

The “Find Your WHY” Program for Seniors in High School

Helping students gather tools for life beyond high school through personal growth and understanding self.



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Background

The Find Your WHY program was conceptualized by Deanna van Klaveren after attending a conference at the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly, SLO) on October 17, 2017. At this conference, a presenter, Lisa Cork, spoke about the concept of “ikigai”. This Japanese term, loosely defined, means: “your reason for being” or “your reason for living”. Lisa also said it can be defined as “your why”. The audience was made up of young women who were students in high school and college and they really connected with her message, including Deanna’s daughter and her daughter’s friend. So many people come to a point in their lives where they want to evaluate where they are at in their lives. They wonder if they are living in their “why”. Through coaching or leadership programs, they realize what their “why” is and how they can connect through their work, community, and family with this realization. Programs like the California Agriculture Leadership Program help individuals connect with their “why” through personal growth and leadership lessons. So why not start earlier.

The idea for the Find Your WHY program was to take some of the pieces of personal growth from Deanna’s experiences working with organizations, FFA, and high school students and combine that with Tess Cox’s experiences working with companies and adult leadership training. Together they began creating a program. Deanna and Tess also considered when would be the best time for teenagers to go through this program. When would teenagers be most open to the learning? The decision was made to focus the program for students during their senior year in high school. At this point they are at a thoughtful place where they start to see the opportunities for their life outside of their structured educational careers and have had some experience being independent. They are starting to consider what they like, what they want, and what they need in life. Also taken into consideration is that they are still living in an established spot (home), in a structured schedule, and yet can personally make the decision to commit to a program like this one.

The pilot program was started in August of 2019 and the non-profit organization, Find Your WHY, Inc. was established in January of 2022.

Program Development

This program was developed in collaboration with Deanna van Klaveren and Tess Cox. Deanna brought her knowledge of high school education and leadership curriculum work along with the understanding of how this demographic takes in information. Tess brought with her experience in the Myers-Briggs assessment, individualized coaching and facilitating group leadership programs in the area of professional businesses and industry organizations.

There were three pieces that were important for this program to have:

- 1) A personality typing assessment – preferably the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment
- 2) A safe place to put into practice the information gained about their personality type through communication, relationship building, and sharing their personal story.
- 3) Individualized time to walk through their personality type for deeper understanding

There were also things that we knew that would be immediate needs for high school seniors as they navigate their way through their last year of structured education. These things were:

- 1) Telling their personal story
- 2) Making decisions
- 3) Building a support team as they go off to new places and experiences

The basis of the program continues to be around these pieces and concepts. The way that the information is presented will always be open to new opportunities and ideas. The main discussion about program development happens after group session #3 with those who coached, facilitated, and supported the program.

Program Outline

From the expectations of pieces and learnings that were important to incorporate into the program, it was decided that there would be the following outline:

- Take the MBTI assessment.
- Coaching session #1: learn about the results from the assessment, understand the vocabulary around the MBTI and personal growth, and start to build a personal story around that information.
- Group session #1: bring the group of seniors together to share with each other their results and start learning ways to connect with each other. Sharing their story, hearing other people's stories, and being open to how they connect with each other.
- Coaching session #2: learn about their personal decision-making process. Have them work through a real decision that they are making at that moment (what college to go to, where or not to go to college, a job opportunity after high school, etc.). From this they will come out with a personalized decision-making plan. This session is also an opportunity to hone their personal message for scholarships, college applications, and presentations.
- Group session #2: interactive opportunity to see how decisions are made by differing personality types and how they would like to process information when making a decision. There is also lessons learned about telling their story and understanding the fear and concerns of imposter syndrome when sharing with new people and groups.
- Coaching session #3: learning how the people they have in their lives connect with them. What are their personal types? Why is connection so meaningful? How do they help them or support them? From this they create a list of personality types that they have in others who support them in their life. This will help them create meaningful relationships as they go into new environments. They also continue to work on ways to share their personal story as well as check in on their decision-making process.
- Group Session #3: This is the finale session for the group. It is a review and reflection. This is done through sharing their personal stories, decisions they have made after graduation from high school, and who their support team will be as they head off for new places and experiences. They will also receive a certificate of completion as well as physical items to support the tools they have received through the program.

(See Program Flyer on Appendix A)

Program Curriculum

The program has two major components: one is individualized coaching and the second is group sessions. The group sessions consist of the individual, high school senior students that make up the class that is participating in that school year. Each class has been made up of students from different schools.

