "What is the meaning of life?" This line of questioning reflects the human yearning for the good life.

Contemporary psychology has paid increasing attention to the ubiquitous presence and the importance of meaning in human life (Baumeister, 1991; Bruner, 1990, Steger, 2012; Wong, 2012a). Regardless of one's theoretical perspective, and regardless of one's religion, there is some consensus that meaning matters in the good life. It is not possible to live a good life that is devoid of meaning and purpose. Interestingly, the same point was made by Tony Robbins in his recent interview with Piers Morgan (CNN Piers Morgan tonight, 2013).

The meaning hypothesis as advocated by Viktor Frankl is that, more than happiness and success, meaning is the most important value or virtue that enables us to overcome our personal demons and live a fulfilling and rewarding life. The present 12-step program is based on the meaning hypothesis. The meaning mindset is one of the essential steps towards developing meaningfulness.

The Meaning Mindset

A mindset is a way of looking at the world, a basic life orientation. Some may call it "worldview" or "frame of reference," which refers to the kind of lens through which you perceive the world or the dominant principle that shapes your life. We hypothesize that a meaning mindset will lead to healing and flourishing, in spite of your circumstances. You may want to complete a brief scale to assess your own mindset (see Appendix A)

If you are primarily concerned with extrinsic motivation, such as possessions, prestige, and power, then success is your core value and your basic life orientation. However, if your primary concerns are about intrinsic motivation, such as developing your potentials and serving the public good, then your basic life orientation may be called a meaning mindset.

Meaning Mindset vs. Success Mindset

One of Viktor Frankl's most important contributions was to challenge people to switch from a success mindset to a meaning mindset. This basic change in life orientation fundamentally changes a person's life direction and liberates one from anxieties about success and failure.

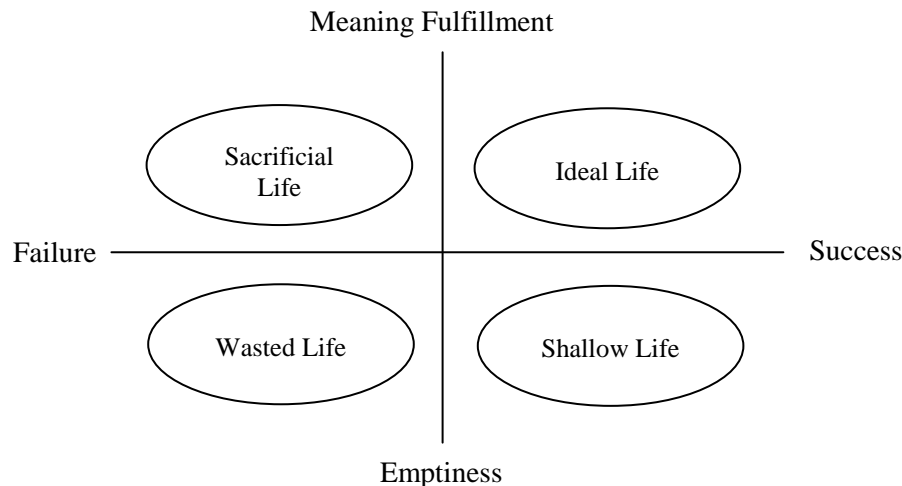


Figure 1. The Meaning Axis vs. The Success Axis (Source: see Wong, 2012d)

As illustrated in Figure 1, when you pursue a meaningful life as your vision for the good life and are able to realize it, then you are living an ideal life. But sometimes, you may not have the opportunities to achieve your dream or gain recognition. In this case, you will be living a sacrificial but can still feel fulfilled for living a meaningful life. A good example is the painter Vincent Van Gogh, who never sold a painting in his lifetime, but never stopped pursuing his ideal of trying to capture the beauty of nature on canvas. If you choose a success mindset, then you are doomed to live a shallow life, regardless of how successful you are. If you pursue success as your life goal, you are running the risk of wasting your life, if success eludes you.

Developing a Meaning Mindset

To fully understand and practice the meaning mindset will take time and effort because it is like forming a new habit. For example, when you start thinking about a situation in terms of how it will benefit you or the likelihood of success, you are under the control of a success mindset. On the other hand, if you start thinking, “what would be the right thing for me to do in this situation?” you are beginning to practice the meaning mindset. You can apply this logic to every situation in your life. Dr. Frankl (1985) has always emphasized that we do not ask what we can expect from life but rather what life demands of us.

A meaning orientation focuses on meaning fulfillment as the ultimate life purpose. In other words, the primary concern of the meaning mindset is the fulfillment of self-transcendence—to fulfill one’s potential and calling to serve others. We need to intentionally cultivate loving kindness and practice the habit of serving others without any concern for personal gain or loss. It requires diligence and consistency, until it becomes our second nature.

In the long run, you will be liberated from worries about failure or success and from concerns about self-interest. This is not an easy process and it is not something that can be accomplished in one day. It requires daily practice in thinking about “how can I help someone?” and “how can I make this world better?”

What are those things that are really worth living for? What are the things that matter more to you than a fleeting moment of happiness or temporary respect and recognition? Everyone can live a meaningful life, regardless of circumstances, abilities, or resources. There is no failure in the pursuit of meaning fulfillment. To live a worthy life, you need to set a worthy life goal – a goal that is worth dying for.

According to Frankl (1985), even with little or no resources, and in terrible conditions themselves, those in the concentration camps were driven by the purpose of caring for others and found some way to do it: “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread.... They offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way” (p. 86).

The meaning orientation will sustain us when we are unhappy or unsuccessful, because it will give us a reason for living. The meaning orientation will also protect us against temptations and excesses, because we will always focus on what really matters. Success and happiness may even come through the back door.

Exercises:

Reflection

- Write a brief paragraph entitled: “This I believe.” Describe what you believe to be the most valuable and important in life.
- What is your definition of a good life? What would you like written on your epitaph?
- What is something that matters more to you than happiness and success?

Serving

- Each day, look for an opportunity to help someone in need. These needs may be material, psychological, or spiritual. Your job is to express your care in a practical way.
- Don’t be disappointed if you encounter rejection or lack of response. Remind yourself that you are simply doing what matters and fulfilling your calling of self-transcendence. Learn from this experience and make it an opportunity to examine whether you have expressed your care appropriately.

Minimalism

- Suppose you are allowed to take only three things with you to a distant place, what would they be, and why?

- How will you simplify your life so that you have more time and money to serve others?

Intrinsic Motivation

- How would you motivate yourself to continually improve your work performance?
- Do you know the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation? Why is intrinsic motivation generally more beneficial?

