

Hearing Loss Association Whatcom County Chapter

"BE BRAVE: How do we equip ourselves and others to live a braver, more courageous life?"

Speaker: Melanie Cool, MA LMHC

Saturday, January 20th, 2018

President Mike: I think we are ready to go with Melanie Cool. Welcome, we are happy to have you with us. You always do such a great job.

Melanie Cool: Thank you!

[Applause]

Good morning! Another year! and I'm here again.

Raise your hand if you've heard me speak before. That's great. Raise your hand if you have never heard me speak before. I am Melanie Cool, a licensed mental health counselor specializing in Positive Psychology.

If you have heard me speak before, you know I talk about Positive Psychology, the Science of Well-being. Positive Psychology looks at what's right with you, looks at what you can do, looks at your strengths and how you can use them to increase your well-being.

Positive Psychology was developed by a researcher by the name of Martin Seligman [sp?]. He researches what contributes to well-being and has done so for 40 years. He coined the term positive psychology as the president of the APA.

He was not the first to study Positive Psychology; Maslow also studied it. **Martin Selegman** thought that psychology was skewed. Traditional psychology focuses on what is wrong with you and what needs to be fixed and that's not all there is to it.

The Diagnostical and Statistical Manual, or DSM, is a book that lists all sorts of psychological conditions. It's huge! **Selegmenn** understood what the DSM was for but he thought it would be better to focus on what was right with people in order to help them thrive.

Selegmen and a good number of researchers traveled the world and focused on character strengths like appreciation of beauty, creativity, love, hope, gratitude, wisdom; there are 24 of them and we all have them!

What Positive Psychology has found, is that if you assess what your top five strengths are and you intentionally use them in work, play and love, you will be a happier person. When I work with people and find out more about a time in their life when things were unhappy or not going well, we find it was because they were *not* using their strengths. So intentionally using your strengths contributes to happiness!

I am going to share with you the secret to happiness. What is the first thing that contributes to authentic happiness?

Charlene MacKenzie: Gratitude.

Melanie Cool: Yes, thank you, Charlene. She is the poster child for Positive Psychology! Now, you should even be grateful for the bad things that happen to us. What? Why would we thankful for that?

In Positive Psychology we look at "post traumatic growth." What is that? This is when you process a negative event from your past and ponder: "What have I learned from this? How am I going to do things differently because of this? How am I wiser/stronger for this?" Reframing negative events into positive outcomes leads to gratitude.

In the year 2002 I had a serious neck injury that resulted in my being in chronic pain all the time. I had no use of my right hand. I had 3 children, one of which was in diapers. I was very depressed. I had to move in with my parents -- they are over here! I had many surgeries coming up, no future, no income and I couldn't take care of my kids. I wanted to die.

One day my six year old, Mark, came into my bedroom and said, "Get up and make me breakfast!" I said, "No, grandma can make you breakfast." Mark threw my covers off and said, "You're the mom and it's your job to make me breakfast!" So I thought, OK, and I made him breakfast with one arm.

I started thinking: What can I do? I had a lifelong dream of being a counselor. My mom tells a story of me as a kid putting my Raggedy Ann doll in a chair and asking her to tell me her problems.

Earlier I had earned a degree in Psychology at the University of Washington. Then, at this time of my injury I thought maybe it was time for me to get my graduate degree in Psychology.

My mom drove me to Seattle once a month for two years to finish my Masters in Counseling in Psychology. While in graduate school I stumbled upon Positive Psychology. I had heard of **Selegmenn** and his research, but the Positive Psychology was "home" to me! I was doing it; I was focusing on my strengths and I decided the world needed to know about it!

I based all my research on Positive Psychology and that's all I do in my practice. People wonder if they can talk to me about what is wrong, and of course they can, but after talking about what is wrong we talk about where we can go from here. There's no proof that revisiting problems over and over can help you move on.

What else helps you contribute to happiness?

Female Student: Zest!

Melanie Cool: Yes, and that's zest for the here and now. If you have struggled with depression or anxiety, it may be a result of worrying about the past or stressing about what is going to happen in the future. Can we change the past? No.

We can make sense of it and let it go. Do we know what is going to happen in the future? No. We can make plans and then let them go.

We need to live right here and right now. This is where life unfolds. If you are living in the past or the future, you are missing out right here.

I grew up in Hawaii. Last weekend there was a big scare in Hawaii. Did you hear about it? There were lots of friends on mine on Facebook who talked about the alert. My friend went for a hike to the top of a mountain in Hawaii that morning

when she got the text message alert: Incoming missiles: Seek shelter; this is not a drill.

