Introduction

All of us have heard of the story of Aladdin, in which a Genie appears to grant Aladdin three wishes. Imagine that a poorer version of the Genie—with only one wish instead of three—appears in front of you and offers you a choice of one of the following two options for the rest of your life:

“If you choose **Option A,**” the Genie says, “you will lead a very happy and fulfilling life, a life in which you will wake up every day with a great deal of enthusiasm and optimism about what you have to do for that day. You will love what you do for a living and your life will generally be stress free. Indeed, if you were asked the following question on any random day of your life: ‘how happy are you?’, you would answer, ‘very happy’. However, not too many people will know of you, or even respect what you do for a living. Indeed, to the external world, you would appear to be leading a life that is dull as ditchwater; and a lot of people may even comment that you have “wasted your talents”. Further, you won’t have amassed much wealth, although you will make enough to make ends meet and enjoy an occasional vacation.”

“If you choose **Option B,** on the other hand,” continues the Genie, “you will lead an extremely glamorous life. You will be the toast of the town, a national celebrity, in fact. You will be considered the world’s expert in a particular field of your choosing, and often be called upon to speak to audiences across the globe. You will have a very good looking partner and a fantastic house. Internally, however, you will be stressed and, on many occasions, plagued with self-
doubt. Often, you will need sleeping pills to fall asleep and, on the occasions that you do fall asleep without them, you will wake up at night in a cold sweat, worrying about the things that you need to get done the next day. If you were asked, ‘how happy are you?’ on any random day of your life you, your answer—your real answer, not your public relations answer—would be, ‘not at all.’”

Which of these two options appears instinctively more attractive to you?

Although you may not have explicitly thought about this type of question up to this point in your life, one of these options instinctively appears more attractive to you because you have implicitly subscribed to a vision for your ideal life. For most students at reputed universities (such as UT), and especially among those enrolled in the business schools, the vision that is more frequently entertained and propagated is the one depicted in Option B.

What is wrong with Option B? Isn’t the definition of a leader someone who seeks to influence people? Clearly, Option B affords much greater opportunity to influence others. Further, shouldn’t a true leader be courageous, someone who loves to take on challenges? Again, Option B appears to offer greater opportunity for challenges and growth. As such, shouldn’t an aspiring leader choose Option B over Option A, however painful the option may be?

Not according to a fundamental tenet of this course, which is that the first priority of any leader is to have clarity that a life of stress, a life of self-doubt and internal conflict—a life in which one needs the aid of sleeping pills to fall asleep—is not worth any amount of extrinsic rewards (money, power, fame, respect, etc.) beyond that which is required to meet “basic” needs. From the perspective of this course, leadership is not something one strives towards, but rather, is an outcome that follows as a natural consequence of leading an authentic and fulfilling life. In other words, you need to become comfortable with the following idea: if, despite pursuing an authentic and fulfilling life, you are not seen as a leader, then so be it.

Several clarifying comments are in order here. First, you may wonder about a third possible option: of starting out with Option B and evolving into Option A, that is, starting out with money, fame, power and influence and then slowly (presumably as you get wiser), transitioning into Option A. I believe that this is very difficult to pull off (although I know a few people who have done it), since the chances are greater that you get irreversibly embroiled in the trappings of Option B, and are never able to bring yourself to walk away from them.

Second, the way the two options are described above, I have made it appear as if the characteristics of one option are mutually exclusive of the characteristics of the other. Specifically, I have made it sound as if a life of authenticity and fulfillment cannot bring with it worldly riches, fame and power. In reality, this may not be true. (Indeed, if anything, the
opposite may be true.) But, the point I wish to make is the following: if you are forced to choose between two options, one of which guarantees fulfillment and meaning but not “conventional success” (wealth, power, etc.), and the other guarantees conventional success but not fulfillment and meaning, you need to have the clarity to choose the former and reject the latter. In other words, if worldly riches, fame, and power accrue despite opting for Option A, they come as bonuses of an already fulfilling life; thus, to a person interested in choosing Option A, extrinsic rewards are not the end-goals, but rather, are potential by-products of a life that is already fulfilling.

Third, if Option A appears to you to be a life of leisure and “escapism”, it simply points to a fallacy in your belief system. Most people have been coached to believe that meaningful achievements are only possible through “striving and stressing.” I will be presenting an alternative vision to you, one in which you will work just as hard—if not harder—towards your goals than a person motivated by external rewards, just that it won’t seem like hard work because it won’t come with stress; indeed, in this vision, you will work hard because you will see your work as fun!

My final comment has to do with a potential concern that some of you may have about a course such as this: will it produce beatniks and tree huggers? Or worse, hyper-active anti-capitalists and propagators of conspiracy theories?