Step 4: Is Life Worth Living in Bad Times? Learn the Basic Concepts of Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy.

The first three steps lay the philosophical foundation for building a meaningful life primarily based on Viktor Frankl's logotherapy. In Step 4, we will discuss the basic tenets of logotherapy, which further reinforce the philosophical foundation of meaningful living. Viktor Frankl confronted the existential crisis of his time, and developed logotherapy as an antidote to the problem of meaninglessness. Applying the principles of logotherapy will greatly help you in your own quest for meaning.

Meaninglessness & Existential Vacuum

“Is life worth living?” This is one of the most important and provocative questions ever asked. During times of despair or bitterness, perhaps you have concluded that there is no point in striving. Here are two classical examples from the Old Testament of the Bible about the problem of meaninglessness.

Job experienced despair and bitterness. He had everything taken away from him; within a short period of time, his possessions were stolen, his children were killed, and he was afflicted with painful sores covering his body.

Solomon had a different problem: meaninglessness—as a king, he had everything he could possibly desire; with tremendous wealth, power, and multiple women, yet he found everything to be empty. The whole world was not enough, because all his achievements and possessions could not fill the hole in his soul. Meaninglessness is simply part of the inescapable human condition. How do we meet this crying need for meaning?

Dr. Viktor Frankl was a modern day Job. He was taken away from his home and medical practice and sent to the Nazi concentration camps. His autobiography, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1985), remains the No.1 bestseller in the self-help category of Amazon.com. This book is based on his painful experiences and discovery of the meaning of suffering in Nazi concentration camps. Given his personal experiences and clinical insights, his logotherapy is most helpful to the suffering masses. Frankl's message is that you can say “Yes” to life no matter how difficult, because your life's meaning is stronger than all your suffering, and your mission is greater than your pain. His meaning-seeking model,

based on the following tenets, will empower you to overcome your personal demons and achieve your dreams.

The Three Basic Tenets of Logotherapy

The three basic tenets of logotherapy are: (1) Freedom of will, (2) Will to meaning, and (3) Meaning of life.

(1) Freedom of will. “The one thing you can’t take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one’s freedoms is the ability to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances” (Frankl, 1985, p.12). Freedom of will refers to the basic human capacity for self-determination or autonomy. Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory has demonstrated that autonomy is essential for well-being and growth.

We have learned in the previous three steps that a sense of responsibility is a prerequisite for living an authentic life. Responsibility and self-transcendence are the two pillars of logotherapy. Responsibility is inextricably linked to the freedom of will. In every situation, we need to respond to the meaning potentials of the situation in an ethical and responsible way. We need to be aware that there are four ways to misuse our responsibility: Relinquish it, abuse it, overstep it, and deprive others of their responsibility. The best way to avoid these various forms of abuse is to listen to our inner compass or intuitive conscience.

(2) Will to meaning. “Life can be pulled by goals just as surely as it can be pushed by drives” (Frankl, 1985). The will to meaning refers to both the primary need for meaning, which drives us, as well as the specific life goals that pull us. Meaningful life goals are based on the practice of self-transcendence and self-detachment. We are able to serve others and serve a higher purpose only to the extent that we learn to detach from our own selfish desires or self-centered concerns. Self-transcendence also enables us to transcend our internal and external limitations.

In order to fulfill the will to meaning, individuals need to be prepared psychologically because self-transcendence entails self-sacrifice. To discover one’s calling is to find something worth fighting for and dying for. To live out one’s calling is to overcome obstacles and oppositions.

(3) Meaning of life. This tenet affirms the intrinsic value and meaning of life in every situation. Therefore, we can discover meaning in life regardless of our life circumstance, even until our last breath. Since the meaning of life is unique and specific to each person, each person must discover the meaning potential of each situation and life as a whole. However, “the meaning of our existence is not invented by ourselves, but rather detected” (Frankl, 1963, p.133), because we cannot arbitrarily decide what is meaningful with no regard to ethics and values (e.g., the case of Hitler); the discovery of meaning has to be guided by authenticity and time-tested values.

Meaning of life includes both situational and ultimate meaning (Frankl, 1985). Situational meaning refers to the moment-to-moment specific demands from each situation. The ultimate meaning refers to how we fit into the larger scheme of things,

relating to questions such as “What should I do with my life?” “What is the point of all my striving?” or “What will happen to me after I die?”

This affirmation of meaning is based on the spiritual or noetic dimension. Fabry (1998) wrote: “People’s lives will be meaningful to the extent that their human spirit is able to tune in on the ‘Ultimate Meaning’ . . . in the suprahuman dimension of the Spirit (with a capital S)” (pp. 297–298).

The detection of the meaning of the moment, from situation to situation, can be facilitated by having an overall meaning orientation (ultimate meaning). For example, if you believe that your ultimate purpose is to show compassion towards others and share with them God’s love, you might see fit to strike up a conversation with a distressed stranger to find out how you can be of help.

Affirmation of meaning also affects your career. Whatever your chosen career, whatever your temporary job, don't forget your calling and don't underestimate the significance of doing ordinary things for a higher purpose. Meaning will make your work more enjoyable.

The Meaning Triangle

On a more concrete level, Frankl (1985) describes the Meaning Triangle as the three avenues that lead to the experience of meaningfulness. These three pathways to meaning are also referred to as the three values of meaning because they represent three categories of time-tested, universal values:

- *Creative value:* We find meaning through giving something to the world in service and creative work. It also means staying actively engaged with life. Even cancer patients can still find meaning through creative value such as handicrafts, painting, etc.
- *Experiential value:* We find meaning through receiving from the world, such as appreciating each moment or enjoying the love and kindness of relationships. This is equivalent to learning how to savor the present moment with an attitude of openness and gratitude. You can make sense of things intellectually, but you can only make sense of life by living through it first. If we have never gone through the valleys of life, we will never truly understand the meaning of suffering.
- *Attitudinal value:* We find meaning through our attitude towards suffering and fate. Through our defiant human spirit, we are able to turn tragedy into triumph. In order to create a better future, we need to face our inner demons and external obstacles. This takes tremendous courage and a defiant spirit. We must defy the many things that seek to oppress or defeat us.

Whatever may be troubling you, if you apply this meaning triangle to your problem and meditate on it, you will find a way to overcome or transcend your predicament. For example, the creative value of suffering includes doing something to relieve the suffering of other people. In helping others, your own suffering is reduced. The experiential value includes valuing the social support offered by others and appreciating the presence of loved ones. The attitudinal value of suffering includes taking a heroic stance or trusting in God.