My friend called her mom and called her husband. She left a message on her husband's phone saying: Whatever happens, I love you.

38 minutes later, she got a message saying the alert was erroneous. She was, however, happy the way she dealt with the situation.

My other friend had teenage sons and she lives in Kailua. She was trying to reach her sons to tell them she loved them. This is why it's good to live in the now and live your passion; do nice things for other people.

Hope is the other contributor to happiness. Hope for the now. Hope for the future. You have a 100% success rate in surviving bad things. You are resilient. Anytime a bad thing happens to you, you are OK. It is all going to work out.

I am going to do something that you haven't heard me do before and you're going to be shocked.

This year we have an intern who is getting hours to graduate in the Marriage and Family therapy program. This is Kim Bradley. It's been great to have her in my office. If you know anyone who needs family or marriage therapy, she is here to help you. Our offices are in the north end of this building.

What I am going to do is write a word that you never hear me say: "Can't."

I want you to tell me things you can't do because of your hearing loss. What gets in the way? What can't you do because you have hearing loss? You can raise your hand and shout it out and I'll repeat it and Kim will write it down.

Bert Lederer: Get treatment.

Melanie Cool: What do you mean by that?

Bert Lederer: First of all to go to an otologist or medical doctor to see if there's anything wrong physiologically.

Larry: Can't hear in noisy environments.

Melanie Cool: I will repeat it: "Can't hear in noisy environments."

Joyce: "Can't hear crickets and frogs and some birds."

Charlene MacKenzie: I can't regenerate my auditory nerves.

Melanie Cool: We are working Kim hard!

Charlene MacKenzie: I can't get my family to speak up!

Melanie Cool: "Can't get family to speak up."

Mike: "Can't get people to speak clearly and slowly."

Melanie Cool: Before I started talking today my dad came up to me and said, "Make sure you speak clearly, slowly, and enunciate everything." He's been telling me that since I was 5 years old!

Female Student: "Can't hear my turn signal in my car."

Female Student: People on the phone don't understand they need to speak clearly and slowly. They do it for about 15 seconds and then start talking fast again.

Female Student: Can't get rid of tinnitus noise.

Melanie Cool: All right! Now, here's a word you always hear me say. "CAN!"

We are going to work together because there's nothing like a group think tank. If someone can't get treatment, what can they do?

Claydene: They can come to this meeting and get help from one another.

Melanie Cool: What else.

Charlene: With this meeting you get support, professional and technological information.

Pam: You can see your audiologist so you can hear a turn signal!

Melanie Cool: What are some things we can do to hear in noisy places?

Larry: Use the technology available.

Charlene MacKenzie: Go to restaurants on off hours so it's not so noisy.

Melanie Cool: Good idea.

Mike: You can sit where you can have your back to the wall or in a corner.

Melanie Cool: Yes, when we go to a restaurant with my dad, we let him choose where he wants to sit. You can do that. He likes to sit in a corner so there's no background noise behind him.

How do we hear crickets, frogs and birds?

Charlene MacKenzie: The frogs, crickets and birds came back to Bellingham when I got my cochlear implant. Also so did my stomach rumbling!

Joanna: Wear your hearing aids!

Melanie Cool: What about regenerating auditory nerves? It's not yet there, but they are researching it. Pay attention to the research!

Charlene MacKenzie: What we can do is be realistic and not beat ourselves for something we can't do such as this, something not available to use yet.

Melanie Cool: How do we get our family to speak up? We are not going to write down what Mike said!

Bert Lederer: Asking your family to speak up is a problem. There are situations where people in family say, "If you paid attention...; you just don't focus", those are derogatory types of comments.

Melanie Cool: That can be true. There are different types of hearing loss.

Sometimes it's a volume issue and other types deal with word discrimination. My dad has trouble discriminating words, so it's important for him to know that and know what to ask for.

What about tinnitus noise? What about that? How do we reduce that?

Charlene MacKenzie: I'll tell you what Pam did for me. First, she gave me hearing aids that met my other hearing needs so I could be more aware of all the other sounds around me and not focus on the roaring sounds in my head.

In addition to that, I got a Widex hearing aid that provided melodic sounds in one of the programs that masked the noise in my head. When I was in a very quiet place and the tinnitus was doing its thing in my head, I could switch the hearing aid to the program and it helped.

Melanie Cool: Great. The point is, if you're in a situation where you feel you can't do something, you probably can do something else! If you can't think of a "can," I'll offer 10 "cans" for your one "can't."

