

What Really Matters? Leadership with No Regrets

Fall 2023 Syllabus

Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 2:00pm-3:15pm

Class Location: 238 Thompson St (GCASL) Room C95 Loc: Washington Square

Professors: Yael Shy yls204@nyu.edu

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Graders:

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Office Hours: Email Us!

Course Overview

In study after study, people lying on their deathbeds overwhelmingly say they regret five things at the end of their life: 1. Not living a life of authenticity 2. Working too hard at the expense of their relationships 3. Not having the courage to express their feelings 4. Not staying in touch with friends. 5. Not letting themselves be happier. For leaders, it's not any different. This course unpacks each of these "regrets" with readings, exercises, meditation, deep listening, skill development and leadership theory, examining historical and contemporary answers to the question of what really matters in life, and providing the space for students to grapple with the question themselves.

Required Readings:

"What Now? Meditation for Your Twenties and Beyond" (Parallax, 2017) by Yael Shy (available through most libraries, Bobst, and wherever books are sold). All other readings are available on Brightspace or will be emailed. Please complete the readings and assignments BEFORE the class where they are listed. Integration papers are due the hour before each class.

Course Requirements & Grading:

1) **30%- Attendance.** Show up! Persistent lateness/unexcused absence will be marked and count against your attendance grade. Your grader will be making note of your attendance in each week. Religious holidays are excused absences. Medical issues will be excused up to one week's class and students must notify in advance of the class. Please notify your assigned grader via email and cc both professors on any request for absence.

2) **10% - Class Participation.** Please bring a notebook or journal and a pen with you to each class for exercises we will do in class. A laptop is not permitted for use in class unless you have a Moses accommodation. Persistent checking of phones, laptops or frequent latenesses will count against your participation and will unexcused absences and lateness to class.

3) **60% - Weekly Integration Papers.** It is easy to skim through many readings, but hard to remember what you've read unless you do some higher-level integrative processing. To help you do so, all students will be required to submit a weekly 1 to 2-page "integration paper." You can skip 2 of these papers without penalty, and nothing is due the first week of class. You should choose two questions from the prompts for each integration paper, and make sure and answer them in a way that directly applies to your life. This should not be a book report or a third-person report - it should include *your* thoughts and reflections and ways this material intersects with your lived experience. Feel free to use "I" statements and share as personally as you feel comfortable.

Format the document as double-spaced, 12 pt font, with no title page, and an absolute max of 2 pages (1- 1.5 pages should be enough text). Be sure to put your name at the top. Submit your homework via Brightspace. They will be graded on a 1-3 scale where 3 = you have answered at least 2 of the questions and have applied each to your life in some direct way. 2 = you have done some but not all of this, and 1 = you are missing multiple elements.

Papers and readings are to be completed before that week's class. If you do not hand in any paper, it is an automatic 0. Late papers are knocked down one grade level (3 to 2, 2 to 1, 1 to 0) for each unexcused late day. Papers that are more than 2 days late will automatically be marked a zero. Extensions and exceptions must be requested via email to your grader with the professors included. As stated above, you are allowed to miss two papers without penalty for the duration of the semester.

Extra Credit: There will be two opportunities for extra credit assignments during the course of the semester. The first is a writing assignment focused on what really matters to you by writing out your plan for a meaningful life. Drawing on all of your previous integration papers, the course readings and practices, write an essay that considers your life from all the angles we discussed in this class. What can you do to maximize your chances of having a meaningful life with no regrets? The expected length for the essay is 5-6 pages double-spaced. Tie the elements in your plan to our readings and class discussions. This should be submitted by 12/13/23 at 2PM and will bump your grade one level (ie an A- will go to an A; a B will go to a B+)

The second extra credit opportunity will happen once or twice during the course of the semester. Students will be given the option to attend an on-campus workshop/event coordinated by the professors on a theme relevant to the course material and then submit a paper following the same guidelines as the integration papers. This should be submitted by 12/13/23 at 2PM and will make up for an integration paper as well as one unexcused absence. Students will be expected to scan in via engage directly with the professor.

Structure of each class: Each class will begin with a short meditation exercise. The class will continue with a lecture, followed by a discussion of the readings as well as additional experiential exercises. Guest speakers will join us for some of the sessions.

Course and Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to

1. Identify their values, purpose, and priorities
2. Have a baseline familiarity with their emotional landscape and how their emotional intelligence impacts their life and leadership.
3. Learn and be able to demonstrate several strategies for wellness and leadership effectiveness, including meditation, healthy sleep and eating practices, finding meaningful work, emotional process and friendship creation, and maintenance.
4. Understand and be able to articulate the connection between inner well-being and the social good.

