

# MAPP Alumni Magazine

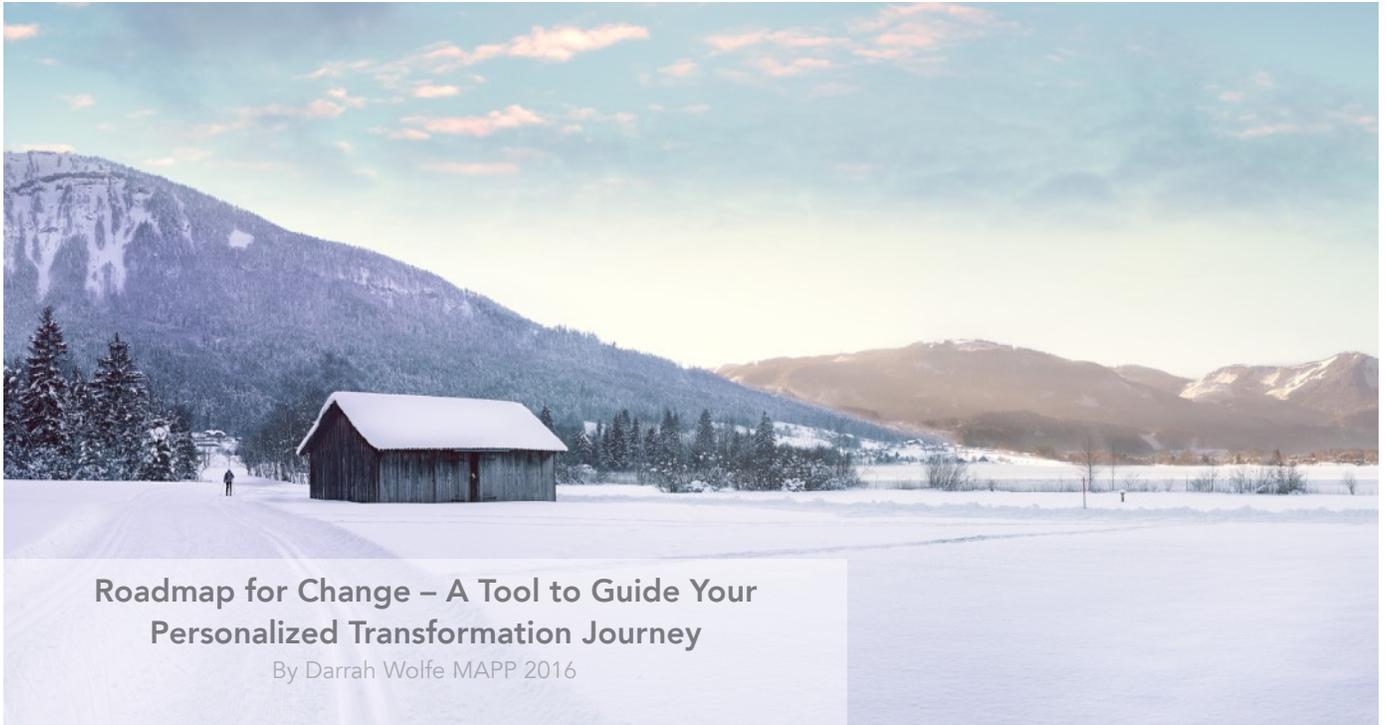
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## Roadmap for Change – A Tool to Guide Your Personalized Transformation Journey

By Darrah Wolfe MAPP 2016

During Fete 2017, Donna Payne (MAPP 2015) and Karen Warner (MAPP 2013) introduced “The Cycle of Renewal” (based on the work of Pam McLean, Ph.D.). The Cycle is a model for understanding life chapters and how adults master change, including transitions and significant transformation.

Payne and Warner first gave a presentation on The Cycle, briefly explaining each of the four Phases of the cycle, the characterizations and emotions encountered during each Phase, how each Phase transitions into the next, and how The Cycle repeats itself. They explained how change is cyclical, rather than linear. That true change – inside-out change – is driven from within a person based on their values.

They discussed how change, including the desire for change, is based on life-long learning, which is the essence of self-renewal. Finally they explained how we are all in states of continuous change, which underscores the importance of the journey of change as all destinations are temporary.

This was an interesting and insightful talk, however the most interesting part of the workshop was the



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## ROAD MAP continued



demonstration. Payne and Warner took a large graphic representation of The Cycle of Renewal and taped it to the floor in the middle of the room. They then asked the workshop participants to congregate around the phase they most closely identified with.

