PATHWAYS TO HOPE

An Innovative Approach to Fostering Hopeful Thinking

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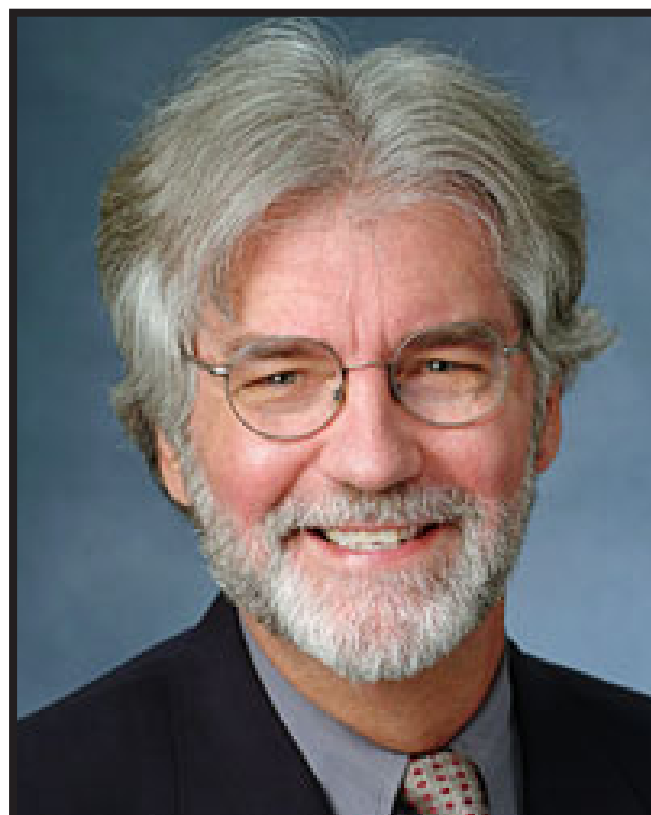
Introduction

C.R. Snyder

In consideration of the underlying premises of C.R Snyder's hope theory (1991), as well as the emerging psychological and social benefits of hope-based practices, this poster seeks to explore how we can apply hope theory in our lives and personal and professional practices in ways that are innovative, dynamic, and tangible. Specifically, this poster highlights individual experiences with *Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH)*, a unique person-centered planning tool, which helps individuals, groups, and communities to build hope and foster self-discovery. This tool was first developed by Jack Pearpoint, John O'Brien, and Marsha Forest (1991) as a method of facilitating individuals in exploring their dreams and goals, and developing a working vision toward positive and possible futures in supportive, collaborative, and inclusive ways. To date, PATH has been used in a multitude of settings, and has served as a dynamic and creative way to bring people together in the interest of hope and healing. It was created and named in the spirit of humility, as its creators envisioned, to "assist people walking the road to a more just society." This poster illustrates, through the shared experiences of PATH participants, the ways in which the PATH process can be considered to visually embody and bring to life hope theory.

Theoretical Framework

Hope = Agency + Pathways (the Will and the Way)

Hope, as Snyder conceptualized it in his works, can be defined as "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of (a) agency *(goal-directed energy)* and (b) pathways *(planning to meet goals)*" (Snyder, Irving, & Anderson, 1991, p. 287). Assisting individuals in their ability to clearly and consistently identify and articulate goals *(goal thinking)*, develop step-by-step plans to reach their desired goals *(pathways thinking)*, and persevere in the face of barriers *(agency thinking)* is therefore at the heart of this theory (Lopez, et al., 2009). In order to do this successfully, the facilitator of hopeful thinking must help foster within the individual or group the "perceived capabilities to produce routes to desired goals, along with the perceived motivation to use those routes" (Snyder, 2000, p. 8).

2014 Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative (HAPPI)

"Hope without an Object cannot live." — Samuel Coleridge, Work without Hope

Methods

The culminating personal artifact of the individual participants — a personalized PATH plan for both individual and professional development — provides a concrete 'pathway' to goals, which symbolically represents the tenets of hope theory. The proposed hypothesis is that as participants use this artifact to identify and explore their goals further, they will gain confidence and skill in setting goals and establishing specific measurable steps to reach them. As such, they will be more likely to remain motivated and maintain a positive sense of well-being conducive to overall life satisfaction and sense of self-agency.