Exercises:**Responsibility**

- Many people think that addiction is a disease. If you agree with this position, what kind of responsibility do you have in coping with your addiction?
- If life has been very unfair to you, what is your responsibility in reacting to your experience of injustice?
- Your genes and circumstances may largely shape who you are, but you are responsible for who you will become. What kind of choices will you make now to shape your own future?

Will to Meaning

- What is the major difference between Frankl's concept of pursuit of meaning and the contemporary concept of pursuit of success and happiness?
- In what ways does the will to meaning enable you to become a better person?
- What is the difference between ultimate meaning and situational meaning?
- In what concrete ways are you able to apply the concept of self-transcendence to your life and work?

Meaning of Life

- In what way does your belief in the meaning of life help you cope with your addiction problem?
- How would you encourage a friend who has lost his job and is in despair?
- If you believe that there is purpose in life and there is a reason for your existence, how would that make you more resilient?

Meaning Triangle

- Meditate on the meaning triangle and discover how each of the values can help you defeat the demon of addiction or overcome any other problems.
- Sit before a wall and focus on a significant other in your life, discovering what good the person has brought into your life or anything you have done to wrong the person. What will you do to show your appreciation or make amends?
- What kind of freedom can you have in a very oppressive situation, like the Nazi concentration camps?

Step 5: What are the Basic Components of Meaning? Identify the Building Blocks of Meaningful Living.

Everyone talks about meaning – meaningful work, meaningful relationships, meaningful beauty, and meaningful life. But what does meaning really mean? Building on the foundation laid out in previous steps, in Step 5 we provide a comprehensive definition of meaning, which serves as a framework for building a meaningful life.

Meaning Defined

A lack of clear definition of meaning has hindered meaning research and applications. After reviewing all the relevant literature in psychology, Wong (2010a, 2012b) has concluded that meaning consists of four essential components: Purpose, Understanding, Responsibility, and Enjoyment, which can be represented by the acronym PURE. This framework provides clear guidelines for meaningful living.

Purpose—*The motivational component.* Life purpose is important in clarifying our life direction and core values, organizing our activities and daily plans, and in setting long-term and short-term goals.

Purpose addresses questions such as: What matters most to me? What is my calling? What are my dreams and goals? What are my strengths and passions? Where am I going? What do I want to live for? What would be worth dying for?

When you start rebuilding your life, you need to be very clear and precise on what you want to do with the rest of your life. You need to discover a purpose that is most consistent with your ideals, your values, and calling. If you do not have a clear sense of calling, then it will be easy to go astray and end up in the wrong place. It is also important that our purpose is noble and ethical; it needs to be consistent with the meaning mindset of self-transcendence and intrinsic motivation.

Understanding—*The cognitive component.* Understanding involves full awareness of the situation and the consequences of one's action. From the standpoint of Viktor Frankl (1985), it is to listen to our intuitive conscience and respond to the demand quality of the situation. This means knowing right from wrong and understanding legal/ethical principles in decision-making.

It is important to know ourselves and understand our place in the larger scheme of things; this is what Frankl meant by Ultimate Meaning. Self-knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses reduces self-deception. There are tools available for self-assessment regarding strengths, interests, and personality traits.

Finally, understanding involves achieving a sense of coherence in the midst of uncertainties, chaos, and absurdities. We have to make some sense of life, even if we have to create myths.

Responsible action—*The behavioral component.* Responsibility and freedom go together. Responsibility has moral implications. To be a responsible person is to be a moral agent. Doing the right thing is the surest way to feel good about ourselves.

Having a sense of social responsibility prevents the excesses of the egotistic pursuit of personal happiness and success. Responsible action addresses such questions as: What can I do in this situation? Where does my freedom lie in these circumstances? What are my realistic options that are consistent with my values and beliefs? What is the right and responsible thing to do in this situation? In what ways can I make amends for mistakes I have made?

Enjoyment/Evaluation—*The affective component.* Enjoyment is the natural result of leading a purposeful and responsible life with a sense of contentment and well-being in all circumstances. But it is by no means definite, because our understanding is

less than perfect and our ability to carry out our responsibilities is often hampered by internal and external constraints.

The best part of adopting the PURE way to the good life is that we will not achieve happiness at the expense of others and we can develop our full potential without harming others. The PURE way will lead to the life that is good in every sense, emotionally, intellectually, relationally, and morally.

However, if we still do not experience happiness after practicing PURE, we may need to re-examine our life purpose, understanding, and actions in order to do some fine-tuning. The PURE way is basically a process of self-regulation that requires honest self-reflection and courageous action. Evaluation involves evaluating the first three elements of PURE.

Summary:

The meaning hypothesis posits that the pursuit of meaning is the most promising way to repair what is wrong and to bring out what is right. This hypothesis is supported by ample empirical evidence. It will also continue to generate more research (Wong, 2012a). The meaning hypothesis is the basis for meaning therapy (Wong, 2010a, 2012b).

The PURE intervention strategy is a very flexible approach, because it can be applied to relationship (Wong & Wong, in press) and management (Wong, 2010b). We now apply it to addiction recovery.

Exercises:

- Write a simple and concise mission statement for your life, not more than one paragraph.
- Is your life mission stronger than your urge for addiction?
- Do you have a deeper understanding now of how you have gotten into addiction and why you need to stay sober?
- If you are in the process of making an important decision, consider how your decision will affect your future, your family and friends, society, and the environment. If you are religious, you may ask yourself how you would give an account to God about your decision.
- Apply the PURE model to a current situation in your life.

Step 6: How Do I Find Happiness in Difficult Times? Discover the Sources of Authentic Happiness.

Everybody wants happiness, but very few understand what true happiness is. In this step, we emphasize that when our primary concern is to pursue meaning and virtue, authentic happiness will come in through the back door. Seligman (2002) emphasizes that meaning is just one of the three components of authentic happiness; Frankl (1985) and Wong (2013) elevate the role of meaning and propose that authentic happiness flows from living an authentic life of self-transcendence.

Meaning-based authentic happiness is accessible to everyone who chooses meaning as their primary life objective. It also has more enduring power than hedonic happiness, which is dependent on pleasant circumstances and positive moods. Most importantly, it enables us to enjoy peace and contentment even in adversity.

What is authentic happiness? There are several facets to a meaning-based authentic happiness. We have already discussed self-acceptance, self-transcendence, and the PURE model. Now, consider the importance of virtue and living a balanced life.

Virtue as a Key Component

The ancient sages considered the good life to be a morally exemplary life characterized by virtues that benefit both the individual and society. Aristotle equates the good life with “eudaimonia,” which may be translated as the virtuous life or flourishing life. The four interconnected cardinal virtues according to Aristotle are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. According to Aristotle, to live the good life is to become what we ought to be as human beings. Thus, his view of the good life is based on living right and fulfilling what we are meant to be rather than on positive emotions and materialistic success.