I would like to reassure you that, all things considered, I believe more in a capitalistic (vs. socialist) economic ideology and in a democratic (vs. socialist or autocratic) political set-up. In the ideal scenario, the course will produce, what may be called, “conscious capitalists,”2 that is, people who operate within the constraints of a capitalistic set-up, but with an acute awareness of, and concern for, those who don’t have a voice within such a system. More generally, I am hoping to inspire students to develop a unique sensitivity and understanding for the beneficial role that they can play within any context in which they operate, without compromising a commitment to staying true to their intrinsic interests and values.

**Other Tenets**

I have already articulated a basic tenet of the course, namely, that one needs clarity that a life of unnecessary stress, self-doubt, and internal conflict is not worth external rewards. There are three other fundamental tenets that shape all aspects of the course (the readings, exercises, the logic behind the course content and structure):

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2 This is a term that I have borrowed from Raj Sisodia and John Mackey; see “Conscious Capitalism” by these authors.
1. Attaining a life of authenticity and fulfillment is possible through a scientific approach.³

Most business schools focus on providing students with skill-sets and tools that can be used to alter or control the external environment—increase market-share, negotiate a deal with your client, assess the financial worth of a risky venture, etc. These skills and tools, however useful in improving firm performance and increasing profits, are not suited for achieving clarity on such issues as: a) how can I stay motivated in the face of persistent obstacles?, b) what are some of self-defeating aspects of my personality and how can I alter them?, c) how can I stay focused on what I need to do when the consequences of my decisions are so monumental?, etc.

One of the important reasons why business schools have shied away from these questions is because these questions are thought to be “too soft” and “fluffy” to be amenable to a rigorous, scientific approach.⁴ This assumption has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years. Indeed, as attested by the success of several courses on leadership offered at leading Universities (Columbia Business School, Harvard Business School, London Business School, etc.)—courses that are broadly consistent with the same “inside-out” philosophy of leadership that lies at the foundation of this course—it has become patently clear that a rigorous and scientific approach can be effectively used to pursue these types of questions. The two domains of scientific research that will inform the readings, exercises, content, and structure of this course are Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Positive Psychology.

2. True change is difficult, but attainable.⁵

One of the objectives of this course is to achieve a transformation in your personality such that, rather than have fear (e.g., of failing to get a good grade), guilt (e.g., of failing to fulfill your parents’ aspirations), or other negative emotions motivate you to work, it is love for, and intrinsic interest in, what you have chosen to do that motivates you. Note that the process of achieving this transformation may, for many of you, be disturbing because it shakes your foundations about many of your deep-seated beliefs, goals, and values. (For example, you may discover that you need to let go of your long-cherished dream of becoming a consultant or an investment banker.) You will need to have the courage to accept this possibility. Further, change can be slow and can take place subconsciously (i.e., without your being aware of it), so the transformation

³ There are a plethora of books on this topic now-a-days. I have just finished writing a book on this topic myself, titled, “If you are so smart, why aren’t you happy?” Some readings for this class will be chapters from this book.
⁴ There are at least two other reasons why business schools have traditionally stayed away from these types of questions. First, many business school faculty believe that these types of questions are out of the scope of a business school curriculum (that is, business schools have no business focusing on personal issues). Second, several business school faculty believe that these questions are not important for achieving business success. I disagree with all of these perspectives, for reasons I will discuss in class.
⁵ See “Switch” by Chip Heath and Dan Heath.
process can be frustrating; patience is thus important. Finally, a transformation in personality is manifested multi-dimensionally; that is, not just in your attitude towards work, but in all facets and dimensions of your life, including how you relate to others in your personal life, how and what you eat, how physically active you are, etc. Be open-minded about changing any and all aspects of your life.

3. Finally, mindset and motivation are both critical in achieving transformation.\(^6\)

No consciously-directed change is possible without believing that change is possible. That is, much like how medicines often work only if you believe they will cure you, it is important for you to have the confidence and belief in yourself that you can change. This is not unscientific hogwash; it just so happens that a fundamental aspect of our nature is such that we can consciously achieve only that which we feel confident and hopeful of achieving. If you strongly believe that your personality is set in stone and that you cannot change it, then this course is not for you. If, on the other hand, you feel that you are open to changing your personality in the quest for leading an authentic and fulfilling life—even if it means that others (perhaps even your closest friends) may no longer recognize you—then you owe it to yourself to take the course.

While belief that you can change is important, it is not enough. Even if you believe change is possible, consciously-directed change may not occur if you are not motivated to change. A big part of the motivation is reflected in your being able to let go of your egocentric mental blocks. Are you willing to change something that you consider to be a core and defining aspect of your personality (e.g., the fact that you always like to “speak the truth” even if it is offensive to others) if there is reason to believe that doing so can steer you toward an authentic and fulfilling life? Are you willing to give a new—and untested—concept your full commitment even if you feel somewhat pessimistic about its chances of succeeding? If you answered “yes” without hesitation to these questions, this course is for you.

