

Closing Keynote Session

H.E.R.O. Rising: The Science of Hope, Empowerment, Resilience & Optimism Dan Tomasulo, PhD, TEP, MFA, MAPP

Session Description:

What just happened in that breakout room? Science. Drawing from *The Positivity Effect* and cutting-edge positive psychology research, this keynote deconstructs the morning's sociometric experience through the lens of H.E.R.O. — the four psychological capitals that don't just predict well-being, they *build* it. Hope is not wishful thinking. Empowerment is not a buzzword. Resilience is not about bouncing back — it's about bouncing forward. And optimism, properly understood, is the evidence-based engine of everything this community has always known: together, we don't just survive — we rise and thrive.

Learning Objectives:

1. Define Hope, Empowerment, Resilience, and Optimism (H.E.R.O.) as the four evidence-based components of psychological capital.
2. Explain how the sociometric character strengths experienced from the morning session activate the capacity for psychological capital.
3. Distinguish between the optimal use, underuse, and overuse of character strengths as a framework for personal insight.

Dan Tomasulo is a psychologist, writer, and Academic Director at Columbia University's Spirituality Mind Body Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in psychology, MFA in writing, and Master of Applied Positive Psychology. He developed P-IBT, Positive-Interactive Behavioral Therapy for people with intellectual disabilities. His books include *Learned Hopefulness* (2020) and memoir *American Snake Pit* (2018), whose screenplay has won over 40 contests. He co-authored *Character Strengths and Abilities within Disabilities* (2023) with Ryan Niemiec. The International Positive Psychology Association named him Outstanding Practitioner for 2025-26. He received Columbia's 2021 Teaching Award and the 2024 William I. Gardner Leadership Award. He is Review Editor for *The Journal of Positive Psychology* and teaches alongside Martin Seligman. He serves as Fulfillment Coach Consultant for Unlimited.Life.