PATH – The PATH begins with focus persons or groups called pathfinders, and a support circle called the Dream Team, typically consisting of 5 to 15 people who know the pathfinders and are invested in their journey. The PATH utilizes a structured planning process whereby each step moves the pathfinders closer to realizing the dream. Beginning with the end in mind, PATH facilitators first help pathfinders create a dream or ideal picture. A graphic recorder works collaboratively with the facilitator, creating a visual of the dream, which continues to guide the PATH process throughout. In the next phase, Positive and Possible, pathfinders imagine the achievement of some of their dreams and aspirations within a specific timeframe that is selected by the pathfinders and their Dream Team. Values are explored at this point to help guide the journey and qualify the purpose of each aspiration. The pathfinders' current situation, or Now, is explored with the facilitator to give the pathfinders a sense of where they are currently in the pursuit of the larger dream and goals. At this juncture, the pathfinders and Dream Team think about other individuals from the family, community, or professional network that the pathfinders may need to assist and guide them on their PATH, and what specific contributions those individuals can make. In the final steps, the pathfinders and Dream Team discuss the strength, knowledge, and personal qualities of the pathfinders that can be used throughout the process to help them remain motivated to overcome barriers and complete tasks. Lastly, a plan of action is specified whereby specific dates are set to achieve milestones toward the overarching dream and goals. The first step in each of the milestones is discussed with the group, and appropriate action steps are delegated.
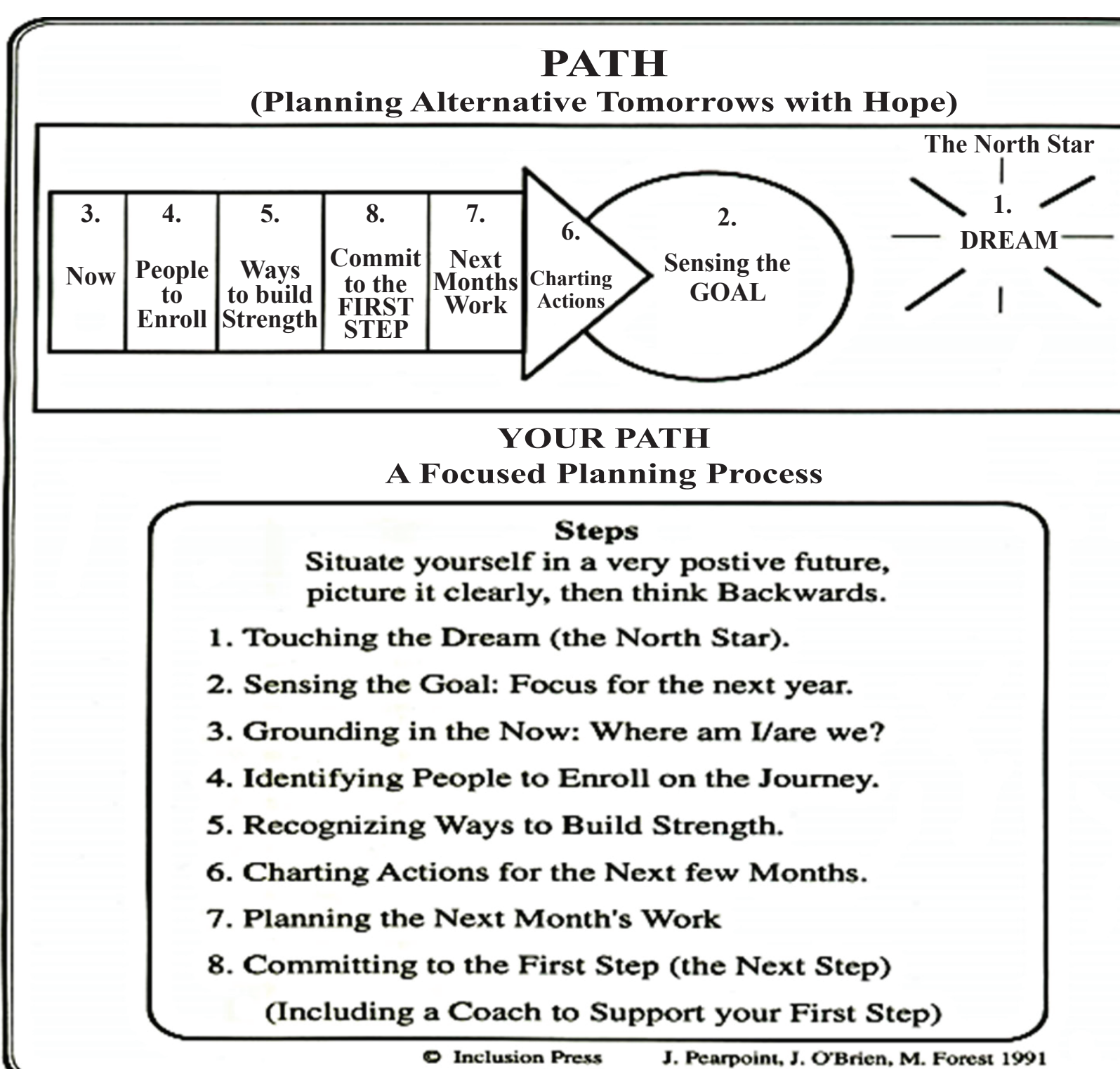
Jack Pearpoint