Coaching:

The individual coaching curriculum has an outcome expectation that each student will better understand their personality type and be able to share this with others. Each lesson for this part of the curriculum focuses on three areas: one is telling their personal story, second is creating a decision-making plan that aligns with their personality type, and thirdly, building a list of character traits that they look for in others to support them as build relationships in new environments and situations. Students schedule time with a coach between each group session. (Since COVID, students can choose to have coaching sessions are offered in person and on zoom.) Each session is approximately 90 minutes long.

Group Sessions:

The group session component has an overall outcome expectation that each student will expand their knowledge and understanding of personality types through interactive and experiential opportunities. Each group session has lessons focused on three areas: Sharing their personal story with others, decision-making in teams and with others, and review and reflection of tools received through the program. All of these sessions are done with the full group participating. (see Appendix E for handouts used for each group session).

The curriculum descriptions and lessons will be listed below in chronological order as it happens through the program as each feeds into the next experience.

Coaching Session #1: Lesson Focus – Building Your Personal Story

In this session the students will learn the results of their Myers-Briggs assessment. This assessment, thought made for working professionals, provided the best reporting from the assessment and is modified to be more relatable to high school students by the coach during the session. Before they delve into the report, the coach shares vocabulary that will help support the information that they will receive (see Appendix B1). Each student walks through their personalized report guided by using worksheets that frames the information they are receiving in the areas of: how they gain energy, how they take in information, how they process information, and how they prefer to organize/structure their lives. (see Appendix B2 & B3). At the end they are asked to share one major take away (this is done at the end of each coaching and group session).

They also receive “YOUWork”, a term used in the program as the lessons and things to work on and that it isn’t required. They are aware the more they put into the “YOUWork” the more they gain through the program. In the first session the “YOUWork” is focused on writing about their personality assessment in a way that can be shared outwardly and to begin framing their personal story. They also are asked to list things they

are passionate about that they can share at the first group session. (see Appendix B4)

Group Session #1: Lesson Focus – Sharing Your Personal Story

The first group session is not only focused on personal story but also on connecting the students with each other. The purpose of having the students together is so they can have other peers to work through what they have learned about themselves as well as try out ways of communicating, working together, and connecting in a purposeful environment. They are coming into the space with an understanding that this is new for all of them, it allows for grace to be given, vulnerability to be welcomed, and support to be shared. The beginning part of the session is time for the students to get to know each other. To allow them to find similarities and to connect. They then share a poster board with their Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) results as well as some personal information (birthday, favorite color). The connection is continued as they walk through exercises and activities that allow them to see how their MBTI impacts their five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smell). They also begin to share their personal story with each other. Through this process they receive feedback on what was heard and how it was received. They can take these suggestions to continue to work on their personal story so the message can be received with the full intention of information they want to share about themselves.

The last major piece in the seminar, they receive a journal that has been customized to their learnings with Find Your WHY as well as pages that they where they can use personal ways of journaling. From bullet entries to other creative ways of sharing what they are processing (drawing, coloring, writing, pasting in photos or quotes, etc.). The facilitator shares the benefits of journaling. It is also shared that this is a good place to put down things that they are working through, good things that happen related to the learnings in the program, or things that they are having a tough time working through. It is expected that they bring this journal with them to each coaching and group session to have that resource of information available to them.

Coaching Session #2: Lesson Focus – Creating Your Decision-Making Plan

In this session, the students start with creating a memorable message about themselves. The coach guides them through listed character traits that resonate with them from their MBTI report. The student then circles 3-5 main traits and then writes a 3-5 sentence statement about themselves using these traits. It is a way to also reconnect them with their MBTI results so it will be top of mind as they step in the next part of the session.

The next part is to learn about decision-making. The initial introduction is shared with the decision-making triangle diagram (see Appendix C1) and an overview of the decision-making process (see Appendix C2). In the individualized discussion, they begin to connect the decision-making process to their personality type. Two worksheets are use help guide this process. (see Appendixes C3 & C4). The first one outlines their awareness

of how they like to start with when taking in information when making a decision (ie: feelings first, information and data, process, etc.). The second worksheet helps them to create a customized decision-making plan for their personality preferences. Once that is created, they walk through a decision that they need to make soon. They use their plan while having support from the coach. Many choose decisions around which college to attend, if they should go to college, while others have walked through decision like: if they should purchase a car, if they should run for California State FFA office, or whether they should get a job for the summer. This activity gives them a real-life scenario to walk through and practice with their personalized plan.