Confucius equates the good life with the harmonious life, within an ordered society guided by the five cardinal virtues: benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness or loyalty. The good life consists of both inner cultivation of virtues as well as fulfilling one’s proper role within the family and society. Psychological research has shown that we feel good when we do good deeds (e.g., Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). One implication of this line of research is that society would become more humane and just when we value and practice altruism and compassion.

Frankl’s meaning hypothesis is that we are moral beings living in a moral universe. We cannot flourish without being guided by a moral compass to do what is right and responsible. According to the meaning perspective, happiness rests in fulfillment of your life purpose of responsibility and self-transcendence.

Another important consideration in meaning-based authentic happiness is living a meaningful life based on balancing different sources of meaning (McDonald, Wong, & Gingras, 2012; Wong, 2012c). In other words, living a balanced life is predicated on the breadth of various sources of meaning (Reker, 1994; Reker & Wong, 1988).

Sources of Meaning-Based Happiness

Wong (1998) asked hundreds of people from all walks of life what would make their lives meaningful if money was not an issue. Based on their responses, he discovered that there are eight sources of meaning:

- Positive affect – Feeling satisfied with life
- Achievement – Striving and attaining worthy life goals
- Relationship – Relating well to others and community

- Intimacy – Having family and close friends
- Acceptance – Being at peace with oneself
- Religion – Having a personal relationship with God
- Self-transcendence – Losing oneself in serving others
- Fairness/justice – Being treated fairly

It is noteworthy that these sources of meaning are also sources of happiness (e.g., Myers, 1993). The good life is not based on single-minded pursuit of only what one is good at or what one is passionate about. Often ambitious individuals sacrifice their families and friends in chasing after their cherished dreams. Feverish engagement in activities can lead to disillusionment and burnout. Ambition needs to be balanced with relationship. Active engagement needs to be balanced by rest, meditation, and self-reflection. In the face of obstacles and setbacks, striving for accomplishment also needs to be balanced by acceptance of one's limitations and external constraints. Even the virtuous and spiritual act of self-transcendence cannot be one-sided. If one simply keeps giving without any reciprocal appreciation or return, one would experience discouragement and disappointment. Therefore, for the practice of self-transcendence to be sustainable and enjoyable, it needs to be balanced by fairness and reciprocation.

Summary:

According to the meaning perspective, you can still have authentic happiness even when you go through trying times, because such happiness is not dependent on external circumstances but on living a meaningful life of self-transcendence. The take home message of Step 6 is that meaning-based authentic happiness needs to be virtuous and balanced.

Exercises:

- Try to help someone who is less fortunate than you are and describe how you feel afterwards.
- If you are bored with pleasurable activities, try something that challenges your intellect, courage, or skill.
- Discover the joy of letting go of something that has been bothering you.
- Is there a balance in your life? Complete the brief PMP (Appendix B) and see if the scores are evenly distributed.

Step 7: How to Maintain Hope after Trauma? Practice Tragic Optimism.

According to the meaning hypothesis, meaning is the key to the good life; happiness and hope are the experiential proof that this hypothesis actually works. In Step 6, we concluded that authentic happiness depends on authentic living rather than positive circumstances. In Step 7, we show how you can keep your hope alive even when you feel that your world is falling apart. Most recovering addicts are no strangers to tragic events. Some of them know well what it is like to hit rock bottom.

Our daily news are full of traumatic events. Some of these traumatic events may be compared to Nazi death camps in terms of the scope of atrocities committed by humans against innocent people. The inmates at the camps were not only subjected to unimaginable degradation and deprivation, they were also threatened with impending death in gas chambers. Out of such a horrible ordeal, Dr. Viktor Frankl developed his concept of Tragic Optimism (TO; Frankl, 1985). According to Frankl (1985), tragic optimism is "an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best always allows for (1) turning suffering into human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action" (p. 162).

As we have discussed in Step 4, an attitude of the defiant human spirit, one of the components of the meaning triangle, is important in turning suffering into opportunity for heroic achievement. Awakening to one's true purpose and responsibility represents the second basic tenet of logotherapy. Transforming guilt into personal growth highlights the power of meaning making.

TO is the only kind of hope that can survive the worst kind of tragedies and traumas. Based on what happened after 9/11, the Asian tsunami, and more recent tragic disasters, we are more convinced than ever that TO is part of the process of recovery. Meditating on the meaning triangle can help people develop TO in tragic situations. More importantly, Wong (2009) has identified at least five basic ingredients for this construct based on logotherapy and resilience research.

(1) Acceptance of What Cannot Be Changed

It is becoming increasingly clear that we are living in a world full of suffering and tragic events. In this climate, it may be more realistic and healthier to develop a tragic sense of life. All of us grow old, become ill, and eventually die. All of us have either experienced or know someone who has experienced some kind of tragic event. Accepting life as it is or reality as we experience it is a necessary part of developing a tragic sense of life.

We have to learn to accept the fact that no matter how careful we are, bad things sometimes do happen to good people. No matter how much we try to avoid or escape adversity, it is never too far around the corner.

(2) Affirmation of the Meaning and Value of Life, Regardless of Circumstances

This is one of Frankl's basic tenets. Affirmation or belief is a necessary antidote to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. If we only accept the bleak reality we are in, we naturally feel helpless and depressed. However, affirmation or belief can lift our spirits and empower us to move on. Affirming the intrinsic meaning and value of life is the foundation—an idea that we have emphasized in Step 1. We need to return to this foundational belief when our presumptive world is shattered. If we firmly believe that life

is worth living no matter what the circumstances, we are more likely to continue the difficult task of recovery.

In this step, we emphasize the importance of believing in recovery, no matter how many times we have failed or how broken our lives have become. The sun will rise again, no matter how stormy the night. We just have to believe that recovery is possible and wholeness is possible.

(3) Self-Transcendence in Serving the Greater Good

In self-transcendence, we lose ourselves in a higher service, and we find meaning by giving of ourselves to others. In fact, the central theme of logotherapy is finding meaning through self transcendence as we have emphasized repeatedly in this chapter. In times of crisis, such as 9/11 and the Connecticut school shooting, people naturally come together to help one another in a selfless way. In traditional 12-step recovery program, sponsorship, and small group meetings are expressions of self-transcendence.