Melanie Cool: When doing this exercise we can think about bravery which means we face a challenge even if it's difficult, hard, emotionally painful; you face it! We have some very brave people in this group.

Bravery can help yourself, but ultimately you help others. When you go to a national park, it's captioned. When you go to a live show at the 5th Avenue Theatre, it's captioned. There are captions at sporting events. Some of the Washington State Ferry will be captioned.

Groups like this one exercised bravery to get those captions. It takes courage and advocacy. You can use bravery by turning "can'ts" into "cans." It is a brave act to ask for what you need from your family, our city, our world.

Now we are going to do an exercise. I'm going to ask Kim to hand these out. You'll need a pen for this exercise. Raise your hand if you don't have a pen.

On the left side of your page is the word "BRAVE."

Female Student: I would like to make a comment on something. This happened to

me just yesterday -- because of my apparatus in case I fall, I have this thing I wear all the time and it was giving me a bad time. I decided to go with a different company. I got a person on the phone and they were talking so fast and I asked them to slow down due to my hearing problem. It happened a couple of times.

Finally I got through to her and she slowed down. And I thanked her! Boy, did that make a difference. I said, "I really appreciate your slowing down to speak clearly so I can understand." I think that when you talk to some of these people, more so than bawling them out, if you take time to ask them to understand and then thank them, it really makes a difference.

Melanie Cool: Yes, you can say, "I appreciate that you are looking at me when you are speaking." This is how we educate people to talk to people with hearing loss.

Now, down the left side of the page is the word BRAVE. Please come up with a word for each letter on how you can be more brave in your life!

Something that starts with a B, an R, etc. We are going to exercise your brain now. How can you be more brave? How can you turn "can'ts" into "cans?" How can you advocate for yourself and for others?

We are going to stop now. We are going to give Soren, our Sound-tech, some exercise with the microphone. We are going to read off some of our answers. If you couldn't think of a word, write someone else's down. If you want to add to your answer, please do so. We are going to do three from each letter.

I'd like to hear from people who haven't spoken up yet. We are going to go for three B's. Three hands for B?

Female Student: **Be** insightful.

Female Student: **Be** positive.

Female Student: **Be** assertive.

Melanie Cool: Yes, wonderful. Those were great. Let's do three R's.

Don: **Remind** yourself to follow through.

Melanie Cool: Yes.

Female Student: Rule out disappointment.

Melanie Cool: I love it! That's wonderful!

Bert Lederer: Relax.

Melanie Cool: You know, that's a really good one. When you have hearing loss, it's hard to relax because you think you're going to miss something and you are on all the time with other senses. Relax is a good one. Now **A's**.

Mike: Advocate.

Melanie Cool: I was hoping to hear that one. I had it on my list if it didn't come up.

Female Student: Ask.

Melanie Cool: Yes, ask for help! Ask for information.

Bev: This one relates back to the first one for boldness and assertiveness. I have Accentuate the positive for A. Was it Larry or Wayne that sent out that old song from the '40s, "you have to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative. . . and don't miss Mr. In Between."

Melanie Cool: Thank you. Now we are on **V**.

Female Student: Value the hearing you do have and use hearing protection around loud noises.

Female Student: Volunteer.

Melanie Cool: Absolutely.

Female Student: View all that is wonderful around you.

Melanie Cool: Yes! That's looking at what is right instead of what is wrong. E?

Female Student: Enjoy more.

Melanie Cool: Enjoy more! There is always something to enjoy, right? It's hard to find sometimes, but you can find it.

Female Student: Enough complaining!

Melanie Cool: Good one! One more.

Female Student: Exercise.

Melanie Cool: Yes, that's great! I always tell people when I first meet with them it's important to give the brain what it needs to function right. Our brain is mentioned by chemical balance. If we eat good food, breath, exercise and the like, then our brain gets what it needs to function properly. Eventually, we may need some medications, but adjusting the chemicals in the brain is very important. Exercise is very important.

Do you have words under every letter? At the bottom of the page, write one thing you can do right away to be more brave in your life.

One thing you can do to be more brave in your life.

[Group writing]

Everyone's "Brave" is different. When you share something brave you are doing or going to do, it inspires others. Let's see how brave we can be to inspire others and share the one thing you are going to do to be more brave. Raise your hand.

Joyce: This is very good because I take it very personally and I really need to do this. Not give into disappointment and frustration.

Melanie Cool: That's good. How do we do that?