- Phase 1. Go for It - The Heroic Self. This phase is characterized by a "go for it" attitude. Emotions are feelings of expansiveness, harmonious balance, feeling energized, optimistic and determined.
- Phase 2. The Doldrums – the disenchanting self. This phase is characterized by feelings of disenchantment, feeling out of sync, trapped, helpless, sad, defeated, and resistant to new ideas.
- Phase 3. Cocooning – The Inner Self. This phase is characterized by feeling withdrawn, quiet, seeking, unsure, but also stirrings of liberation and anticipation.
- Phase 4. Getting ready – the Passionate Self. This phase is characterized by feeling creative, refreshed, prepared, adventurous, and ready to start The Cycle over and move again into Phase 1.

The group congregated around the Phase they most identified with while Payne and Warner asked for volunteers to explain why they chose each Phase. Some people straddled Phases 1 and 2. Payne and Warner explained that it's not uncommon to jump back and forth between these Phases in some situations such as "mini-transitions" like a new job, new boss, or new partner. Several other people straddled Phases 3 and 4, finding themselves both withdrawn and seeking as in Phase 3, and getting ready as in Phase 4. Again, Payne and Warner explained how this is not uncommon and is a natural outcome of the attributes of these two Phases.

Overall, the consensus of the group of workshop attendees agreed that the experience of walking through this model helped them understand The Cycle of Renewal and change that occurs with life transitions. When one life stage ends, another begins, and The Cycle begins anew.

## ABOUT THE PRESENTERS



Donna Payne, MAPP, 2015, is an executive coach and strategic advisor with expertise in leadership and transition coaching, new business development and leading large scale complex projects with executives and physicians. She has a reputation as a collaborative results oriented leader. She is the founder of Donna Payne, LLC and served as Chief Operating Officer of TransforMed.



Karen Warner, who completed MAPP in 2013, is CEO and Founder of Tangible Group, an executive coaching firm that helps people realize their full potential at work, so they can achieve great things. Before launching Tangible in 2002, Karen served as Vice President of Worldwide Marketing for private equity firm, Atlas Venture. During her 27-year corporate career, Karen has worked with some of the finest marketing groups in the world.

## New MAPP Professor, Dr. Allyson Mackey asks the question: Can educational interventions ameliorate effects of negative experiences?

by Virginia Millar, MAPP, 2008



Virginia Millar

During Summit 2017, Saturday's rich agenda concluded with the introduction of new MAPP professor, neuroscientist Dr. Allyson Mackey, who presented her recent, inspiring work in brain development and neuroplasticity. Such work will inform the brand-new MAPP spring semester course, *Positive Education*. Dr. Mackey, who now heads up Penn's "Changing Brain Lab" joins the Penn family via MIT and holds a BS in Biological Sciences from Stanford University, and her PhD in Neuroscience from University of California Berkeley. Her recent work explores human brain development in response to life experiences, and the resulting impact, both positive and negative, on peak developmental windows of neuroplasticity. As mother of a two-year-old daughter and former student of inner-city public schools, Dr. Mackey is particularly concerned with applying her

findings to reduce the income achievement gap to promote positive educational and health outcomes for all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background.

For over a decade, our fearless MAPP leader, Dr. James Pawelski has introduced us to the powerfully hopeful nature of positive interventions through the early neuroplasticity findings of (well of course!) William James. Appropriately, Dr. Mackey now takes us on a cutting-edge deep dive into a neuroanatomical view of modern, yet ever hopeful neuroplasticity! Her Summit presentation confirmed the influence of life experience on human brain development through the powerful neuroanatomical correlates of low SES and early life stress; yet left us with the hopeful message that such knowledge also provides insight as to how and when we may intervene to counter the negative effects and promote real growth.

Dr. Mackey noted that over 50% of today's public-school students qualify as low-income. Such status is associated with reduced educational achievement, greater emotional stress, lower language exposure, and lower cognitive skills. Further, today's brain-imaging techniques also confirm that low SES also shows up as reduced "gray matter"; the actual cortex of the brain is thicker in high income students! Not surprisingly, greater cortical thickness correlates with higher test scores. Dr. Mackey noted that cortical thinning occurs naturally in normal human development; such thinning reduces plasticity yet is adaptive in solidifying mature skills and preventing drastic change due to stress or injury. Unfortunately, this cortical thinning has an accelerated trajectory in lower income students. Conversely, slower cortical thinning is linked to better cognitive skills. Further compounding the situation, fMRI images show the impact of stress on the brain's emotional regulation circuitry resulting in aggression and attention problems that further impact learning.