(4) Faith or Trust in God and Others

Faith in God and prayer have been sources of strength and optimism to countless individuals in practically hopeless situations. It has often been said that man's adversity is God's opportunity. Faith represents a flickering light at the end of the tunnel. Often, it is the only positive expectation in an otherwise dark and hopeless world. Yahne and Miller (1999) referred to faith-based hope as the net that catches one when all else fails. Such hope is vested not in oneself but in a higher power (Tillich, 1958). That is why in the traditional twelve steps, seeking help from God or a Higher Power is an essential step for recovery. In this step, we also emphasize the importance of seeking professional help for problems. Denial or delay can exacerbate the problem.

Faith also includes our trust in other people. We gain strength from togetherness. We will elaborate on this in Step 11.

(5) Courage to Face Adversity

Courage may be considered as the "master gland," because without it other glands will not function well. It is the pivotal point of TO – all other components hinge on courage – the heroic, defiant human spirit. We need courage to face tomorrow, courage to grow old, and courage to face sickness and death. One cannot be optimistic without the courage to face an unknown and uncertain future. Courage does not mean fearlessness to the point of being reckless. It does mean that you take all the precautions, make all the preparations, pray with all your heart, and then, move forward bravely in spite of fear.

We can cultivate this courage by recalling all the incidences of adversities in which we have overcome. We can also practice what Dr. Frankl called "paradoxical intention" by facing what we fear most through our imagination. We do not know how courageous we are until we are severely tested.

Summary:

The above five strands work together to form a strong rope that will not break under any circumstances. Tragic Optimism (TO) is the only kind of optimism that can survive the worst kinds of tragic events. Armed with TO, you are on your way to a resilient life. A recovered drug addict recently wrote to the senior author that the concept of TO has been more helpful to his recovery than anything else; he is now happily married and doing well in graduate school.

Recovery is a hard and steep journey. You travel on it one day at a time and one step at a time. When you fail, you just get back to the healing path. Never lose sight of your life goal. Never lose faith in complete recovery. The psychological scars may still linger. You may still have to cope with the fallouts from your past abuse of substance or alcohol. You may even suffer from post-traumatic-stress symptoms (PTSD). But you still can have hope for a bright future, if you practice meaning-based tragic optimism.

Exercises:

- Think of a tragic situation that you have experienced or witnessed and discover new grounds for hope based on Step 7.
- How does meaning make tragic optimism stronger than hopes based on positive thinking and confidence in one's own competence?
- Think of a task that you have been avoiding because of its difficulty and its high risk for failure. How would the concept of tragic optimism empower you to complete this task?

Step 8: Practical Steps to Build Resilience: The ABCDE Model

Tragic optimism (TO) teaches us the foundational attitude that enables us to maintain hope and keep moving forward, even in the most difficult of times. Building on this foundation, the ABCDE (Wong, 2010a) provides us with tools to cope with the hardships in life and transform the negatives into positives. It shows us what does not kill us makes us stronger.

TO is like stress inoculation that prepares you for the hard life ahead. The ABCDE strategy equips you with the skills to cope with the stress and troubles that may come your way. The ABCDE can be used to address a variety of problems and predicaments in life. Some personal problems may stem from deeply rooted unresolved issues. Some may be due to circumstantial difficulties. The ABCDE intervention is an all-purpose coping strategy.

ABCDE stands for:

- *Accept* and confront the reality -- *the reality principle*.
- *Believe* that life is worth living – *the faith principle*.
- *Commit* to goals and actions – *the action principle*.

- *Discover* the meaning and significance of self and situations – *the Aha! principle*.
- *Evaluate* the above – *the self-regulation principle*

Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean resigning or giving up. When we accept our problems, we are no longer in denial. We no longer expend our energy trying to pretend or prove that there is nothing wrong with us. The first step in AA's twelve-step recovery programs—acknowledging one's addiction problem—is a case in point. Before we can move forward, we need to face the difficult realities of loss, addiction, weaknesses, limitations, traumas, and existential givens (e.g., our own mortality, alienation, finitude). Acceptance means accepting life as is. We need to learn to accept the imperfections in ourselves, in others, and in the world in which we live. We also need to learn to accept annoyances, frustrations, and normal anxieties in our everyday lives.

Belief

Belief incorporates the affirmation and faith principles of TO. Belief means affirming one's ideals, core values, and faith in the things that give you hope. It may involve a belief in an Ultimate Rescuer or Higher Power. It could also mean believing in the eventual triumph of good and justice. During difficult times, we need to return to and nurture these beliefs.

Commitment

Commitment refers to moving forward and carrying out one's convictions with determination, doing what needs to be done regardless of feelings or circumstances. It means striving to fulfill one's responsibility, including enduring hardship and pain for a worthy cause.

When we are committed to our mission or life goal, we will not allow temptations to lead us astray or bad habits to lure us back to addiction. Commitment may also involve embracing suffering or personal loss for the sake of the higher purpose or calling. Commitment is intimately related to PURE because both pursuing your life purpose and fulfilling your responsibility entail commitment. Furthermore, applying the ABCDE to cope with obstacles and setbacks also entails commitment.

Discovery

Every challenge presents an opportunity to learn something new about oneself and life. We may discover our hidden courage and strength through striving. Our faith may grow deeper and we may discover the power of spiritual resources in times of great needs. We may grasp the complexities of life and people in a new way. These discoveries may lead us to a richer understanding of life and greater ability to empathize and walk with others through similar difficulties. Our meaning-seeking and meaning-making abilities allow us

to find a secret gift in our suffering. We may discover ways in which these circumstances can ultimately serve our higher purpose.

Evaluation & Enjoyment

At the end of this process we reflect on the results. It is a chance to review the situation, assess our progress, consider feedback from others, and make adjustments as needed. We also take time to enjoy the positive results and savor the small successes.

Summary:

PURE and ABCDE, the two pillars for meaningful living and meaning therapy, build on the foundation of Frankl's meaning-seeking model. If you can practice ABCDE, you can overcome solvable problems and transcend problems that are beyond your control.

Exercises:

- What are some things about yourself or your life that you find difficult to accept? What are the barriers to acceptance? Discover what would happen to you when you fully accept that aspect of yourself.
- In what ways does your defensiveness or self-deception prevent you from finding solutions to your problems?
- What are some of the beliefs that sustain you and give you hope during difficult times? Make a list.
- What is the vision you have been pursuing? How would the ABCDE model empower you to overcome opposition and obstacles?

Step 9: What Should I Do When I Feel Stuck or Trapped? Use the Double Vision Strategy.

The central concept for meaningful living is to be awakened to your responsibility for the higher purpose of self-transcendence. The double vision strategy is closely linked to the central concept of self-transcendence. We will not find solutions for our problems if we only focus on our immediate present situation. But when we consider our place in the larger scheme of things, and consider our responsibility to others, we begin to see our personal problems in proper perspective and gain new understanding.