PATH
(Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope)

| 3. Now | 4. People to Enroll | 5. Ways to build Strength | 7. Commit to the FIRST STEP | 8. Next Months Work | 6. Charting Actions | 2. Sensing the GOAL | The North Star 1. DREAM |

YOUR PATH
A Focused Planning Process

Steps
Situate yourself in a very positive future, picture it clearly, then think Backwards.
1. Touching the Dream (the North Star).
2. Sensing the Goal: Focus for the next year.
3. Grounding in the Now: Where am I/are we?
4. Identifying People to Enroll on the Journey.
5. Recognizing Ways to Build Strength.
6. Charting Actions for the Next few Months.
7. Planning the Next Month's Work.
8. Committing to the First Step (the Next Step)
(Including a Coach to Support your First Step)

© Inclusion Press   J. Pearpoint, J. O'Brien, M. Forest 1991

Figure 1: Template of the eight steps in the PATH process (Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 2011).
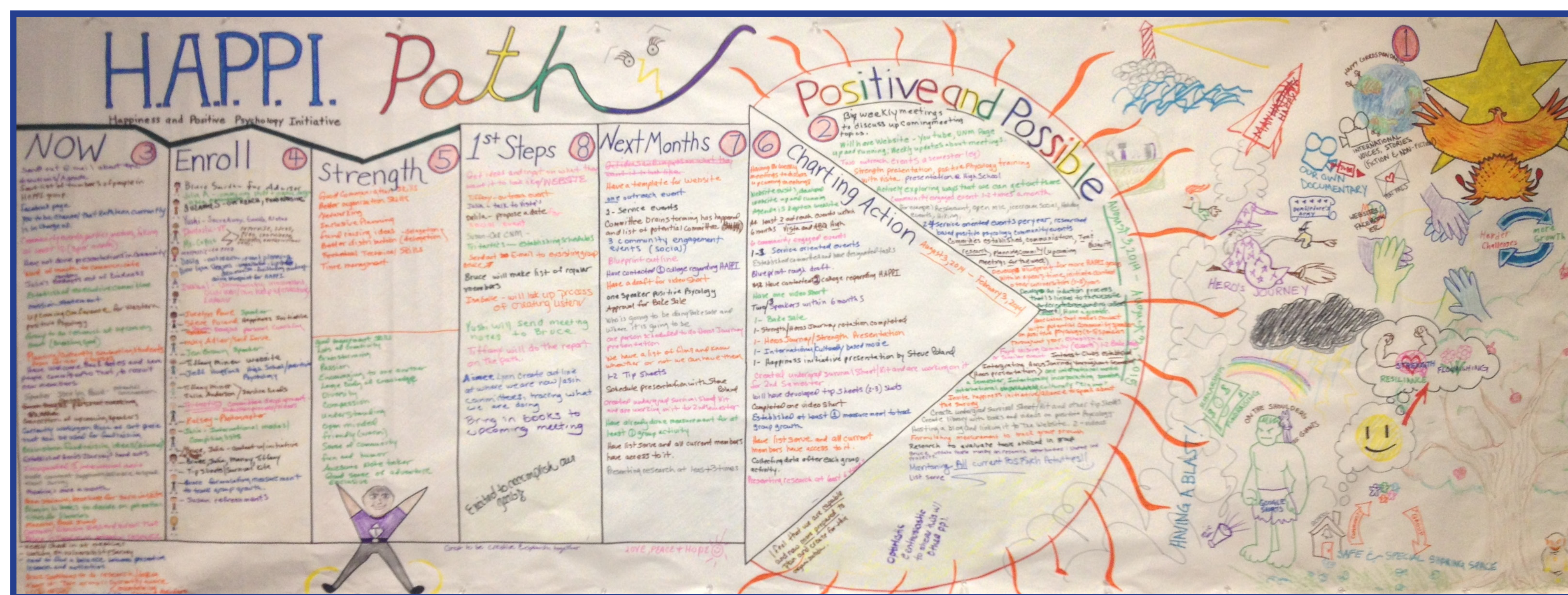
Figure 2: An example of a completed PATH. This PATH was completed with the Happiness and Positive Psychology Initiative (HAPPI) at the University of New Mexico. In eight steps, which are represented both in words as well as dynamic and colorful graphics on a large piece of paper, this inherently person-centered planning process brings to life Snyder's hope theory in a way that is both tangible and exciting to the pathfinder or person using this unique tool. It not only encourages the visualization of positive and possible tomorrows, but true to Snyder's hope theory, provides individuals with pathways to reach their visions and goals.