It's important to acknowledge the disappointment and frustration and then ask, "What can I do about this? Is there something I can change or do? and then

move forward."

Female Student: Engage in a new adventure.

Melanie Cool: Do you know what the adventure would be?

Female Student: Oh yes! What I'm going to be doing, now that I'm on my own, I'm going to become more physically and mentally active. The adventure I'm going to be taking is to put myself out front there and make an effort to do things I haven't don't before.

Melanie Cool: I love it!

Female Student: Value your own opinions.

Melanie Cool: Yes, that has to do with self worth, self confidence and self esteem. Beverly?

Beverly: Another influential piece of advice comes from the Serenity Prayer: grant me the power to change the things I can, the wisdom to the know the difference. As a list maker I write several things down and what can I change about them? Some things happened in the past and you can't change. Some of the things are things I can change, and if so, I put question marks on them.

I can go from there and start tackling the list. I advocate my own well-being and there are things I can't change so I have to just soldier on. That prayer is helpful for everyday life.

Melanie Cool: There's that word "acceptance" and I think that's the hardest work of all: To accept the things we cannot change. That is difficult, deep work.

When we are able to do that, we are filled with so much relief, it's amazing.

Mike: This comes up a lot, and I'm sure with everyone, but it seems to me the world revolves around forgiveness, being forgiving.

Melanie Cool: Not only forgiving others, our past or our circumstances, but forgiving ourselves. We have time for one more.

Terry: Don't be bashful.

Melanie Cool: That's a good one! OK one more.

Female Student: Always have a smiling face and patience.

Melanie Cool: Yes, that's good.

Today you learned the secret to happiness. You learned how to be happier in your life by using your strengths. You learned about being brave and one more thing you can do this year to be brave. If you ever want to talk more about Positive Psychology, I'd be happy to see you.

We have a couple more minutes and I'm happy to answer questions.

Terri: I don't have a question, but sorry -- testing, hello? I was walking out here and I have a really bad back and I'm going to have surgery and I'm optimistic about it, but it occurred to me that one of the bravest things we can do is ask for help.

We try to solve everything on our own and by ourselves and there are people out there waiting to help us. They don't know it either. The more you ask, the more you question and let people know what you are going through, the more people there are that will help you.

Melanie Cool: Yes, there's a study called The Harvard Study that's been going on for over 70 years and it shows the predictor of happiness is the basis of your social relationships. It's based on people you love and people who love you.

Once I told my parish nurse I couldn't ask for anymore help because I felt I used it all up but she said, "If you don't ask for help, you are denying my joy to help you!" We need others to be happy. Social relationships cause more healthy immune systems and people with good relationships even live longer!

Any more questions? Well, I appreciate your having me. I think Amanda and I are celebrating our 10th anniversary today. I'll be here next year and if you have any questions in between you know where to find me!

Mike: As always, thank you for helping us kick off the year in a positive way. You do speak slowly, clearly and you enunciate! And now you get to go help your mom and dad move!

Before you leave, we are recognizing volunteers and helpers, so please help yourself to a rose, chocolate or both. Please take a 10 minute break; then we'll come back and conclude the meeting.

[10 minute break]

Mike: Let's get started.

Bert Lederer: Hello! I'm Bert Lederer and in August 2004 I helped Charlene start this group. The vision we had at that time has certainly come true.

There were 21 chapters of the Hearing Loss Association of America founded in the State of Washington in the 1990s and I believe there are 5 left that are not doing too well and we are doing great!

We have not received any help from the National Hearing Loss Association but we are doing great and they are a great resource. We have definitely had help from the church here.

This is our 14th year kickoff. We have met every month since the beginning and we have an average of 40 participants per month. It's wonderful that it's happened here and the reason we stay strong is because of you attending, excellent leadership, support from the church, a good program every month, and two potlucks per year.

Today we have the president of the church congregation, Donna Grubbs, and I'm happy she's here for the kickoff.

I'm happy Donna is here today!

Donna: Thank you. My mother was deaf in one ear which was an advantage because we could stand behind her and she couldn't hear us, but we also learned to stand in front of people who have a hearing loss to communicate well.

I am happy to be here from CTS because over the years we have reached out to include groups like years. One of my new projects and the pastor's projects for 2018 is to have this building be used even more.

I brought along a form which is the property agreement with the church. This is to give you a place that is your time, your spot and these are the people are connected with so you are anchored here. We don't want you to go away. Whoever signs is, please give it to Charlene.

Mike: That's it for today! See you all next month!

[End of meeting.]