Do you feel trapped in a bad relationship, lifestyle, dead-end job, or in a painful situation with no way out? Do you feel that the setbacks are insurmountable? In these situations, we may feel stuck and not know how to resolve our personal predicaments. The paradox is that sometimes the more we focus on finding a solution to these problems, the more confused and frustrated we become. The more we give our lives to others, the smaller our personal problems become.

Consider the proverbial frog at the bottom of the well. To this poor creature, the sky is no bigger than the opening of the well. It has no knowledge of the vast world all around it.

Also consider the Chinese axiom: “If you step back from your problem, you will see the ocean and the sky open up before you.”

What is Double Vision?

Double vision means that while we are confronted with a situational problem, we keep in mind the big picture issues as well as our dreams (Wong, 2010a). These big picture issues include, for examples, the universal human condition, the injustice of society, and the displacement and alienation of immigrants. These universal issues normalize our personal problems and give us the motivation to work for a better world.

What seems to be a personal problem may be related to a universal human condition. Our personal visions are also part of the big picture. We are more likely to give up and die from within if we stop pursuing our dreams. We are more likely to be motivated to tackle and overcome our obstacles if we maintain our tragic optimism and pursue our life goals.

With the double vision strategy, we keep one eye on the ball and one eye on the goal, our higher purpose in life. Where are you headed? What is your ultimate goal? When we fix our eyes on our life goals, we will be less likely to be defeated by small setbacks along the way. To use a chess game analogy, we don't mind to sacrifice a pawn in order to checkmate our opponent's king. From time to time, we need to step back, take a deep breath and consider the big picture. This can create a much-needed space between us and our problems, keeping us from getting lost in the misery of the moment.

At a time when all we can see is our stuckness, double vision can expand our vision so that we can see things more clearly. New solutions may emerge. These solutions may take the form of practical changes or may simply be a shift in the way we relate to the problem. For example, what we once perceived as obstacles may become opportunities. Alternatively, a sense of the big picture may give us the freedom and courage to change things that we previously thought we could not.

Exercises:

- Think of a situation in which you felt stuck.
- How would you see this problem differently if you used the double vision strategy?
- How do you relate your personal problem to a larger societal or existential problem?

Step 10: How Do I Live Life to the Fullest? Discover the Yin-Yang Way.

Through the PURE model, we have learned how to build our lives through meaning. Through the ABCDE model, we have learned how to overcome and transform adversities. In this step, we learn how to integrate these two models in order to live our lives to the fullest regardless of the circumstances.

You have already learned that a meaningful life cannot be based on the hedonic principle of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. In this step you would learn that life is about how to manage pleasure and pain that are always present in different measures in every situation. Generally, people tend to make one of two mistakes: some want to focus solely on the positive and ignore the negative side of the human condition; others focus only on the negative and ignore what is good and beautiful about life. The Yin-Yang way avoids these two extremes and requires a more philosophical and integrative way to cope with life's vicissitude and challenges.

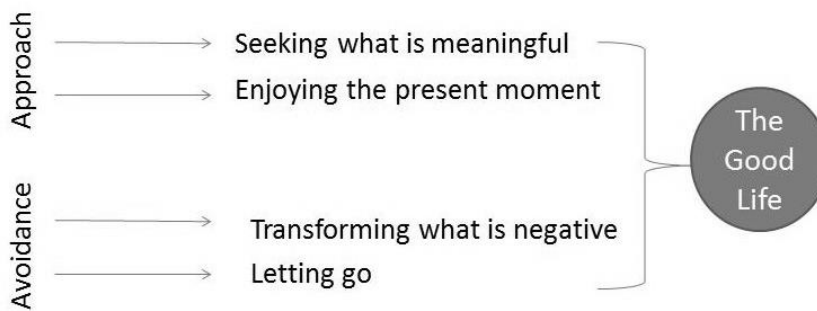
Yin-Yang

As the symbol shows, life is a balancing act between positives and negatives. In fact, each positive experience contains the seed of self-destruction; similarly, each negative contains the seed of personal growth. The Yin-Yang approach avoids the excesses of the pursuit of happiness and success, while allowing us to discover the potential benefits of negative experiences. This is an important skill in life. It will not only prevent us from extremes, but also gives us the practical wisdom to practice the middle way, according to Confucius, or the Golden Mean, according to Aristotle.

Here is a famous Taoist story teaching us the wisdom of the inter-relationship between fortune and misfortune: There was an old farmer whose only prized possession was a workhorse. One day, his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. "Such bad luck," they said sympathetically. "We'll see," the farmer replied. The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses. "How wonderful," the neighbors exclaimed. "We'll see," replied the old man. The following day, his son tried to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathy on his misfortune. "We'll see," answered the farmer. The day after, military officials came to the village to draft young men into the army. Seeing that the son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out. "We'll see," said the farmer.

Dual Systems Model

The Dual Systems model represents our attempt to translate the Yin-Yang principle into psychological processes. It focuses on the interaction between our approach and avoidance tendencies, in order to yield the best possible outcome.



We can use the PURE model (see Step 5) to develop what is good and right about us. However, in your pursuit of a meaningful goal, such as recovery from addiction or developing your professional life, from time to time, there is bound to be a bump on the road or some major setback.

The ABCDE intervention (Step 8) represents a meaning-centered approach to overcoming or transforming what is hindering or troubling us. If you practice the skills related to acceptance, belief, commitment, discovery, and evaluation/enjoyment, you will be able to overcome the obstacle and return to your positive life goals under the umbrella of PURE.

Many people are struggling with their personal demons, financial difficulties, or health problems. For most people, life is hard and complex. There is no simple solution for all life's problems. The Dual Systems model emphasizes flexibility and enables us to embrace all of life and benefits from both positive and negative experiences. PURE maintains your passion for life and gives you the energy to face obstacles, while ABCDE deepens your resilience and broadens your horizon.

Summary:

The take home message is that in the process of practicing PURE, you may encounter setbacks, while ABCDE can transform negatives to positives. ABCDE needs to be fueled by the positive energies and visions from PURE to keep going until the problem is resolved.

Exercises:

- Recall a situation in which your belief or faith is the only thing you can hang on to in order to survive?
- In what ways does the Dual System give you a sense of freedom or relief when you feel overwhelmed by your problems?
- Can you name some of the benefits resulting from your painful life experiences?
- Can you name some of the dangers or risks when everything is going your way?
- Try to apply the Dual System model to solve a current life problem.

Step 11: Other People Matter: Why Are Other People Essential for the Good Life?