While the power of the environment on the developing brain is clearly evidenced in numerous negative outcomes, in true positive psychology fashion, Dr. Mackey then turned to exploring how such intimate understanding of the environment's influence on development and neuroplasticity can also afford us clear windows of opportunity to intervene! Dr. Mackey described her work with Boston Charter schools where a positive learning environment has been shown to reduce the achievement gap, particularly in math. Further, such achievements in math are associated with increased hippocampal volume and connectivity, and such changes have been observed following learning! In other work, Mackey examined the impact of direct practice in reasoning tasks by correlating brain changes with preparation and



## INTERVENTIONS continued

performance of students preparing to take the LSAT. In this case, learning to reason was associated with changes in brain structure, including frontoparietal functional connectivity and white matter structure. For those of us beyond undergraduate age, Mackey hopefully noted that brain networks that support reasoning are plastic in adulthood, and therefore equally malleable to growth!

Such measurable outcomes then beg Mackey's question, "Can educational interventions ameliorate the effects of negative experiences?" To which Mackey answers with her "STOMP" program (Structured Training of Mental Processes). This hour long, twice-weekly program was used on children in an Oakland elementary school for eight weeks and provided direct instruction of reasoning and speed skills using computer, group, individual, and Nintendo DS games. Mackey affectionately refers to this type of intervention as CSI (Cognitive Skills Instruction) and wondered whether it could take place within the classroom setting and further show up as academic gains? Well, it appears so - while scores on reasoning and speed tasks predictably and notably improved, better cognitive gains were associated with bigger math gains!

Such hopeful outcomes connecting direct cognitive instruction with measured brain change and real academic outcomes lay the foundation for Mackey's initiative to reduce the income achievement gap toward positive educational and health outcomes for all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background. Powerful stuff! We warmly welcome Dr. Allyson Mackey to our MAPP family and look forward to learning more from our current MAPPsters when they return next year with *Positive Education* learnings to share!

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### ABOUT DR. MACKEY

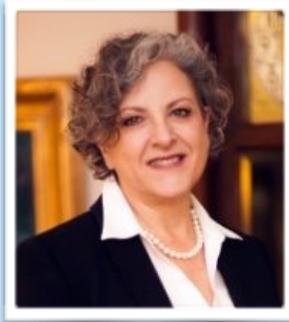


Allyson Mackey

Dr. Mackey has a B.S. in biological sciences from Stanford University and a Ph.D. in neuroscience from the University of California, Berkeley. She joined the MAPP faculty in 2017 and is teaching her first course in the program, *Positive Education* in spring 2018. According to her Penn Arts & Sciences bio: "My years in inner city public schools, first as a student, and then as a researcher, have led me to concentrate my translational work on reducing the income achievement gap. Ultimately, the goal of my research is to promote positive educational and health outcomes for all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background." For more information, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/ya3g3cxb>

## PANEL DISCUSSION: Well-being for Everybody

By Frawn Morgan, MAPP 2017



Frawn Morgan

During Fete 2017, Stephanie Ramones, MAPP 2006, Leora Rifkin, MAPP 2011, Elizabeth Jennings, MAPP 2012 and Rolanda Manitowabi, MAPP 2012 engaged in a panel discussion focusing on their work applying positive psychology in their specific understudied populations. Each of these women actively and passionately works with distressed populations, including those in prison, non-English speaking immigrants, teens, addicts, and the disabled. Each took the opportunity to pose a challenge to the panel.

- Jennings asked: "How do we make the application of positive psychology concepts intentional and thoughtful?"
- Ramones reminded us it is "important to understand the background, including the emotional injuries, of the population you intend to serve."
- Similarly, Manitowabi stressed the importance of "understanding the intergenerational trauma" of the First Nation population she serves and the important of "becoming intimate with their history of trauma" in tailoring well-being strategies.
- Rifkin discussed how inclusion and diversity needs to focus on creating spaces conducive to the population being served.

The common theme was identification with the population being served and customization of well-being strategies to their specific needs, returning to Jennings' original question of making the application of positive psychology concepts intentional and thoughtful.

The panel further discussed the importance of recognizing the existing strengths in each population, including the all-important cultural strengths and historic well-being practices unique to each population. Once the context of a particular well-being construct can be understood in the population, activities can be modified to achieve desired results. Specifically, the panel discussed the concept and experience of micro-aggression and how to manage and prevent it in communities that has a history of oppression.

