

COMMON GROUND SPEAKER SERIES  
Counselor Breakfast with Scott Barry Kaufman  
January 24, 2017

*“Creativity is something that allows for us to reconcile all the seemingly incompatible parts of ourselves that just make us human—to make meaning of ourselves and the world around us.”* —  
Scott Barry Kaufman

Scott Barry Kaufman is the scientific director of *The Imagination Institute*, and conducts research in the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, where he also teaches the popular undergraduate course *Introduction to Positive Psychology*. He received a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology from Yale University, and an M. Phil in experimental psychology from the University of Cambridge. His writing has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Scientific American*, *Psychology Today*, and *Harvard Business Review*. He also writes a regular column at *Scientific American* called Beautiful Minds, and hosts The Psychology Podcast, which was recently named by *Business Insider* as a podcast that “will change how you think about human behavior”.

In 2013, Kaufman published *Ungifted: Intelligence Redefined*, which reviewed the latest science of intelligence and also detailed his experiences as a child growing up with a learning disability. In the book, he outlined his Theory of Personal Intelligence, which goes beyond traditional metrics of intelligence (e.g., IQ, standardized tests), and takes into account each person’s unique abilities, passions, personal goals, and developmental trajectory.

His latest book is *Wired to Create: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Creative Mind*, which he co-authored with the journalist Carolyn Gregoire. In *Wired to Create*, they review the latest science of creativity, and argue that creativity is a lifestyle that anyone can cultivate by continually engaging in a series of habits— from daydreaming to mindfulness to being open to new experiences.

Dr. Kaufman started his talk by acknowledging that kids in Special Education are treated with low expectations. As a child, he himself was diagnosed with a learning disability, so he knows first hand the importance of educators working hard to try to increase each student’s potential. When Dr. Kaufman first put forth his own theory of intelligence, he distinguished between ‘small i’ intelligence and ‘capital I’ Intelligence. ‘Small i’ intelligence measures attention and concentration, memory, numeracy, literacy, spacial reasoning and all the other factors that fall into the category of general intelligence. ‘Capital I’ intelligence looks to the dynamic interplay of engagement and ability in pursuit of personal goals. Basically, what it means to be a whole person.

Kaufman has spent his career trying to shift education to take more of a ‘whole person’ approach. He calls his approach *Positive Education* and, using a systems model from psychology, it integrates academics, character and well-being. Dr. Kaufman just celebrated *The Festival of Positive Education* in Dallas, Texas - an event he hosts every two years. Australia and England are very interested in this movement and sent representatives to the Festival to learn the techniques.

Kaufman recommends taking the Free Character Strengths Test available at <https://www.viacharacter.org/Survey/Account/Register> to better understand yourself and how to live a happier, more engaged and satisfying life.

Essential to Positive Education is the concept of ‘flow’. Flow is a psychological state in which a person is so enraptured in something that they lose sense of time and place. Another focus of Dr. Kaufman’s work is on resiliency. Resilience is the ability to grow and thrive in the face of challenges and to bounce back from adversity. Viktor Frankl’s book, *Man’s Search For Meaning*, proposes that our setbacks and our suffering are at our own hands - that it comes from within. Frankl writes that it is not the experience of trauma itself that is damaging, but in how we make meaning of the experience. Resilient people have a strong internal locus of control - a belief that they themselves are in control of their own achievements. As a result, resilient people seek out new opportunities, take

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calculated risks and capitalize on opportunities. Kaufman's research indicates that most often, resilient students are set apart by a bond created with a supportive caregiver, parent, teacher or mentor. In order to develop more of these types of caregivers, Kaufman teaches Resiliency Training - which he finds essential to 'capital I' Intelligence.

The goal in Resiliency Training is not to merely be symptom-free, but rather to flourish. When someone is flourishing, they see their life as one with a positive purpose, that includes positive relationships, is filled with positive emotions (joy, engagement, etc.), positive engagement and enjoys positive health. Kaufman finds four Resiliency Competencies:

1. **Self-awareness** - Mindfulness training that allows kids to tap into their inner selves and to increase self-acceptance;
2. **Self-regulation** - Using scientifically-validated "WOOP" - wish, outcome, obstacles, plan. There is an app to utilize: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/woop-app/id790247988?mt=8>
3. **Self-compassion** - Allowing kids to be kind to themselves and to teach them that they do not have to choose between academics and self-compassion. Both can exist simultaneously;
4. **Mental agility** - The ability to look at situations from multiple perspectives.

Kaufman trains his students CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) so they learn that thoughts drive consequences and that they need not immediately react to their thoughts. He uses the ATC model based on work by Albert Ellis:

- Think about an **Activating Effect** (trigger, challenge, adversity or positive event);
- What are your **Thoughts** about this event (your interpretations, what you say to yourself in the moment)?
- What are the **Consequences** for your emotions and physical reactions?

Kaufman also focuses on the benefits of gratitude. The character strength of gratitude is the single best predictor of well-being. So what can you do to bolster your gratitude? Fortunately, researchers have focused a lot of effort answering this question in the past decade. It is easy to let life's challenges and problems crowd out gratitude. All three of these suggestions revolve around making time to think about and focus on all the good in your life:

1. **Three Good Things.** There is something positive to take from almost any circumstance. Often, it's up to us to decide whether to look for the bad or the good—and most likely, we'll find whichever it is we're looking for. Positive psychologists have developed an exercise called "3 good things," also referred to as "what went well." Every day for 21 days, sit down in the evening and write down 3 things that went well during the day. Do not repeat any of the items. It will not take long before you realize that your life, no matter how difficult or stressful, is still full of a lot to be thankful for. Doing this exercise literally trains your brain to be more aware of the good things in your life.
2. **Gratitude Letters.** Carve out 10 minutes and write a hand-written letter to someone who has made a deep, positive impact on your life. Let them know how much you appreciate it and that you are grateful for the role they played in your life. If you can, hand-deliver it. If not, put it in the mail so that the person doesn't read it on a computer screen or smart phone. Doing this exercise has proven to improve life satisfaction for both the author and recipient for up to 6 months!
3. **Take a Gratitude Walk.** Leave your phone at home and take a 15–20 minute walk in the neighborhood or local park with one goal in mind: Think about what you are grateful for and how you can express that gratitude when the walk is over. Then pick up the phone, call someone, send a text message or write an email to someone you are grateful for. Because the character strength of gratitude is not just about recognizing what you are thankful for—it is about expressing it.

Kaufman makes his popular Introduction to Positive Psychology course syllabus available to the public: <http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu/sites/ppc.sas.upenn.edu/files/kaufman2016positivepsychology.pdf>