The YOUWork from this session is to focus journal entries about using their decision-making plan and sharing their reflections.

Group Session #2: Lesson Focus – Decision-making in Teams and With Others

In this session, they expand their decision-making plan to include working with others. The session begins with the students breaking into smaller groups and sharing about their personal decision-making plan. From there, they are put into two teams and are given a scenario in which the group has to come to consensus on how to execute an event. The group that has personality traits that are more data and fact driven are giving details focus on the emotional impacts of the scenario while the other group is given details that are more data and fact driven even though they prefer to make decision based upon the feelings of others. The groups then come back and share their decision on how to execute the event. They also learn about the synthesis process to share what it was like to come to the decision. (The group will use the synthesis process in the group session #3).

The topic of being vulnerable is shared with the students through an article (<https://brenebrown.com/blog/2015/07/27/the-most-dangerous-stories-we-make-up/>) and group discussion. The facilitator also shares about the types of fear reactions (fight, flight, freeze, and fawn). It is then shared that when they fight for things, fear can be a reaction. They read aloud with the group an article that shares what each MBTI fights for (<https://www.psychologyjunkie.com/2020/01/15/heres-what-you-fight-against-based-on-your-myers-briggs-personality-type/>). The students share their fears within the pairings and then with the group. This activity is done so they can practice sharing in a vulnerable way with the group.

(Students with the Class of 2023 will have an additional opportunity to tour agricultural companies who share how they made decisions that changed the trajectory of their companies.)

The YOUWork project after this session is to create a YOUBoard (see sample in Appendix G). This board is created by each student to have items (pictures, drawings, things, stickers, photos, mementos, etc.) that tell their story. There is a group “make and take” session where they come together to grab supplies and can get start on their board. They will share

these board at their coaching session #3 and again at the group session #3.

Coaching Session #3: Lesson Focus – Building Your C-TEAM

So many students leave their homes, families, and friends after high school. They are placed in a new environment with new people, sharing new experiences. This session not only reviews and reflects on the learnings around their personality type but also gives them a tool to align with personality types who have supported them thus far. This process helps guide them so they can recognize in others what they have had as supporters when they begin to build new friends and connections. The session opens with them sharing their YOUBoard and telling their story. They again build a 3-5 sentence statement about themselves based on the YOUBoard. This personal story is focused on experiences where as the story created in the first session is based on their personality type.

The second lesson in this session is the importance of having a personal mantra. The coach shares with that it is a statement that helps them focus, take a breath, and to see the way forward. The student then takes a moment to create a mantra during the session. (see a sampling of mantra cards in Appendix H)

The final piece that is create is building their “C-TEAM” (Complementor, Teacher, Encourager, Advocate, Mentor) (see Appendix D1 worksheet). The process is for the student to list specific people who are in these roles for them now and then to pull out the character traits that they have. The final C-TEAM is a list of character traits that they can see in the new friends and connections made as they move into these new spaces.

The YOUWork from this session is to refine their personal stories and review their mantra and C-TEAM list ahead of group session #3.

Group Session #3: Lesson Focus – Review & Reflection (Finale for the Program)

This session has two major components. One component is to pack the tools they have gained through the Program and the second is to celebrate each of the students and their personal stories. Packing their tools is done through reflective activities. Each student shares the personal story they created from their YOUBoards and they share their C-TEAMS with each other. The facilitator(s) share more tools for their journey including the importance of trust, that leaders are readers, to continue journaling, and the eight pillars of joy (article: <https://www.beliefnet.com/inspiration/the-eight-pillars-of-joy.aspx>). The students then share their mantras with each other.

The celebration piece is an opportunity for the coach(es) and facilitator(s) to share about each student and how each student has connected with their personality type and their growth story.

The finale piece is for alumni to share their takeaways and where they currently are and how the learnings from Find Your WHY has supported their journey.

Each student receives a duffle bag (to use to pack their tools), a leadership book (“leaders are readers”), and their framed mantra.