**Course Objectives and Tools for Achieving Objective**

There are three main objectives for this course. The first objective is to provide you (the student) the opportunity to discuss, with your peers, one of life’s most important questions: *What are the determinants of a meaningful and fulfilling life?* The second objective is to provide you with the skill-set and the confidence to devise your own roadmap for leading a meaningful and fulfilling life. The third objective—stated earlier—is to transform your personality into one who, by and large (and certainly in life’s most important decisions), operates out of love for what you want to do, rather than out of fear for what you have to do.

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\(^6\) See “Mindset” by Carol Dweck.
As a natural consequence of achieving such a transformation, you will benefit from a general sense of cognitive clarity, as a result of which you will be able to think more freely and creatively, and arrive at more optimal decisions more regularly. From an emotional standpoint, you will be happier and less stressed and, on occasions in which you are subject to stress, you will be better able to cope with it. In sum, you are more likely to exude a sense of quiet confidence than you did before. Further, you will likely be more ethical in your conduct, and will also benefit from enhanced interpersonal skills and greater enthusiasm both in your personal and professional pursuits.

Critical to achieving this transformation is the ability to introspect on the nature of your mind and on your motivations, combined with a willingness to “experiment” on yourself to identify the practices that work for (and against) you. I will consider the course to have been a success if, at the end of it, you feel that have the skills necessary to conduct, as and when you desire, a self-analysis on the inner workings of your mind. Although you may consider yourself to be the world’s expert on “You,” it is likely that you know quite a bit less about yourself than is desirable. All aspects of the course are ultimately designed to enable you to discover insights into aspects of your personality that limit you from achieving your potential. The specific tools include:

1. Readings, articles, and videos: You will be assigned several articles and book chapters for this course. You will also be asked to view several videos that will expose you to a number of transformational concepts, all of which are aimed at re-shaping your thinking into becoming more positive, optimistic, and action-oriented. Some fundamental ideas that we will explore include the following: a) Why is it useful to be happy?, b) What are the goals and ideals to which you currently subscribe? Why do you seek these goals and how do they limit your progress?, c) What is “reality” and how do your beliefs about what is real matter?, and d) What are the set of attitudes that help propagate a happy, confident state?

2. In-class Discussions: Perhaps the most important way by which you will achieve clarity about the subtle and devious workings of your mind is through in-class discussions and interactions with others. Indeed, a class such as this one can succeed only if there is active and animated discussion. So, come prepared to speak in class and don’t be afraid to ask fundamental and seemingly stupid questions. If you are afraid to ask a question because it might invite ridicule, you owe it to the class to ask it!

3. Exercises: The exercises are the heart of the course. Whereas conceptual knowledge (especially if it is perceived as being logical and coherent) can make you confident that it can work, it is not until the knowledge manifests itself in your actions that a transformation in your personality can be expected. For example, while you may generally buy the idea that keeping a journal (in which you record the day’s activities,
thoughts and feelings) can be useful in aiding your progress towards transformation, this transformation will not occur unless you actually do keep the journal. There is just no short cut around this. So, please commit yourself to giving each and every assignment your best effort.

Grades

I am generally not fond of grading since it kills intrinsic motivation. The concept of grading appears particularly anathema to a course such as this, since an important focus of the course is to help you identify intrinsically motivating goals. However, we have to live with the reality that grades are an indispensable part of our university’s system. Further, in a way, the grading system mimics life after school: whether you like it or not, you are going to be graded in your work-life, dating-life, and in other domains as well. So, why not use the context of this class—and the aspect of being evaluated (through grades) embedded in it—to explore the possibility of transcending the constraints that being graded places on your well-being and equanimity? Indeed, a lot of the concepts and exercises in the class will be directly applicable to overcoming the pressure that being graded places on you.

The grading will follow the following point-allocation scheme:

1. Class participation (individual): 10 points

2. Assignments (individual and group): 70 points
   
   I. Journal (self-grading) 5 points
   II. Healthy lifestyle 10 points
   III. Expressing Gratitude 10 points
   IV. Ideal Life Exercise 10 points
   V. Who am I?—Auto sketch 15 points
   VI. Final project (creative altruism) presentation 20 points
   VII. Retrospective Exercise 0 points

3. Final exam (individual): 20 points

   The class participation grade will be based on the quality of your participation during class. Here are the salient points with regard to this aspect of your grade:

   1. There are 28 sessions in this class and, for each session, you will get a grade between 0 points and 10 points. Your final class participation grade will be calculated based on the overall score you get across 25 of these 28 sessions.

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7 See Dan Pink’s book, “Drive”.

