

Booster Shot Workshops

- by Eric S. Kim, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan

As trees forfeit their leaves in October and Michigianians across the state brace for colder winds, many head to their doctors for flu shots - a preventative measure against illnesses that spread during our harsh winters. With Michigan's unemployment rate greater than the national average by several percentage points, even topping a staggering 15% in June, we are in an economic winter. It may seem like a strange time to be investing in personal well-being, yet in hard times like these, nothing is more important.

With hopes of contributing some practical, positive skills to the distressed community, faculty and staff from both the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) and Executive Education at the University of Michigan's Stephen M. Ross School of Business teamed up because they wanted to offer practical tools, exercises, and ideas that would inspire a sense of hope in this time of need. From these compassionate desires came the idea of offering Booster Shot workshops to the community. This multidisciplinary effort had faculty and staff from various University of Michigan areas, including the School of Public Health, University of Michigan Health System, and the Department of Psychology joining the Ross School's Center for POS and Executive Education to make the workshops a success.

On several Saturday mornings spanning from late May to late July, six world-class professors donated their time. Unlike other self-help seminars that offer advice derived from mainstream pop culture, these workshops were steeped in empirical research. Applying their occupational expertise in research and lecturing, the professors translated the gems of knowledge locked away in academic journals into relevant and accessible tools that would help community members thrive in these hard economic times. "In times when people in work and out of work most need them, these Booster Shot workshops are designed to boost attendees' sense of hope and possibility about thriving in challenging times. These 'booster shots' are relevant for all organizations—in both private and public sectors, large and small—as well as for individuals currently holding jobs and for those without," said Jane Dutton, the Robert L. Kahn Distinguished Professor of Business Administration and Psychology and co-Director of the Center for POS.



Program Coordinator Jennifer Huntington



Professor Jane Dutton

The workshop series kicked off with a presentation by Professor Dutton and Justin Berg called "Building Strength through Crafting Your Job." They introduced a self-development tool that helped participants reconsider their jobs in a new way to make tasks more engaging and satisfying. A visually stimulating and interactive workbook guided attendees in identifying and matching personal passions, strengths, and motives with tasks at work. In the second session, "Building Strength through Everest Goals," Kim Cameron, the William Russell Kelly Professor of Management and Organizations at the Ross School, presented two techniques for thriving in difficult times — goal-setting and personal management interview programs — and introduced practical tools to enhance organizational performance. Session three described "Discovering and Living Your Calling." Valerie Myers, assistant professor of health management and policy at the School of Public Health and adjunct



Professor Kim Cameron

assistant professor of management and organizations at the Ross School, provided tools for structured reflection and action steps to help participants discover and live their "calling" by linking their own faith to work (and to help them understand the faith of others). In session four, "Building Strength as a Crisis Leader," Lynn Perry Wooten, clinical associate professor of strategy and management and organizations, taught participants about crisis leadership by exploring the viewpoint that crisis situations are opportunities for resilience and learning. For session five, "Investing in Well-Being to Build Strength," Sandra Finkel, manager of the Stress Management Services and Executive Health Program at the Cardiovascular Center, examined strategies and techniques for cultivating a calm and uplifted state of mind through meditation, journaling, and mindfulness practices — regardless of circumstances. Christopher Peterson, the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Psychology, closed the series with "Using Positive Psychology in Trying Times."



Professor Christopher Peterson

Professor Peterson applied the theories of positive psychology — the empirical study of virtues and strengths that enable individuals to flourish - and discussed their relevance to the workplace, especially in trying times. He also explained why work is psychologically important.

Though similar workshops and lectures by such high-caliber professors can run at significant fees, the Ross School of Business kept the cost to attend the Booster Shot workshops as low as possible - just enough to cover materials, administrative tasks, and a continental breakfast for attendees. A variety of people attended the workshops, a majority of whom came from the larger Ann Arbor community, including local family

restaurant owners, Washtenaw County employees, unemployed individuals, and retirees, as well as current students, faculty, and staff from a variety of departments within the University of Michigan.

Feedback from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive. “The workshop was incredibly helpful. I loved the framework that was presented and I wish more business students were here to enjoy it. I think it would be great if they incorporate things like this [workshop] into our first or second year fall curriculums to help us better gauge our interests and the internships we should aim for,” said a current 2nd year MBA student. A local artist said, “Not only was I inspired by the workshop, but I found a future collaborator who I’m going to catch a meal with next week in order to discuss a project.”

Cheri Alexander, Executive Director for the Ross School of Business Executive Education program, co-organized the Booster Shots and attended all six sessions. As former president of General Motors University and a passionate advocate for making education and development opportunities accessible to as many people as possible, she was impressed by the enthusiasm of the professors, the variety of multimedia used, and, most importantly, the valuable lessons conveyed in each and every workshop. She even brought some of the lessons home with her to discuss with family members.

Smiles, laughter, and a general sense of hope filled the air after each workshop. Attendees mingled, sharing stories and contact information. Friendships were formed. Attendees left the workshops empowered with new tools, friends, and ideas to help boost their psychological and emotional well-being, as well as a toolbox of applicable skills. Workshop attendees may not be completely immune to the ebbs and flows of the economy, but organizers hope the Booster Shots workshops have empowered all attendees and helped them endure, and even prosper, in this cold economic winter.