

## **A Man Filled with Character**

By Ryan M. Niemiec<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>VIA Institute on Character

I joined Dr. Paul Wong's Meaning Conference years before I joined the VIA Institute on Character a decade and a half ago. As one of the keynotes for the conference, I met with Paul when I arrived at the registration. I was flooded by his zest, humor, and humility. He was gracious, grateful, and gentle. I knew I was in the presence of someone who was both impactful and kind-hearted. I can easily picture in my mind his open and welcoming smile.

Over the years since then, I became aware of Paul's uncanny perseverance. He has dug deep into an inner well of resources to persist through substantial medical issues and maintain strength through discriminations, rejections, and systemic obstacles over the decades. Through it all, his bravery never seems to have been tempered as he courageously challenged conventions, confronted misguided authority and systems of injustice, and stood up for groups with few voices.

Paul is a trailblazer; he displays a joy in forging into new territories, areas that most people fear to tread or do not know they can tread. I believe this is his strength of hope – to look to the future and not only aim for something better but to create pathways to make it happen. It is clear his strength of spirituality is a driver for him in all his work. To me this comes forth in secular and non-secular ways, and first and foremost is a spirituality that is always humanity-driven, faces and transcends suffering, and celebrates the trials and tribulations of life in all its vicissitudes.

As a top scientist, Paul has made impacts – despite numerous obstacles – in many domains and topic areas, arguably none as large as his work in meaning in life. His scholarship on personal meaning has paved the way for measurement and basic and applied research. Meaning-making and personal meaning are now go-to phrases used in positive psychology and related fields.

Through it all, Paul displays a unique comfort and a candid capacity, to share his life experience – his journey – amidst his offering of science and practice. This candor in sharing is a model for all of us to follow as we share our own stories to the world.

Dr. Paul Wong – in part through his perseverance, spirituality, bravery, kindness, gratitude, zest, and gentleness – has offered a model for a meaningful and full life.