Other Items to Connect Between Individual Coaching and Group Sessions:

- Social media – Find Your WHY has a dedicated Facebook and Instagram account that shares the activities during the Program as well as inspirational quotes and thoughts connected with the Program curriculum.
- Group chats – each class is encouraged to find a way to connect together using either Snapchat, WhatsApp, or texting so they can stay connected between sessions.
- Pre-work – prior to each session students are sent references that will help them engage in the learnings that will be shared. This is done through links to websites, brief videos, and links to articles.
- Social gatherings (optional) – always encouraged are opportunities for the classes to meet socially. Some classes have done barbeques, others a movie night, some met up at an FFA conference during their down time. This helps them to continue to reinforce their connections with each other and supports deeper vulnerability during the group sessions for more formidable learning.

Current Statistics and Results from the Program

Number of Students Who have Participated:

Class of 2020 (pilot program):

10 in August of 2019 / 9 completed the program in June of 2020
9 - Modesto High School
1 – Oakdale High School

Class of 2021:

8 completed the program in June of 2021
1 – Denair High School
1 – Golden Valley High School, Merced
2 – Hughson High School
1 – Joseph Gregori High School, Modesto
3 – Modesto High School

Class of 2022:

6 completed the program in June of 2022
1 – Central Catholic School, Modesto
1 – Hilmar High School
2 – Hughson High School
2 – Modesto High School

Class of 2023:

5 in the current program / completion date set for June of 2023
3 – Hughson High School
2 – Stone Ridge Christian High School, Merced

Where Students are Now:

Class of 2020:

Four Year College (5):

Oklahoma State University
Oregon State University
UC, Berkeley
CSU, Fresno
Lee University, Tennessee

Community College:

3 - Modesto Junior College
1 – Butte College, Oroville

Working:

1 – Mechanic (?)

Class of 2021:

Four Year College:

2- Oklahoma State University

Community College:

2 – Merced Community College
3 – Modesto Junior College

Military Service

1 – US Navy

Class of 2022:

Four Year College:

CSU Monterey Bay
Dordt College, Iowa
Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo
University of Oregon

Community College

Modesto Junior College

Other Service

State FFA Officer

Other notables:

4 applied for State FFA Office – 2 served

4 applied for National FFA Proficiency – 2 won / 1 finalist for 2022

Program Expansion Opportunities

There are three areas of expansion that the co-founders have for this program.

- 1) Find ways to fund the program through grants and donations so the organization can not only survive but expand and thrive.
- 2) Add new activities to the Organization:
 - a. Workshop to share Myers-Briggs personal type teachings with high school teachers and how understanding their MBTI helps them to be better teachers for the many different personality types in their classrooms and that they are advising.
 - b. Expand the Program by creating curriculum that can be used as a template so that high school seniors can participate outside of Merced/Stanislaus counties.

- c. Create an individual coaching program for students who are in areas where there is not an in person Program available.
- 3) Bring in an executive director to lead the organization. The responsibilities of this leader would be to oversee the Program, support fundraising opportunities, and to place thoughtful facilitators and coaches for the Program that are committed to the Program.

Conclusion

The Find Your WHY program is focused on giving seniors in high school tools that will help them outside of their formal education. The hope is that the Program will continue to spread so that more students can gain these tools. The other hope is that having people gain personal introspection through their MBTI will allow them to grow with thoughtfulness and understanding as leadership opportunities arise and life situations come before them. This Program has many opportunities to grow and expand, hopefully the support and guidance of those committed will help it to do so.

Appendix A:
Program Flyer

REDACTED

Appendix B – Coaching Session #1 Handouts
1) Find your WHY Vocabulary Handout

REDACTED

2) Find Your WHY Coaching #1 – pg 16-17 Worksheet

REDACTED

3) Find Your WHY Coaching #1 – Enhancing Worksheet

REDACTED

4) Find Your WHY Coaching #1 – YOUWork Worksheet

REDACTED

Appendix C – Coaching Session #2 Handouts
1) Decision Making Triangle

REDACTED

2) Find Your WHY Decision-Making Handout

REDACTED

3) Find Your WHY Self Awareness Decision-Making worksheet

REDACTED

4) Find Your WHY Decision-Making Worksheet

REDACTED

Appendix D – Coaching Session #3 Handouts
1) Find Your WHY – Your C-TEAM Worksheet

REDACTED

Appendix E – Group Session Handouts

- 1) Find Your WHY Rules & Logistics Handout

REDACTED

2) Find Your WHY 2022 Fall Group Session Agenda

REDACTED

Appendix F – Group Session #1 Handout:

- 1) Find Your WHY Message In a Bottle Instructions

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Appendix G – YOUBoard example

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Appendix H: Mantra cards

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