

MSOD 618 Paper – Appreciative Living Experiment

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### Appreciative Living Experiment Overview and Design

My Appreciative Living Experiment consisted of six exercises in support of Kelm's Appreciating-Imagining-Acting (AIA) framework (Kelm, 2005). They included two exercises from the "Appreciating" section, three from "Imagining," and one from "Enacting." Tasks were performed daily or as needed. The exercises were:

#### *Appreciating What Is*

#1. Gratitude Journal (1-2 minutes daily)

#4. Changing Focus (20 minutes on Day 1, then 5 minutes daily)

#### *Imagining the Ideal*

#5. Gaining Clarity (5-10 minutes daily)

#6. Envisioning the ideal (15-30 minutes as needed)

#7. Surfacing assumptions (10-15 minutes as needed)

#### *Acting in Alignment*

#8. Enacting (5-10 minutes daily)

### Personal Areas of Focus

I focused the experiment on two areas of my health which have challenged me in recent months. The first area was in managing my daily blood sugar. When I returned from our first intensive in Pájaro in October 2017, I learned I had Type II diabetes. My A1c was too high. I needed to get my blood sugar level under control and lose weight. Fortunately, my situation did

not require insulin injections or other forms of medication. I have been able to control this through diet and exercise without medication.

That is, until after I returned from France last September, From October leading up to Christmas, the holiday time was a stressful period for me. I learned I will have to provide for my ailing sister who requires medical and financial support. Her situation is dire. This has disrupted my life and the lives of my family and comes at a time when I am still in school, not working, and living off retirement savings. My plans to launch my consulting business after graduation must now be accelerated so that I can generate sufficient income to cover my new obligations. I haven't coped well in reacting to these circumstances. I stopped exercising, started eating more sugar and fat, gained weight, watched my sugar begin to spike, and had difficulty keeping it all in check. I knew I needed to make a course correction, but my mental state was negative. I was anxious and filled with fear and guilt.

During the same time, I was having issues with my eyesight, the lingering after-effects of damage to my right eye from a surgical procedure done over thirty years ago. The effects have increased in the past year, most noticeably in the last six months, which have caused blurriness, itching, and redness, and intense glare which has begun to impair my night time vision. This has made driving at night extremely stressful for me and has caused me to become fearful of going out at night and trusting my driving.

Given everything I have described up to this point, I also chose to focus the experiment on a professional goal, i.e., to gain clarity on my business goals in 2019, including near term contract opportunities, the OD niche I wish to pursue, and the kinds of clients I want to attract.

### Experiment Findings

To “warm me up” I kept a gratitude journal. I found this to be a simple, effective, and meaningful practice to do every day. It helps ground me by reinforcing all the good in my life and the many reasons that I should be grateful and feel joy. Some of the entries from the log include: sunny days, spending time with my granddaughter, sitting at the kitchen table enjoying coffee and conversation with my wife, living in a comfortable home, and, even, being grateful for the gratitude log itself! As I scan all the entries I have made, it makes me feel good to recognize the many blessings I receive each day.

Another powerful exercise was Changing Focus (a.k.a. “want/don’t want”). I identified sixteen things I either didn’t like or didn’t want, and then, restated each item in the positive. Some positive examples include: “I want the best for my sister and the ability to provide for her that allows me to prosper and thrive financially and emotionally”; “I want the confidence and presence of mind to be able to drive anywhere I want to go at any time”; and, “I want to have an abundance of well-paying, appreciative clients.”

Concrete steps I have taken include deciding to go vegan, which I started ten days ago. I got inspired and excited about that decision after watching *Forks Over Knives* on Netflix. Since then I have stopped eating meat, dairy, and processed foods, and have seen a drop in my blood sugar and weight. I went to the eye doctor and have started a new treatment to repair some of the damage to the eye and to reduce the symptoms I have been experiencing. And, because of a referral I got from Jeff McCollum, I have an interview already lined up when I get back from Costa Rica for a part-time training contract.

It is clear to me that this experiment has yielded positive results. Indeed, I would say this has been successful. But I question if this is also elusive and fragile. Last week I

discovered someone had hacked into my smartphone, locked me out of my device, and uploaded all of my personal information. This triggered an immediate panic response. This was an existential threat. I lost sleep, became paranoid, and immediately cut off communication with various social media platforms. I had to change passwords to many online and banking accounts, review recent credit card transactions, and notify my network carrier to black list my phone number and SIM card, and file a claim with the device manufacturer to get a replacement phone.

I tried in vain to reframe this experience into something positive so that I could reduce my stress and get myself through it, but I found it nearly impossible to do. On the one hand, I did not find stray charges on any of my accounts. I also was able to change my login information and activated an alert monitoring service with the credit bureaus. I took precautionary steps and told myself nothing terrible happened, and I was okay. But, on the other hand, the data breach was an aggressive act with malice of thought. I couldn't get past it to continue the experiment. I felt violated. I also felt confused about how quickly the good feelings of my experiment evaporated the moment my PIN no longer worked on my phone. This is something I still have to sort through.

#### Resources

Kelm, J. B. (2005). *Appreciative living: the principles of appreciative inquiry in personal life*.

Wake Forest, NC: Venet Publishers.