No man is an island; we cannot live without other people. We are hardwired for each other; intimate relationships are the main source of our security, happiness, and well-being. Happy people have good relationships. Happy organizations and communities are also based on good interpersonal connections. The question is: how do we relate to other people in a way that is best for everyone? If we focus on pursuing a self-centered happiness, we will treat others as tools to meet our own needs and purposes.

However, if we relate to others from the standpoint of transcending our own personal interests and caring for others, we will have a better chance of enjoying good relationships. This meaning perspective treats others as people worthy of respect, not as instruments for self-gain.

Other People Matter

We established in Step 1 that you matter as a unique individual. Here we emphasize that other people also matter. Do other people matter to us because we need them to meet our needs? Or do they matter in their own right, regardless of what they can do for us? This is an important question that will determine how we treat others.

Many spiritual teachings claim that we matter because we bear the divine image in our soul. Humanists say that we matter because we belong to each other and we will all be happier if we treat each other well. Other people are neither hell nor heaven – they are *us*. Ultimately, how we treat others always boomerangs back to us; paradoxically, the best way to love self is to love others. Self-transcendence is not just about politeness or occasionally considering the needs and wants of others; to transcend ourselves, we must fundamentally alter our orientation toward others. We must learn to love others as we love ourselves.

Perhaps the most complete description of love is offered by a passage from the Bible:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NIV).

Such love is focused on the other and enables us to truly see the other. Viktor Frankl (1985) writes:

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be

actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true (p. 134).

From “Me” to “We”

One practical way of living out the principle that other people matter is to change our “me” mindset to a “we” mindset. We treat others as if we are on the same team, as if we are on their team. We focus on the common interests we have in a situation, rather than on our competing interests. We reflect on such questions as: “What is motivating the other person? What is it that they hope for or desire? How can I be on their side, helping meet their needs as well as my own?” When we think in terms of “we” rather than “me” alone, we are more likely able to balance the tension between self interest and the needs of others.

Communication is also essential in relationship. Self-centered communication is often conflictual and destructive whereas meaning-centered communication builds relationships. Self-transcendence is a major component of meaning-centered communication. Here we want to contrast the different communication styles.

Self-centered communication style.

1. It is accusatory—“You do not meet my needs.” “You never listen.”
2. It is manipulative—“If you loved me, you would...”
3. It is demanding—“You had better fix this.”
4. It is defensive—“It’s not my fault.”
5. It is boastful of one’s own contribution—“I have done this, I have done that.”
6. It is critical of the other—“How can you be so stupid?”
7. It is often deceitful—telling half-truths or lies.

Meaning-centered communication style.

1. Seeks to understand the other’s perspective.
2. Shows appreciation and validation to the other.
3. Expresses one’s own need without accusing the other.
4. Communicates trust and understanding.
5. Attempts win-win solutions.
6. Reaches out to help and support the other.
7. Talks about common interests and shared goals.
8. Tells the truth with love.

Summary:

Other people matter (Peterson, 2013), because relationships matter a great deal for the good life. To transform an inhumane society into a kinder and gentler community, we need to value people more than self-gains. We all gain at the end when we place other people’s well-being above self-centered concerns. Another take-home message is that if

we practice meaning-centered communication, we will more likely achieve better harmony in our relationships.

Exercises:

- Think of a relational conflict in your life. What difference would it make if you thought in terms of “we” instead of “me” in this situation?
- Try to start with “I” rather than “you” to express a negative emotion. (e.g., “I feel angry” vs. “You make me angry”).
- Focus on an interpersonal conflict you have experienced and recall any self-centered communication you employed in this conflict. Then try to replace the problematic statement(s) with meaning-centered communication.
- Have you every made amends in order to repair a broken relationship? If not, what holds your back?

Step 12: Learn the Meaning-Centered Pathways to Well-Being: A Holistic Model

This last step provides a brief survey of the influential models of happiness and well-being, with special emphasis on the meaning hypothesis. It identifies several pathways to happiness and well-being based on meaning as the core motivation. For a more detailed discussion of meaning-based happiness, refer to Wong (2013).

Snyder and Lopez (2007) propose the formula: Happiness + Meaning = Well-being. This summarizes the important role of meaning in well-being as broadly defined. Other psychologists have also proposed more specific definitions of happiness and well-being. Diener (2000), the foremost authority on happiness, uses the terms happiness and subjective well-being interchangeably, reflecting a hedonic perspective of subjective well-being. A eudaimonic perspective of subjective well-being focuses on meaning and virtue (Waterman, 1993, 2008).

According to Ryff and Keyes (1995), psychological well-being is based on several dimensions: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relationships with others. According to Keyes (1998), social well-being consists of five dimensions: social integration, social contribution, coherence, actualization, and acceptance. Complete mental health includes emotional, social, and psychological well-being (Keyes & Magyar-Moe, 2003), in addition to the absence of mental illness symptoms (Keyes & Lopez, 2002).

Consistent with the meaning hypothesis, some psychologists emphasize spiritual well-being, as measured by the Spiritual Well-being Scale (SWBS; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). This scale consists of an Existential and a Spiritual subscales: the former is the quest for personal meaning, while the latter is about one’s relationship with God. Research has shown that the SWBS is also a useful indicator of global health and well-being, because it is related to physical, psychological, and relational well-being (Ellison & Smith, 1991).

According to contemporary positive psychology, meaning is a component of authentic happiness, along with engagement and pleasure (Seligman, 2002). Meaning is also considered a component of well-being, according to Seligman's (2011) more recent theory of PERMA (Positive Affect, Engagement, Positive Relationship, Meaning, and Achievement).

Most of the above models of well-being include a component of meaning and purpose. The present meaning-oriented approach makes meaning the overarching framework for well-being and mental health. Even in the absence of positive affect and active engagement, one can still enjoy certain levels of well-being based on meaning, virtue, and spirituality. According to Haybron (2000), "pleasure does not really matter all that much in itself, being merely a by-product that accompanies the achievement of what is truly worthwhile" (p. 20).

A Three-Factor Theory of Meaning-Based Well-being

We have reiterated the importance of will to meaning or need for self-transcendence as the core motivation for the good life. We now want to highlight three major pathways to well-being and positive mental health.

1. Meaning itself leads to a sense of Eudaimonia or happiness. For example, meaningful work and meaningful relationships are intrinsically satisfying.
2. Meaning-making and meaning-reconstruction help transform negatives into positives. These processes help to repair what is broken and indirectly increase our well-being. Tragic optimism is an example of transforming hopeless situations into hopeful ones through the attitudinal value of meaning. Re-authoring your life story and changing your role from a victim to a victor are other forms of meaning reconstruction.
3. Meaning provides a blueprint for building a better life for self and others. A meaning-centered model for recovery and well-being is holistic. It involves building relationships and being part of supportive community. It involves making contributions to society.

