

Introduction

Dr. G as she is affectionately known by her students and colleagues, has designed this leadership development seminar entitled **Your Best Self** specifically for African Youth, both on the continent and in the diaspora. The concept of **Your Best Self** is rooted in research that emerged from the branch of Leadership Studies known as Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). In POS we ask the key question: How do we create and sustain the practices, ecosystems and enabling environments where human beings flourish and thrive? This central question touches upon our individual lives as well as larger societal concerns. POS research reveals that bringing **Your Best Self** into every facet of your life fosters good will, individual well-being, community cohesion, resilience, and peak performance. Together, we can use this leadership development program to stimulate and re-energize ourselves as we work to transform Africa and our world.

Basic Requirements Include*

An open mind and willingness to stretch
meeting place
flip charts
tables to accommodate 4 to 5 participants each
handouts and evaluations

*Don't worry if you lack any of the foregoing items, instead use what you have along with your imagination to achieve your goals.

Please send your evaluations and feedback to: CIQEvaluations@gmail.com

What you vividly imagine, ardently desire, sincerely believe and enthusiastically act upon must inevitably come to pass.

— Paul J. Meyer

Leadership Learning Objectives

The **Your Best Self Program** is specifically designed to give participants numerous opportunities, individually and collectively (i.e., in dyads, triads and small groups), to exercise (1) critical thinking skills, (2) active listening, (3) relationship building, (4) self-reflection and (5) writing skills. Participants will:

- Gain insight into their individual strengths;
- Learn practical leadership skills they can begin to apply immediately;
- Examine the power of listening as an effective leadership practice;
- Identify qualities and characteristics of effective leaders;
- Develop a written profile describing the qualities and characteristics of their **Best Self**.

Program Outline

Explain Workshop Purpose and Premise

The facilitator discusses the basic purpose of the **Your Best Self Program**. Together, we establish norms for conducting ourselves during the course of the training.

Who Are the Leaders You Admire? Why?



Small Group Exercise: Participants are asked to name leaders they admire and explain their choices. What are the qualities and characteristics that you find appealing? interesting? compelling? Why? How can you incorporate these qualities and characteristics into your life and leadership practice?

NOTE: Participants do not have to reach consensus, but they must listen respectfully to the opinions of others.

One representative from each group shares key findings and conclusions with the larger group.

40 WORDS

The facilitator disseminates a handout containing 40 words. This is an individual table top activity. Participants are instructed to select a series of 10 words that describe themselves and their skills or qualities they hope to develop and/or refine. Next the facilitator asks participants to reduce the number from 10 to 5 words. Finally, the facilitator asks them to focus on 1 word and discuss the decision to choose that 1 word description.

Review the following 40 words. The facilitator will provide further instructions.

appreciative	authentic	courageous	industrious
focused	dedicated	driven	inventive
innovative	thrifty	engaged	creative
informed	advocate	confident	joyful
organized	inquisitive	thoughtful	designer
impresario	founder	pacesetter	director
activist	supervisor	artist	provocative
effective	active	efficient	forceful
capable	practical	powerful	persuasive
impressive	energetic	direct	productive

BREAK TIME (5-10 minutes)

**Success is the progressive realization of a worthwhile goal.
— Paul J. Meyer**

Your Best Self

Table Top Exercise: Participants will be guided through a series of self-reflective processes drawn from Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), a branch of Leadership Studies. Participants are prompted to focus on their own lived experiences during which they demonstrated their **Best Self**. In the process, they are identifying the qualities, characteristics and practices they have already demonstrated in their lives where human beings flourish and thrive.



Developing a Portrait of Your Best Self

Working in small groups (4-6 people) and drawing from their own lived experiences, participants complete three episodes of the **Best Self** exercise. They are asked to reflect upon a time when they showed up as their best. Give them time (approximately 5-7 minutes) to write a brief description or episode. Next, participants will discuss their findings within their respective small groups. Next, participants will share important insights with the larger group.