2. **You are allowed to miss up to 3 sessions—except the presentations (2 sessions), brainstorming (1 session) and autosketch quiz (1 session)—without penalty.**

3. **For the sessions for which you are absent, you will get 0 points. You will be penalized 2 points (that is, you will get a score of -2) for missing the presentation, brainstorming and autosketch quiz sessions.**

4. **You will be penalized for missing more than three sessions for ANY reason (job interviews, sickness, etc.)**

5. **For the sessions for which you are present, you will be graded (on class participation) as follows:**

   i. Absence 0 points
   
   ii. “Bad attitude” or missing brainstorming, autosketch quiz or presentation sessions -2 points
   
   iii. Mere presence in class (no contribution): 8 points
   
   iv. Good comments (shows good critical thinking) 9 points
   
   v. Excellent comments (show attempt to integrate material) 10 points

   **Important note:** you will be penalized (2 points) for displaying “bad attitude” in class. (For these sessions, you will get -2 points.) Bad attitude includes, but is not restricted to:

   i. Being tardy
   
   ii. Text messaging (or using laptop), and
   
   iii. Engaging in cross-talk while a discussion/lecture is going on

   You will get one warning for displaying “bad attitude” and be penalized if you continue to exhibit it.

   With regard to the **assignments**, excluding the retrospective exercise (which is worth 0 points), there are six assignments, of which five are “individual” assignments and one (creative altruism) is a “team” assignment. (You will be asked to form teams before the plus break, most likely on March 2\textsuperscript{nd}.) Please form teams of 3-4 students (no less than 3 and no more than 4). Needless to say, for the team assignment, every student will be expected to contribute his/her fair share. If you believe that one or more members of your team did not do so, please contact me and I will investigate the issue.

   All assignments (except retrospective) count towards your final grade. Hard copies of instructions for the assignments will be handed out on the starting date for the assignment (see last page of the syllabus), and assignment reports will be due on the specified due dates (see last page of the syllabus).

   The final exam will consist of two parts: multiple choice and short essay. The first part will be worth 8 points (consisting of 16 questions) and the second part will be worth 12 points
(consisting of 4 questions of which you will need to answer 3; each question will be worth 4 points).

**Important note:** You will be penalized 10% of your assignment grade for turning the assignment in 1 day late and 25% for turning it in 2 days late. You will be penalized 50% for turning the assignment in more than 2 days late. (You have up until the end of the semester to turn in an assignment.) **In the interest of fairness to other students, please do not request extension of deadline for any assignment for any reason.** If you need an extra day or two to turn in an assignment, please do so, but please also accept the associated penalty.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS FOR CLASS:**

**Required reading:**

There will be, on average, one article per session. The links to readings/videos will be distributed via email to you on the day of the previous session (or earlier). You can also access the links on Canvas.

**Other materials:**

Buy a journal (doesn’t matter what type of journal it is; it could even been a simple notebook) and dedicate it to this class. Note that you could even keep an online journal. You will need to write in this journal every day, beginning January 17th, 2016 (Tuesday) through May 2nd, 2016 (Tuesday). The journal is a self-graded assignment—meaning, you will need to grade yourself for this assignment. (This is so that you have the freedom to write whatever you want to in the Journal—the instructor or TA won't be reading your journal.) The instructions for the assignment will have details on the grade you need to give yourself. Needless to say, we will expect you to be completely honest in the grade you give yourself for it.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-4641 TTY or visit the website http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/

**CLASS WEBSITES AND STUDENT PRIVACY:**

Password-protected class sites will be available for all accredited courses taught at The University of Texas at Austin. Syllabi, handouts, assignments and other resources are types of information that may be available within these sites. Site activities could include exchanging e-mail, engaging in class discussions and chats, and exchanging files. In addition, class e-mail rosters will be a component of the sites. Students who do not want their names included in
these electronic class rosters must restrict their directory information in the Office of the Registrar, Main Building, Room 1. For information on restricting directory information see: http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi02-03/app/appc09.html.
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<th>Topic</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>Jan 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Genesis of the course; syllabus overview</td>
<td>Begin Journal</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Thur</td>
<td>Jan 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>What is happiness? Definitions and measurement</td>
<td>Leading Healthy Lifestyle</td>
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<td>Thur</td>
<td>Jan 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Tue</td>
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<td>Thur</td>
<td>Feb 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Peaks &amp; valleys; values &amp; shadow values</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Tue</td>
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<td>3 most important questions</td>
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<td>Feb 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4th habit and exercise</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Topic TBD</td>
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**SPRING/GLOBAL CONNECTIONS BREAK: March 6<sup>th</sup> – March 19<sup>th</sup>**

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<td>Recap of pre-break material</td>
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<td>Brainstorming for final project</td>
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<td>Apr 18&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>The MBA Framework &amp; The 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; sin, habit &amp; exercise</td>
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<td>Apr 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Enhancing employee &amp; societal well-being</td>
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<td>Wrap-Up: Sustaining happiness and fulfillment</td>
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