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# **COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TRACK™**

## *Activity Guide exclusively for the Engagement Ecosystem*

*Empower young people to build a personal  
competitive advantage—one skill at a time!*

*Presented by*  
**MARK C. PERNA**



**markcperna.com**

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“**Building a competitive advantage will help me move forward because it will allow me to grow in my personal and academic career.**

— Student

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## Welcome to the Competitive Advantage Track!

In these highly engaging, plug-and-play videos, your learners will discover the powerful skills to craft a personal competitive advantage—and why they need it.

In a fast-changing world, young people must develop strong life and career skills. Each module (or “Slice”) includes a short, heartfelt talk by Career Tree creator Mark C. Perna about a particular skill, why it matters, and how it connects to their personal competitive advantage for whatever they want to achieve in life.

▶ Click on the video to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/o8W9X78A2fM>

MARK C. PERNA

**“ Building a competitive advantage can help you move forward by getting you the skills needed to do well in life, and whatever you’re passionate about. It gives you purpose and you can get far.**

— Student



After watching the video together, you can then implement any or all of the resources in this packet, provided to our Engagement Ecosystem community:

- Facilitator Reflection
- Group Discussion Starters
- Career Tree Connection
- Supersize Suggestions
- Reflective Journaling (coming soon)

You choose whatever elements will make the greatest impact in your unique learning environment.



**“ I liked that we weren’t pushed to be motivated and inspired, like every other video.**

— Student

## Why It Works

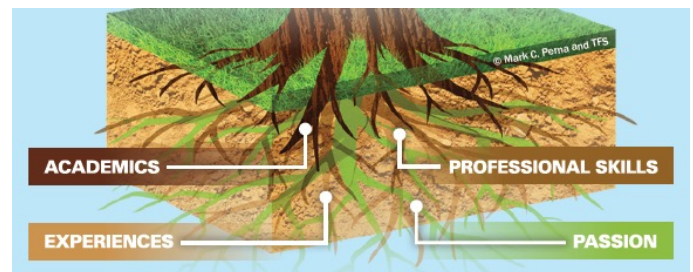
**“ I like that it shows how to put your skills and effort towards your goal or job you want to do or complete.**

— Student



**The Competitive Advantage Track** is how learners develop their personal Career Tree Root System. The Tree's trunk and branches are outcomes; the roots are what enable an individual to accomplish those outcomes by developing a personal competitive advantage.

We've designed the Competitive Advantage Track to give learners practical steps to create a strong and vibrant Root System that will allow them to reach their lifestyle and career goals.



### Here's why it works:

- **Bite-sized.** Each concept is presented as a "Slice," one piece of the bigger whole they need to thrive.
- **Universal.** Whether learners want to achieve something grand, modest, or laid back, the Competitive Advantage Track provides the springboard to make it happen.
- **Reinforcing.** The Competitive Advantage Track helps keep the Career Tree dialogue happening, because it all goes back to what they want out of life and how to get it.
- **Relevant.** Sometimes learners can't see how their education will positively affect their future. The Competitive Advantage Track helps bridge that gap and builds relevance into everyday learning.



**“ I liked how Mr. Perna was sitting down and talking to the camera the whole time.**

— Student

## Strategies for Success

**“ It made me think on how I can build my future and be successful.**

— Student



How you use the **Competitive Advantage Track** is entirely up to you. It can be a bellringer exercise or material for an entire class period. You can use all the materials in this packet or change them up. These resources are provided to adapt in any way that best serves your schedule and learners.

**That said, here are a few best practices to consider:**

- **Make “competitive advantage” your thread:** The experienced facilitators who piloted the Competitive Advantage Track tapped into the power of repetition by constantly touching back on the concept of a personal competitive advantage. Everything the learners did moving forward was done because it related to their own competitive advantage. With this narrative, learners were more engaged when asked to complete work.
- **Connect to the Career Tree and Skill Tree:** The Competitive Advantage Track is designed to help learners develop their Root System and ultimately move closer to their goal on the Career Tree. Each time you talk about the concept of a personal competitive advantage, it should connect to their individual career and lifestyle goal.
- **Encourage effort:** Our pilot facilitators suggest that the concept of a personal competitive advantage is a useful tool to answer questions like “Why do I have to learn this?” or “When will I ever use this?” The answer: “It is all part of building your own personal competitive advantage.” Making “personal competitive advantage” a constant thread throughout the day encourages effort and helps reframe the challenge the learner is experiencing with an end goal that matters to them.



