

Life Coaching and Asset Building
What's the Difference?

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"Helping All Young People Thrive"

A whole paradigm shift came for me about eight years ago. Life continued to happen on purpose. There is a reason for everything and I had applied for a Public Health Nursing position because I just wanted a pay check and financial security and a public health nursing position was the only position I could access and still have a life outside of work. What this meant was, I could go home at 5 pm and have every weekend off. This I thought was balance.

However, the universe had a different plan for me. Unknown to me was that I applied for a newly created position in community development. When I found out I was the successful applicant, I was plunked into a position where no one else knew how to direct me. They were experts on telling me what I couldn't do but they did not know what I should do. So, after about six months of stress, reading, and just asking people what they wanted, I learned that the latter was the key to success. What do you want? Totally unaware of the magnificence of this question was I. After of two years of settling in, the universe took me yet again to another paradigm shift. What if we ask youth what they want? Hmmmmm.....but society isn't used to that. But nevertheless, the new concept resonated with me. With extreme curiosity, I started to plunk myself into situations where I wanted to learn more about this simple concept. I came across the 40 Developmental Asset approach. At that time, it was a huge "AH HA" moment in my life. Little did I know that it would be the beginning of a wave of change for me and many communities?

The 40 Developmental Assets are identified as the building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible. They have been developed by Search Institute in Minneapolis who has been around since the 80's researching the causes and effects of positive development and influence on youth. The 40 assets are divided into two categories: External Assets and Internal Assets. External assets that youth can acquire are built from outside influences. We seldom as small children control these. Internal assets on the other hand are self-built. This takes into consideration that as we grow there are a lot of outside influences that affect who we are but there are also a whole lot of internal influences that we have choice to nurture ourselves. Knowing this personally can be a huge paradigm shift in itself.

Within the category of External Assets, there are 20 assets. They are categorized in four sections. I will use a couple as examples. Within the Support section, let's talk about "other adult relationships". This is defined as an asset if a young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults. How many youth do you know have this asset? In our county, we opted to discover how many assets our youth from grade 6 through 12 had. Search Institute receives their research from communities who opt to use their tools.

Charlotte County, New Brunswick purchased the Profiles of Attitudes and Behaviors Survey and organized a whole sample of this age group for data analysis. We found out that 38% of our youth receive support from three or more non-parent adults. Results in most communities across the continent are very similar.

Even though all assets are individually important, asset number seven is “community values youth”. This is defined as young person perceives that adults in the community value them. How many of our youth believe that this happens? In our communities only 23% of our youth feel valued. Again, you will find that similar values are the same in other communities. What happens here? Do we still have a “seen and not heard” culture? Do we as adults believe that youth opinions and contributions to society are inferior and worthless? Do we make available forums where they can be equally heard? Do we make assumptions that they need to be told what to do and think? Do we allow them to be who they are or do we encourage them to be who we want them to be? Do we really consider them naturally creative, resourceful and whole?

What about the internal assets? In the section entitled Social Competencies, asset number 32 is named planning and decision making. Search Institute defines this as young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. Again, in Charlotte County, New Brunswick, our youth measured 26% in this asset. What is happening here? What is preventing our youth from the inability to plan for anything and make choices? What is it they do not know about making choice? Are we as adults allowing them to make choices or are we dictating their lives? How many of us as adults went into early adulthood knowing the confidence and power of choice we had?

Let’s make reference to our last asset number 40 which is “Positive View of Personal Future”. Almost two thirds of our local youth have this asset at 69%. We have strength here. How can we build on this? Is it a perception of youth that as soon as youth hood is over they will finally be free to be who they are? How can we foster this earlier? What does the future mean to them? I wonder if we asked them what their view of today or tomorrow is, if the result would have been similar.

The bottom line is that youth, generally speaking across this continent have on average eighteen out of forty assets. Research shows that the more assets they have the more apt they will grow to be healthy, caring and responsible. What happens when we tell them we believe in this research? What happens when we empower them with this knowledge? Amazing things happen.

In just three short years, our community has seen groups of youth transform into a volcanic eruption of leadership, confidence and power. Youth have been given the opportunity to create, manage, run and responsibly raise and spend thousands of dollars. During the process of the school year, youth are informed about what they have told us in these surveys. They have been asked to give their opinions and they have planned and made decisions on how to best inform their peers about how to grow into healthy, caring and responsible adults. They are creating youth forums where they invite over one hundred youth every year. They MC the forum for two days. They create their own

sessions and activities. They network. They stay all night in a hotel. They work with the hotel management (thanks to the support of the Fairmont Algonquin) and they hire their own key note speakers. When empowered to take the reigns with guidance, they are in fact naturally creative, resourceful and whole. Do they make mistakes? Of course they do. We allow them to. However, these mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and never considered failures. No one gets to be wrong. EVER.

How does all of this relate to life coaching? Coaching is no different than asset building. Coaches are natural asset building champions. We inspire, motivate and empower our clients. We know it works. We acknowledge their strengths and we raise the bar because we know that our clients are bigger than they appear. We walk with them through the dips and celebrations. We encourage the vulnerability of just “being” and the expression of all feelings. We really listen to what they want which is parallel to valuing their opinions and personal agendas. We self manage. It’s not about what we know, it is about what they know and feel. We allow actions to play out by choice and we deepen the learning no matter what the outcome. Most of all, we are curious. We are curious about our client’s potential and what they are capable of discovering within themselves.

Imagine having every young person in the world evolve from an asset building approach. Imagine every young person having a life coach. Imagine that life coach being the positive adult role model that is lacking in today’s world for them. Imagine the stuckness and powerlessness that would be prevented when coaching young people in their teens is fully appreciated and implemented. Imagine what our next generation would be like if every young person had access to the abundance of personal power that they have within. Imagine.

(Life Coaching is offered to youth and parents both individually and in group/retreat settings. For more information, go to www.chandraleavitt.com or call Chandra at 1-888-467-1762)