Learning Assessment Table

Graded Assignment Course Objective Covered

Participation	All
Integration Paper 1	1
Integration Paper 2	1
Integration Paper 3	1, 3
Integration Paper 4	2
Integration Paper 5	2
Integration Paper 6	2
Integration Paper 7	3
Integration Paper 8	3,4
Integration Paper 9	3
Integration Paper 10	2,3
Integration Paper 11	3

The following syllabus is a draft and subject to change.

SECTION ONE: LIVING A LIFE OF AUTHENTICITY

In order to live a life of authenticity, we must figure out who we are, what we value, and what our purpose is. Then we must structure or restructure our life in line with that authentic self.

September 6: Who am I? History, Personal Narrative, and Starting at the End

Introduction to course, syllabus, and requirements

Lecture: Death and Life

- [“Top 5 Regrets of the Dying”](#) from the Guardian

September 13: What do I value? What is my purpose/mission? What are my priorities?

Lecture: Building value in your life and leadership through discovering your own values and motivations and re-prioritizing what is important. Examining the difference between internal and external markers of worth.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration Paper 1 (see requirements above - the paper will be on the readings below)
- [“Poetry is not a Luxury”](#) from Sister Outsider by Audre Lorde: a meditation on Lorde’s relationship to poetry and her realization that her authentic self as a poet
- [You Don't Have to Be Miserable While Doing Important Work](#): An Interview with adrienne maree brown on Ten Percent Happier
- **OPTIONAL** [“How to Discover Your Life Purpose in about 20 Minutes”](#) by Steve Pavlina <https://www.stevepavlina.com/blog/2005/01/how-to-discover-your-life-purpose-in-about-20-minutes/>
- **OPTIONAL**: Watch Steve Jobs’s commencement speech, [“How to Live Before you Die”](#) at Stanford University, 2005

September 20: LEADERSHIP: Goals, Obstacles, Fears, Failures, and Resilience along the Path of Self Knowledge

Lecture: How to work with obstacles and common pitfalls when creating a life of purpose. How to create effective self-care practices to help us sustain our commitment to a life with no regrets.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 2
- Yael Shy, What Now?: Chapter One: Suffering: You aren’t Crazy and You Aren’t Alone.
- Gay Hendricks, [“The Big Leap”](#), p.19-25

SECTION TWO: UNDERSTANDING AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS

Opening up and expressing our feelings is much harder for some of us than others. Expressing feelings - whether positive or negative - is a learned skill, which has direct correlation to healthy relationships, healthy workplaces, and overall well-being throughout our lives.

September 27: Feeling Feelings

Lecture: An exploration of emotions and the benefits of opening up and recognizing emotions, from individual trauma and loss to the collective pain of racism, homophobia and oppression.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 3
- [“Guest House” by Rumi](#)
- Yael Shy, What Now? Chapter 4 on “Feeling Emotions, Not Being Emotions” p. 87-116
- Way of Tenderness Selection in Brightspace

October 4: Expressing Feelings

Lecture: It takes skill to move from recognizing our emotions to expressing them in healthy and liberating ways. This class will explore the expression of vulnerability, strength, anger and love.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 4
- [Brene Brown’s Ted Talk on Vulnerability](#)
- Lama Rod Owens, “Remembering Love: An Informal Contemplation on Healing” in Radical Dharma (in Brightspace).
- Complete this assessment and bring results to class:
<https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/assessment/>

October 11: Forgiveness

Lecture: This class will explore forgiveness inside and out: its benefits, why we might be scared of - or opposed to - forgiving those who have wronged us. We will also look at the difference between forgiving and forgetting, revenge and accountability.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 5
- Watch Valarie Kaur’s Ted Talk [“Revolutionary Love in a Time of Rage”](#)
- Read at least 5 of the stories at [The Forgiveness Project](#)
- Yael Shy, What Now? Forgiveness, p. 126-134

October 18: SECTION THREE: BALANCE AND MEANING AT WORK

Lecture: Once we leave school - and sometimes while we are still in it - most of us spend a huge portion of our life at work. How can we make sure our work life is meaningful? How can we balance our work and our relationships so that the former does not eclipse the latter?