**“ It can help me by giving me something to look up to and give me ideas.**

— Student

## Slice 1:

# Why We All Need a Personal Competitive Advantage (Part 1)

**Video Runtime: 5:36**

### Learners will discover:

- What a personal competitive advantage is and why it matters
- How to adapt to a fast-changing world
- 3 vital components of a competitive advantage: academic knowledge, technical competency, and professional skills
- Why your professional skills will set you apart
- What these Slices will help you accomplish

Click on the video above to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/Ic1yGnR6ruA>

### Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on how a personal competitive advantage would help someone succeed in your field. Think about the types of skills that successful people at ALL levels in your field have in common and how they developed those abilities. You want to frame everything in your course of study as a necessary part of each learner building their personal competitive advantage.

You can also log in to your Career Tree portal any time at <https://tfscareertree.com> to access all **Competitive Advantage Track** materials.

Need help logging in? Contact us at [contact@tfsresults.com](mailto:contact@tfsresults.com).

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## Slice 1: Activities

### Group Discussion Starters

- Based on this video, what is a personal competitive advantage and why does it matter?
- Of the three key components of a competitive advantage (academic knowledge, technical competency, and professional skills), which may be the most important for you to master? Why?
- What is one thing Mark said that stands out for you or that you didn't realize before?



### Career Tree & Skill Tree Connection

- **Discuss:** How will a personal competitive advantage help you reach your goal on the Career Tree?
- **Revisit:** Does your goal on the Career Tree still reflect the lifestyle you want to live?
- **Reflect:** How does strengthening your skills on the Skill Tree grow your personal competitive advantage?
- **Commit:** What is one thing you can do today to continue building a personal competitive advantage?

### Supersize Suggestions

This is just a starter list to help you supersize the impact of this Slice. Customize these activities or create your own to fit your unique learning environment and course of study.

- As the facilitator, use your own knowledge of people who are leaders in your field or topic to tell a story about that person and how they reached their position.  
Ask: **How do you suppose they built their competitive advantage to get there?**
- Referencing learners' career goals on the Career Tree, have learners visualize themselves as successful in their chosen career and enjoying their lifestyle.  
Ask: **What does that lifestyle and career look like?**
- Project: If resources allow, have learners interview a person they consider to be successful (in any field or topic) to find out how that individual achieved their goals and how they maintain their success. They can ask questions like:
  - What is your career and what steps did you take to succeed in it?
  - Was this your original plan for your life or did your goals change along the way?
  - Did you face any challenges? If so, how did you adapt to overcome them?
  - What would you have done differently (if anything)?
  - What advice would you give to someone who wants to succeed?

If time allows, have them report the results of their interview to the group.

*You're the expert! Share the supersize activities you create with us [here](#) and we may share them with the larger Career Tree community!*

### Big-Picture View

This closure question is designed to show learners the relevance of your course of study to their lifestyle and career goals. They should be able to connect the dots between their personal competitive advantage and the material being covered in your learning environment.

- **How will your personal competitive advantage help you complete this course of study?**

## Slice 2:

# Why We All Need a Personal Competitive Advantage (Part 2)

**Video Runtime: 9:31**

Click on the video above to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/TUcIsNTe3Rg>

### Learners will discover:

- Mark's story: how epic failure can be the precursor to success
- How to focus, plan, and take action to overcome challenges and build a competitive advantage
- The Why Generation and why they're capable of amazing things
- How academic knowledge, technical competency, and professional skills together comprise a competitive advantage
- How passion can start with finding what you're good at

### Facilitator Reflection

Reflect on what success looks like for someone working in your field. Consider the ways that a personal competitive advantage can be built out of challenges and what a person would need to do to achieve that. Learners need to know that everyone faces adversity and adapting their approach is vital to succeeding. Their competitive advantage will be key in allowing them to make the necessary changes.

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## Slice 2: Activities

### Group Discussion Starters

- How might successful people adapt to challenges or failures?
- How can your personal competitive advantage motivate you when times are tough and things are challenging?
- How do you imagine Mark might have used his personal and professional failures to get better?

### Career Tree & Skill Tree Connection

- **Discuss:** What will you do if you fail along the way to reaching your goal on the Career Tree?
- **Revisit:** Is your career goal based on something you're good at, interested in, or both? (no wrong answers)
- **Reflect:** How does what you're learning on your Skill Tree give you a competitive advantage over someone who doesn't know it?
- **Commit:** How can you rethink failure so that it actually fuels your personal competitive advantage? What actions can you take?

### Supersize Suggestions

This is just a starter list to help you supersize the impact of this Slice. Customize these activities or create your own to fit your unique learning environment and course of study.

