

2026-04-11 PROFESSIONALS Workshop SUMMARY: Life Design, Islamic Faith Integration, and Community Projects

Date/Time: 2026-04-11, 9:00 AM

Location: UF Hilton, Gainesville, FL

Instructor: Imam Youssef Mekawy

Meeting Notes

Workshop Introduction and Icebreakers

- **Networking Bingo:** Speaker 1 initiated a “networking bingo” activity to help attendees learn new things about one another. Participants had a limited time to fill their bingo cards by interacting with different people.
- **Participant Introductions:** Following the bingo activity, participants introduced themselves, sharing their names, professions, something new they learned about another person, and their goals for the workshop.
- **Participant Backgrounds & Goals:** Attendees came from diverse professional fields including architecture, civil engineering, software engineering, and medicine (anesthesiology, periodontics, pathology, research). A common goal was to learn how to integrate their Islamic faith with their professional and personal lives, find work-life balance, and connect with other Muslim professionals.
- **Grounding Exercise:** A “square breathing” exercise (inhale, hold, exhale, hold for four counts each) was conducted to help participants focus and become present.

Workshop Agenda and the “Why” of Life Design

- **Agenda Overview:** The workshop was structured to cover an icebreaker, the rationale for “life design,” its core principles for believers, activities on building a personal story and leadership, designing three five-year life plans, and a concluding Q&A.
- **The “Rat Race”:** The concept of the “rat race” was introduced as a cycle of earning and spending that distracts from life’s true purpose. The Quran’s description of the “dunya” (this life) was referenced as a parallel.

- **Modern Workforce Challenges:** High rates of unhappiness in the workforce and significant physician burnout (50%) were cited to underscore the need for intentional life planning that integrates personal and religious values.

Core Principles for Life and Career Design from an Islamic Perspective

- **Purpose of Creation and Intention (Niyah):**
 - The foundational principle is that the purpose of creation is to worship Allah. Every action, including work, can become an act of worship through sincere intention (niyyah).
 - This intention must be purely for Allah's sake. Providing for one's family is also considered an act of worship.
- **Creating a Coherent Life Story:**
 - A fulfilling life connects "Who am I?" (a servant of Allah, a Khalifa), "Why life?" (a temporary test), and "Why work?" (a means to earn halal income and support the community).
 - Group discussions revealed that family and community impact are powerful connectors between personal identity, work, and faith.
- **Work as Worship and Action:**
 - Contributing to civilization through work is a form of worship. A hadith about planting a seed even if the Final Hour arrives was used to illustrate a "bias to action," focusing on the effort while leaving results to Allah.
 - Work provides purpose, fulfillment, and tranquility when connected to a higher purpose beyond just earning money.
- **Passion and Vocation:**
 - Passion is developed through curious engagement, not discovered passively.
 - A distinction was made between a hobby (for fun), a job (for pay), a career (a series of jobs), and a vocation (a calling or purpose). Vocation is found by connecting actions to a higher purpose.
- **Designing Your Own Life and Acceptance:**
 - A key principle is to set aside societal expectations and design a life based on one's own story, strengths, and limitations.
 - Acceptance of one's current situation and fate (qadr) is a core requirement for moving forward. This is related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, emphasizing that one is "enough" regardless of their stage.
- **Trust in Allah (Tawakkul) and Bias to Action:**
 - **Tawakkul** is trusting in Allah's plan after putting in the effort.

- This trust should lead to a “bias to action”—taking initiative to solve problems without getting stuck in overthinking or “perfection paralysis.”
- **Addressing Imposter Syndrome:** Participants were advised to challenge negative thoughts, celebrate small successes, and adopt a growth mindset to combat feelings of self-doubt.

Leadership and Problem-Solving

- **Leadership as an Activity:** Leadership is an action anyone can take, not a formal position. It involves mobilizing others to solve problems, which can be risky and challenging.
- **Technical vs. Adaptive Problems:**
 - **Technical problems** have clear, expert-driven solutions (e.g., fixing a car).
 - **Adaptive problems** are complex community challenges tied to values and beliefs (e.g., youth disengagement from the masjid). Solving them requires including those affected and managing the “heat” of difficult conversations.
- **Group Activity on Community Problems:** Participants broke into groups to analyze issues like cell phone use during prayer, Sunday school curriculum, outreach (da’wah), and youth engagement, identifying their technical and adaptive components and proposing interventions.

Community Projects and Planning

- **Proposed Islamic Community Center:** The need for a new center in Gainesville was discussed to provide space for sports, a coffee house, an Islamic school, and events. Key challenges include gaining community consensus and finding a location.
- **Hiring a New Imam:** The process should involve a representative hiring committee, clear criteria (strong Sunni background, good communication), and community feedback.
- **Improving Public Da’wah (Outreach):** Suggestions included using social media, providing training for volunteers, and getting youth more involved to overcome challenges in volunteer recruitment.

Life Planning Activity and Conclusion

- **Designing Three Five-Year Plans:** Participants were instructed to create three life plans: their current trajectory, a backup plan, and a dream plan. They evaluated each plan on resources, satisfaction, confidence, and coherence with their values.
- **Building Connections:** The workshop concluded with an emphasis on building connections by talking to people who have already achieved one’s goals to get a “sneak peek into the future.”
- **Integrating Faith and Daily Life:** A final reminder was given to center life around prayer (salah) and maintain community connections by attending the mosque.