Summary:

A meaning-centered holistic model of positive mental health captures all the previous steps. This model differs from other models of happiness and well-being, because (a) it emphasizes self-transcendence rather than the self-centered pursuit of personal happiness and success, and (b) it is dependent on personal meaning more than positive affect and favorable circumstances.

The meaning-centered 12-step program makes good use of the uniquely human capacities for meaning-seeking, meaning-making, and self-transcendence. The final aim of this

program is to develop one's full potential to live a life of self-transcendence in order to serve the greater good.

Exercises:

- What are the advantages of the meaning approach to wellness as compared to the traditional emphasis on happiness and positive affect?
- Identify an unhappy situation in your life. Try to use meaning-seeking or meaning-making as a way to make you feel better without thinking about addiction for relief.
- Describe an experience in which you felt good about yourself in going through a very difficult situation because of your belief in following your calling and doing the right thing.
- How will you use the meaning approach to help a depressed friend?
- Which aspects of the meaning-centered 12-step recovery program are most helpful to you? Why?

Conclusion

To put it all together, this meaning-centered 12-step program will facilitate healing and flourishing. It is not meant to be a simple recipe for recovery. It is intended to be a roadmap for living the good life in spite of a history of addiction. It may be used as an alternative to AA's 12-step (see Hart, Chapter 15).

It would be more helpful to think of each step described here as a major life task, necessary for living a sober, productive, and rewarding life. As you have already discovered, each task actually involves several skills and lessons.

Here is Paul Wong's meaning manifesto that captures the essence of this chapter. Use this manifesto as a daily reminder that meaningful living can transform self and society.

Life is much more than the everyday busyness of making a living or striving for personal success. Life is much more than a constant struggle of coping with harsh reality by fighting or escaping. Life can be lived at a deeper level and on a higher plane by adopting a **meaning mindset** as your basic life orientation. Your life has intrinsic meaning & value because you have a unique purpose to fulfill. You are endowed with the capacity for **freedom** and responsibility to choose a life of meaning & significance. Don't settle for anything less. No matter how confusing & bleak your situation, there is always beauty, truth, & meaning to be discovered; but you need to cultivate a **mindful** attitude and learn to transcend self-centeredness. Don't always ask what you can get from life, but ask what life demands of you. May you be awakened to your sense of responsibility and call to **self-transcendence**; you become fully human only when you devote your life to serving a higher purpose and your fellow human beings. Let your inner goodness and **conscience** be your guide; let **compassion** be your motive and may you see the world and yourself through the lens of **meaning & virtue**. You will experience

transformation and authentic happiness when you practice meaningful living. Now, go forward with courage & integrity and pursue your ideals against all odds with the **defiant human spirit**.

We encourage you to study these twelve steps by yourself or with a group. Take time to work on the exercises and apply them to your own life. As we have said before, recovery can be a long and steep road. Do not despair if you relapse or fail in any area of your life. Hang on to the belief that your life has intrinsic meaning and value and you have a unique purpose to fulfill. If you persist, you will make life better not only for yourself, but also for those around you. By practicing these twelve steps, you are contributing to a new paradigm for community mental health.

This chapter is only a brief version of the program. If you have any questions about this chapter or want to learn more about meaning-centered 12-step program, feel free to email DrPaulWong@gmail.com.

*Much of the material in this chapter is derived from the lessons created by Paul T. P. Wong for the Toronto Meaningful Living Meetup sessions. Visit www.inpm.org for more information about the Meetup lessons.

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Appendix A

The Life Orientation Scale (LOS)

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Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling a number on the 5-point scale that best corresponds to your personal belief and attitude.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.					1 2 3 4 5
2.					1 2 3 4 5
3.					1 2 3 4 5
4.					1 2 3 4 5
5.					1 2 3 4 5
6.					1 2 3 4 5
7.					1 2 3 4 5
8.					1 2 3 4 5
9.					1 2 3 4 5
10.					1 2 3 4 5

Items 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10 are worded in the negative direction. The higher the total score is, the greater the meaning mindset.

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Wong, P.T.P. (2012). What is the Meaning Mindset? *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy*, 4(1), 1-3.

Appendix B

The Brief Personal Meaningful Profile (PMP-B)

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This questionnaire is intended to identify what really matters in your life and measures people's perception of personal meaning in their lives. Generally, a meaningful life involves a sense of purpose and personal significance. However, people often differ in what they value most, and they have different ideas as to what would make life worth living. The following statements describe potential sources of a meaningful life. Please read each statement carefully and indicate to what extent each item characterizes your own life. You may respond by circling the appropriate number according to the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Moderately			A great deal

For example, if going to parties does not contribute to your sense of personal meaning, you may circle 1 or 2. If taking part in volunteer work contributes quite a bit to the meaning in your life, you may circle 5 or 6.

It is important that you answer honestly on the basis of your own experience and beliefs.

1.	I believe I can make a difference in the world	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	I have someone to share intimate feelings with	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	I strive to make this world a better place	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	I seek to do God's will	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	I like challenge	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	I take initiative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	I have a number of good friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	I am trusted by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	I seek to glorify God	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	Life has treated me fairly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	I accept my limitations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	I have a mutually satisfying loving relationship	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	I am liked by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	I have found someone I love deeply	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	I accept what cannot be changed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	I am persistent and resourceful in attaining my goals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	I make a significant contribution to society	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	I believe that one can have a personal relationship with God	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	I am treated fairly by others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	I have received my fair share of opportunities and rewards	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	I have learned to live with suffering and make the best of it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Scoring

Please indicate the score you circled for the indicated question number in the cells below. Add up the scores in each row.

Subscale	Score	Score	Score	Row Total
Achievement	(Q5)	(Q6)	(Q16)	
Relationship	(Q7)	(Q8)	(Q13)	
Religion	(Q4)	(Q9)	(Q18)	
Self-transcendence	(Q1)	(Q3)	(Q17)	
Self-acceptance	(Q11)	(Q15)	(Q21)	
Intimacy	(Q2)	(Q12)	(Q14)	
Fair treatment	(Q10)	(Q19)	(Q20)	

Reference:

McDonald, M. J., Wong, P. T. P., & Gingras, D. T. (2012). Meaning-in-life measures and development of a brief version of the Personal Meaning Profile. . In P. T. P. Wong (Ed.), *The human quest for meaning: Theories, research, and applications* (2nd ed., pp. 357-382). New York, NY: Routledge.