- Have learners discuss any obstacles to achieving their goals or objectives.  
Ask: **How would you use your personal competitive advantage to overcome challenges?**
- Encourage learners to visualize something they have struggled with but choose not to give up on.  
Ask: **What did you have to do to overcome, adapt, and try again?**
- Have learners think of a question they would like to ask Mark about his story.  
Ask: **How might he answer if he was there in person?**
- As the facilitator, tell a story from your own life about a time you experienced a challenge and how you adapted to it.  
Share with learners what your biggest takeaway was from that experience.
- Project: Have learners write or orally present a reflection on what they have learned about a personal competitive advantage.  
Ask: **How will you continue building your personal competitive advantage?**

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### Big-Picture View

This closure question is designed to show learners the relevance of your course of study to their lifestyle and career goals. They should be able to connect the dots between their personal competitive advantage and the material being covered in your learning environment.

- **How can this course of study allow you to supersize the building of your personal competitive advantage?**

## Slice 3:

# Leveraging the Human Connection

**Video Runtime: 6:16**

▶ Click on the video above to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/LWsfuvvzB2U>

### Learners will discover:

- What a human connection is and how it's part of a personal competitive advantage
- How a human connection helps you build relationships, advocate for yourself, ask for help, collaborate effectively, and lead/convince others
- The 3 questions we're all silently asking: Do you see me? Do you hear me? Do I matter?
- The key to supersizing your competitive advantage (making others feel the answer is yes when they ask the same 3 questions)
- 3 ways to start building a human connection: eye contact, active listening, and validation
- How skills like human connection will never expire, no matter how much the world changes

### Facilitator Reflection

*"Education is the transfer of enthusiasm through the conduit of a human connection."* Think about how this quote from Mark Perna may apply in your learning environment. Reflect on how you personally build human connections with learners, coworkers, and others. You might also consider how the ability to connect with people allows you to convey your ideas and material effectively.

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## Slice 3: Activities

### Group Discussion Starters

- What is the power in building a human connection? (Human connection is defined as the ability to build relationships, advocate for self, ask for help/support, lead others, collaborate, and leverage that connection to build a competitive advantage)
- If it is significant that we all feel seen, heard, and that we matter, why is it important to make others feel those same three things?
- How will building human connections strengthen your personal competitive advantage?

### Career Tree & Skill Tree Connection

- **Discuss:** What human, interpersonal skills will help you succeed in your chosen career on the Career Tree?
- **Revisit:** How might your goals on the Career Tree be supersized by building strong human connections?
- **Reflect:** How does working on the Human Connection skill from your Skill Tree give you a competitive advantage over someone in your chosen career who doesn't have these abilities?
- **Commit:** How can you hone your ability to make good eye contact, actively listen, and validate others?

### Supersize Suggestions

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- Have learners practice giving their full attention during a short conversation.  
Ask: **Why does it matter whether we give people our full attention when we're interacting with them? What are ways we can show we are giving someone our full attention?** (phone down, turned towards the person, active listening, engaged questioning, etc.)
- Have a learner tell you a story about their day/week and model active listening in front of the group.  
Ask: **What did my body language communicate while this person was talking? Did I make them feel like what they were saying was important?**
- Have learners come up with examples of how they can validate what other people say. Examples could include phrases like, "I understand," "I hear you," "That must have been tough," etc.  
Ask: **How does it impact your confidence and feeling of connection when someone validates what you say?**
- Have learners imagine how Mark might build a human connection with someone he never met before.  
Ask: **Would that person feel seen, heard, and valued? How do you imagine that person would feel seen, heard, and valued?**
- Project: Have learners write or orally present a reflection on what they have learned about building a human connection.  
Ask: **What are some benefits (both for you and for the other person) when you intentionally build a human connection with them?**

*You're the expert! Share the supersize activities you create with us [here](#) and we may share them with the larger Career Tree community!*

### Big-Picture View

This closure question is designed to show learners the relevance of your course of study to their lifestyle and career goals. They should be able to connect the dots between their personal competitive advantage and the material being covered in your learning environment.

- **How can you strengthen your human connection skills right here in this space every day?**

## Slice 4:

# Building Your Dream

**Video Runtime: 7:04**

Click on the video above to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/O89jwTVs6ss>

### Learners will discover:

- What it means to build your dream
- Why we all do one of two things: build our dreams or build someone else's
- The difference between passion and interest
- Why, instead of trying to find their career passion, they should put themselves in a position where that passion can find them
- 3 ways to give your best effort (show up 5 minutes early, leave 5 minutes late, and care while you're there)
- How a personal competitive advantage is necessary to reach our dreams, no matter how big or small those dreams are
- Insightful advice from legendary actor/comedian Steve Martin

### Facilitator Reflection

It is often said that time is our most valuable asset. Think about how time spent in your learning environment is helping learners build their dreams. Do they see how putting forth effort in this course of study can connect with building their dream for their life? You might also consider how much of your own time is invested in building your dream.