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 6
- Take the "[VIA Survey of Character Strengths Questionnaire](#)" (you have to create a profile -it's free!). Print out your feedback – your top strengths, and bring those to class.
- [Webb, How to Have a Good Day, Playing to Your Strengths \(p.292-301\)](#)
- Omad Safi, "[The Disease of Being Busy](#)"

SECTION FOUR: MEANINGFUL FRIENDSHIPS

October 25: Friend Me: Connection and Loneliness

Lecture: We are living in a time of hyper connectivity on social media, our phones, and the internet. Yet, loneliness is high and deep connections are often hard to come by. This lecture will focus on the importance of balancing technological connections with real-life one.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 7
- Yael Shy, What Now? Chapter 5: Mindful Relationships
 - "[Loneliness, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Among US Young Adults during Covid-19](#)"
 - "[Why Loneliness is a Problem for Leaders and What To Do About It](#)"
- Omad Safi, "[If Community Were a Safe Place to Fall Apart,](#)" On Being Blog

November 1: Relationships and Friendships, Continued.

Lecture: This lecture will continue to dive deeply into the connection between friendships, leadership, and living a meaningful life.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 8
- "[How Friendships Change in Adulthood,](#)" in the Atlantic, (2015), by Julie Beck
- [Radical Friendship: Interview with Kate Johnson for CTZN Well \(audio or transcript\)](#)

SECTION FIVE: LETTING YOURSELF BE HAPPY

Everyone wants to be happy. And yet, for so much of our life, so many of us look in the wrong places for happiness, and spend a substantial part of our time doing things that do not bring us happiness. These classes will be an exploration of real happiness and contentment.

November 8: What is Happiness?

Lecture: What are the building blocks of happiness and what gets in the way? What is the role of gratitude in happiness?

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class)

Integration Paper 9

- [Appreciation \(Including Gratitude\) and Affective Well-Being: Appreciation Predicts Positive and Negative Affect Above the Big Five Personality Factors and Demographics](#), N.S. Fagley
- “[Chapter 5: The Pursuit of Happiness](#)” from *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, 2006, by Jonathan Haidt.

November 15: Being Well and Being Happy

Lecture: How do our diet, physical activity, and sleep affect our happiness? How do these things affect our ability to lead others?

GUEST SPEAKER: Dr. Wendy Suzuki

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 10
- Watch Dan Buettner Ted Talk: [How to Live to be 100](#)
- [Trust Your Gut: A Beginner’s Guide to Intuitive Eating](#)
- Keep a Sleep Journal this week. Note down what time you go to sleep, what you do right before, how well you sleep, what time you wake up, and your mood at the end of the day. Please also note any other key facts associated (i.e. mid-sleep wake-ups, dreams, etc) Please bring your results to class.

For your Sleep journal, notice what makes your sleep worse, and what better? Did what you eat matter? What about your level of exercise or screen time that day? What makes it worse? What could you change, and what would be some of the barriers to changing your sleep habits? What do you notice about yourself when you are well rested? How can you take care of yourself when you are not?

****NO CLASS NOVEMBER 23, THANKSGIVING BREAK****

November 29: Greater Than the Self (CANCELLED AND RESCHEDULED FOR DEC 14)

Lecture: An essential part of living a happy and meaningful life is serving others, being kind, and making a difference in the world.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 11
- Listen to or read Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech, [“The Quest for Peace and Justice.”](#)
- Watch George Saunders’ commencement address to Syracuse University in 2013 called [“Err on the Side of Kindness.”](#)
- Watch [Khalid Latif’s commencement address](#) for College of Arts and Sciences graduation, New York University 2014

DECEMBER 6: Play and Happiness

Lecture: An exploration of the research behind true happiness, the difference between happiness and contentment, and the ingredients of lasting and deep happiness.

Readings/Assignments (to be done before class):

- Integration paper 12
 - Watch Stuart Brown’s Ted Talk: ["Play is More than Fun: It’s Vital" opens in new window](#)

- Play something this week (not on a screen) for at least 30 minutes and journal about how it felt.

DECEMBER 13: Greater than the Self Make-Up Class (THIS IS OUR LAST CLASS)

- There isn't an integration paper due for this day
- The extra credit paper is due before class at 2pm.
- Please see Nov 29 for information on this class.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a vital component of Wagner and NYU. All students enrolled in this class are required to read and abide by [Wagner's Academic Code](#). All Wagner students have already read and signed the [Wagner Academic Oath](#). Plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated and students in this class are expected to report violations to me. If any student in this class is unsure about what is expected of you and how to abide by the academic code, you should consult with me.

Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at NYU

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please visit the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities \(CSD\) website](#) and click on the Reasonable Accommodations and How to Register tab or call or email CSD at [\(212-998-4980\)](tel:212-998-4980) or mosescsd@nyu.edu for information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are strongly advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays

[NYU's Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify me in advance of religious holidays that might coincide with exams to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives.