Results

Based on participant feedback, PATH can be considered to engender hope by endorsing 'approach' over 'avoidance' goals, helping individuals to chart action toward a desired outcome rather than to avoid an undesirable outcome. It further fosters hopeful thinking by helping individuals 'goal shop' and select goals that are most pertinent to and in alignment with their values, identity, and ideals. By using powerful visuals to represent their dreams and goals, participants expressed feeling better equipped to generate several possible pathways to their goals and identify alternative routes when faced with blocks. In addition, PATH participants also reported an increase in perceived self-agency. The PATH process allowed participants to improve upon agency thinking by evaluating progress made toward their goals, building strengths, and fostering communication with family, friends, and other positive connections through actively networking and enrolling others in the PATH.

Future Implications

One of the unique strengths about hope-based treatment is the allowance given to people to shape their own lives through supportive, goal directed processes that promote positive selves. The results of the PATH process, as expressed by participants, indicate that, when presented with an opportunity to align their wisdom and energies towards the common goal of "developing hopeful potentials" for the future, individuals become empowered to take charge of their own lives. The bold and beautiful visuals PATH offers through the use of objects, personal photographs and drawings, pictures from magazines, and pastels and oils, aid an individual or group of pathfinders in the creation of a unique pictorial representation of their process. The ability to 'see' the process "graphically and in living color" helps pathfinders to lend both a voice and a vision to: (1) their purposes, (2) their understanding of their situation and its possibilities for hopeful action, and (3) their actions for change, mutual support, personal and team development, and learning (Pearpoint, O'Brien, & Forest, 2011, p. 5).

Bearing these points in mind, it is suggested that PATH be explored further as a tool to make hope theory more accessible to diverse populations, as well as to foster hopeful thinking in creative and colorful ways. Suggested direction for future studies using PATH include collection and evaluation of additional qualitative data, such as interviews and focus groups, as well as using Snyder's measures for hope to assess long-term effects on the hope levels of PATH participants when compared with community samples. Voices of prior PATH participants indicate promising implications for the combined use of hope theory and PATH, and enhance our collective knowledge of innovative approaches to fostering hopeful thinking and facilitating positive growth and change.

Feedback from Pathfinders and Dream Teams:

"Great to be creative and optimistic together!"

"Finally have a plan to fulfill steps!"

"[I feel] excited to accomplish our goals!"

"[PATH illuminates] Love, Peace, and Hope!"

"I feel that we are capable and now more prepared to plan and create for this organization."

"Very informative… Great teamwork!"

"[I'm] optimistic and enthusiastic to share this with other people."

"[I feel] happy that his dreams are being acknowledged!"

"[This was] fun!"

"Energizing experience!"

"[This promotes] accountability… recharging!"

"Love the visual! Easy to see the 'Whole Picture'"…

"[This process] expands his horizons to make his life more fulfilling."

"[I am] happy that we're making structure [necessary to meet goals]"

"[Before this process, I was] anxious and confused. [After this process, I feel] renewed… more confident."

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