[Below see 3 examples of Best Self Episodes](#)

Best Self Episode #1:

I was working at the State Department in Washington, DC. During the course of a meeting, a representative from a U.S. Government agency made what I considered a disparaging remark about Arabs. I challenged him saying that I found his comments inappropriate. Other colleagues chimed in saying that they agreed with me and also found his comments offensive.

Best Self Episode #2:

As a teenager, I traveled back and forth between my home in New Jersey and the boarding school I attended in rural Massachusetts. As a consequence, I traveled through the Port Authority in New York on a regular basis. One day, I saw an old man, stumble and fall. He did not get up. Several people walked right past him. I ran over to the man and began to help him up, as I did, others joined me in offering him assistance.

Best Self Episode #3:

I met a 13-year-old youngster in Wilmington, DE through my elder brother. This youngster told me that this was the first time he traveled outside of the confines of Philadelphia, his hometown. I was astounded and invited him, with his parents' permission, to visit my home to participate in a tour I designed called the ABDC Tour. His parents agreed and my brother brought him to my home. I also invited another young man to join us. Over a long weekend in June, we travelled to Annapolis, Baltimore and Washington, DC. (Now, I hope, you get it the ABDC Tour). During this period, we visited Baltimore's Great Blacks in Wax and Reginald Lewis Museum, had lunch in Annapolis, visited the National Museum of African Art and the Old Post Office Pavilion in DC. We also attended a WNBA game and saw the blockbuster movie, *Man of Steel*. The ABDC Tour afforded me the opportunity to provide two adolescent African American males with exposure to places and spaces they might not otherwise learn about or consider. It also gave me an opportunity to 'pay it forward' thereby allowing me to walk my talk about empowering and supporting our young people.

Questions for Self-Reflection:

(Q) Were other people involved in these episodes? If so, how did they experience you? How did they experience themselves?

(A) Yes, others were involved. In episodes 1 and 2, others joined me in manifesting their best selves too speaking out against bigotry and helping an elderly man who had fallen. In episode 3, one of

the two young men called me recently expressing a desire to return. The second young man is already scheduled to visit again. I think they both found something of value in our time together.

(Q) What emotions did you experience during these episodes?

(A) In my case --satisfaction, wholeness in terms of honoring my values, a profound sense of alignment with the values that I inherited from my grandparents - now Ancestors.

(Q) What strengths did you display during these episodes?

(A) I spoke up for principles I believe in.

(Q) What emotions did you experience during these episodes?

(A) I felt a deep sense of joy because my actions helped others.

(Q) Were other people involved in any of your episodes? If so, how did they experience you during these episodes? How did they experience themselves during these episodes?

(A) The young men who participated in the ABDC Tour were pleased to have the opportunity and even asked to return.

My Best Self Portrait

In preparing the **Best Self Portrait** participants are asked to develop their own written description building upon completed exercises and reflecting upon their lived experience.

My Best Self is a place where I demonstrate courage of my convictions. I challenge bigotry and find common ground with those who were also disturbed by the toxic characterization of the 'other.' My Best Self is compassionate and reaches out to help others get back on their own two feet. My Best Self is altruistic and reaches out to offer hospitality to others. My Best Self is generous and welcoming to people. My Best Self designs and implements leadership programs to inspire youth to reimagine ways to

improve the quality of life for all on our planet. My Best Self recognizes the importance of fun and celebration and seeks opportunities to express gratitude.

Evaluation

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a systematic procedure for obtaining rich, qualitative information about significant incidents from observers with firsthand experience, which in turn helps researchers and curriculum developers understand critical requirements for individuals, processes or systems. Please take the time to complete the following 5 questions and email them to CIQEvaluations@gmail.com. Be sure to include the name (Best Self) and date of the activity. Let us know what other Leadership Training Programs interest you.

1. At what moment(s) in the program did you feel most engaged with what was happening?
2. At what moment(s) in the program did you feel most distanced from what was happening?
3. What action(s) that anyone (presenter and/or participant) took during the program did you find most affirming or helpful?
4. What action(s) that anyone (presenter and/or participant) took during the program did you find most puzzling or confusing?
5. What is it about the program that surprised you the most? (This could be about your own reactions to what went on, something someone did, or anything that occurred.)