In closing, the panel devised an action list:

1. Assume all people want a better life.
2. Create safe spaces for the conversation and ask each person how they can be best supported.
3. Integrate cultural competency.
4. Make the academic info we are exposed to in MAPP readily available and consumable.
5. Build relationships based on peace, love, and respect.
6. Throw out (some of) the rules –
  - a. Ask if the activity, plan, etc., is harmful or helpful to this person and this population,
  - b. Involve those in the activity design that understand, experientially, the needs of the served population,
  - c. Ask if the activity is accretive to the ultimate goal.
7. Be more like James (Pawelski)! Serve people the way they want to be served.

## Caring for the Healer

By Elaine O'Brien, MAPP 2008

The workshop, "Caring for the Healer in Life and Death: Cultivating Wellbeing for the Caregiver through Positive Psychology" was gracefully presented by Rosie Jaye and Linda Shrivane during the 2017 Fete. Rosie and Linda addressed the importance of self-care, and how to cultivate well-being in situations of life and death.

Around self-care, they reminded us about "dropping into the breath," creating sacred space, and the value of caring for one another. One breathing exercise presented reminded us how we were all breathing in the "same air in the same space." Also this mantra was offered, " Inhale connection, exhale community."

In this valuable presentation, they discussed the roles of the therapists, wellbeing and self-care, and how almost 1/2 of all Americans will experience mental health problems!" Another statistic was how 1 in 4 of us will experience mental illness in our lifetime; they shared how almost 7 million American adults sought help in 2014. Therapists and caregivers facilitate psychological relationships and spiritual well-being; they are exposed to a "cradle of secrets," and need to follow the law of the oxygen mask, around self-care. Rosie and Linda spoke about the value of "mindful caregiving," "being mortal," and "presence and non judgment."

The speakers spoke about end of life care, a difficult and important subject, and how 80% of us want to die at home, but instead 80% die in the hospital! They encouraged the importance of the advanced care directive. (I had discussed this, and also introduced the *Stanford Medicine Letter Project* <https://med.stanford.edu/letter/friendsandfamily.html> in my 2015 MAPP Fete IGNITE presentation). It is really important to highlight the area of Thanatology-Death and Dying. We will all die someday, and offering greater understanding, options, and choices can help lessen some of the pain.

The speakers advanced the idea of a "death positive" culture, one that is not fear-based. Another helpful exercise, fill in the blank, "Before I die.....," a meditation from Buddhist monks, was introduced to help us create perspective and a sacred space.

The concept of the Death Café, a place where people can come together to talk about death, the value of being attentive to "healing moments," and the safe space of a "Hive Container," like we have in MAPP, were presented to offer resources, comfort and care. Rosie and Linda discussed helping families have meaningful conversations and the importance of personal connections. Palliative care is finally starting to come of age, and this wonderful session, with skilled presenters proposed great reminders, including embracing the power of acceptance and non-judgment, in allowing space for grief, and the importance of seizing micro-moments of joy every day.





## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Scott Asalone, MAPP 2008

Ever since the first day that I met David Cooperrider at MAPP and listened to him speak I have been profoundly moved by his idea that "we move in the direction of what we most deeply question, of what we focus on." That idea has never left me in the years since MAPP and it is contained in all of the work I do with individuals and organizations. So, it is only natural that it comes to mind now.

We have an amazing group of MAPP individuals who each are changing the world in their own way. New books, podcasts, blogs (even a tv show) are offering everyone the benefits of positive psychology. That is not even counting the numerous workshops, interventions, coaching and consulting that is happening worldwide.

**"We move in the direction of what we most deeply question,  
of what we focus on." — David Cooperrider**

Yet simultaneously as this wave of positivity is pouring over the world it seems that negativity has reared its ugly head. We have never been closer to a nuclear war as the clock ticks down to zero. Nations are building walls literally or politically to keep out those in need. More and more the process of collaboration and conversation is disappearing to be replaced by single-mindedness and selfishness. (Wow. That's a lot of negativity)

So, here we have this loose group of amazing, energetic people who can change their own world in their individual areas. But it raises a larger question...who and what are we as an alumni group? Can we be a singular force for good in the world? Beyond preaching the value of positive psychology and enjoying our new adherents are we destined to be something else, especially in this historic time?

I believe that is our destiny. I believe that we have the capability to make major impacts on the world scene if we concentrate our abilities and energy. I believe that this is the time and the place for us not only to place positive psychology in the world, but to utilize its force to counter the negativity.

These are only my beliefs. However, I would wonder...are we willing to ask the question of what we might be? Are we willing to go beyond what is currently possible to believe in the impossible? Do we have the courage to ask the question and move in the direction of that which we most profoundly seek? I believe we do.

—Scott