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## Slice 4: Activities

### Group Discussion Starters

- Think about some things you dream about for the future. How can the things you are doing now help you build that dream?
- How are you currently carving out time to build your dream? What actions can you take to carve out more time?
- Actor and comedian Steve Martin says we should spend our time becoming good. In fact, he says “Be so good they can’t ignore you.” What are you already good at? What are some things you want to become good at? How can you explore more things you may be good at?

### Career Tree & Skill Tree Connection

- **Discuss:** What are some actions you can take to reach your goal on the Career Tree?
- **Revisit:** How can building your personal competitive advantage and focusing on your interests put you in a position where your career passion may one day find you?
- **Reflect:** How do people in your chosen career become so good that they can’t be ignored?
- **Commit:** Moving forward, how can you use the Small Steps/Consistency skill from your Skill Tree to carve out time in your daily life to build your dream and become good?

### Supersize Suggestions

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- Have learners outline what they do in a normal day, hour by hour.  
Ask: **How much of your time is spent building your dream? How much is spent building other people’s dreams? Are there ways to turn the things you HAVE to do into things that help build your dream?** (For example, school or work)
- Have learners discuss any obstacles to or distractions from building their dream.  
Ask: **What are some things that get in the way of spending time building our dream? How can we overcome those distractions and obstacles?**
- Have learners consider that Mark is never done building his dream—and neither are we.  
Ask: **What might Mark need to do (or NOT do) to keep building his dream?**
- As the facilitator, tell a story from your own life about how you built your dream. It could be a big dream (example: your career) or a small dream (example: your goals for today’s lesson). Talk about the things that could have prevented you from reaching your goal and how you overcame the ones that were within your control.
- Project: Have learners write or orally present a reflection on what they have learned about building their dream.  
Ask: **Since nobody can build our own dreams but us, what action can you take now to make sure you’re ready to succeed when your passion finds you?**

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### Big-Picture View

This closure question is designed to show learners the relevance of your course of study to their lifestyle and career goals. They should be able to connect the dots between their personal competitive advantage and the material being covered in your learning environment.

- **How will your effort to be good at this course of study move you closer to your dream, or prepare you for the day you find your dream?**

## Slice 5:

# The Power of Failure

**Video Runtime: 6:20**

▶ Click on the video above to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/fwSA62ZjfH0>

### **Learners will discover:**

- Why the fear of failure can be an obstacle to building a personal competitive advantage
- How there's power in failure, but no power in not trying
- That our personal best can grow every day
- Why Mark still experiences the fear of failing
- How you spend more time failing at a videogame than beating it
- That your personal competitive advantage is simply giving your personal best
- What to do when you give your personal best and still fail at something

### **Facilitator Reflection**

Failure isn't fatal—but many of us live as if it is. Think about how the fear of failure might be holding learners back in your learning environment. What has contributed to this fear, and how can you help them see the power of failure? Reflect on what you've learned from your own failures and how your experiences could help learners focus, plan, and take action after failing.

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## Slice 5: Activities

### Group Discussion Starters

- Is Mark a person you would think of as an expert in failing or an expert in adapting to failure? What are your takeaways from his journey?
- What actions can you take to overcome the fear of failure and pursue your goals effectively? What's the cost of not trying?
- How can you harness the power of failure as a tool for success?

### Career Tree & Skill Tree Connection

- **Discuss:** How can adapting to failure supersize your opportunities and personal competitive advantage?
- **Revisit:** Everyone worries about failure from time to time. How does the Coping skill from your Skill Tree help you manage those thoughts and move forward proactively?
- **Reflect:** There's a power in failure, but no power in not trying. How can you use that understanding to always give your personal best? How will that strengthen your competitive advantage?
- **Commit:** Using the Self-Management skill from your Skill Tree, what are some ways to focus, plan, and take action if you fail at something?

### Supersize Suggestions

This is just a starter list to help you supersize the impact of this Slice. Customize these activities or create your own to fit your unique learning environment and course of study.

- Have learners research famous quotes on failure and pick a personal favorite. Some of Mark's favorite quotes include:
  - *"Failure is success in progress."* – Albert Einstein
  - *"We learn from failure, not from success."* – Bram Stoker
  - *"Success is not final, failure is not fatal. It is the courage to continue that counts."* – Winston Churchill
  - *"Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will."* – Suzy Kassem
  - *"You always pass failure on your way to success."* – Mickey Rooney
  - *"The master has failed more times than the beginner has even tried."* – Stephen McCraine
  - *"I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can't accept not trying."* – Michael Jordan
- Encourage learners to consider the idea that Mark was afraid of failing when he recorded this Slice.  
Ask: **How do you think Mark overcame his fear of failing so that he could share this message with us?**
- Have learners create a personal affirmation for themselves to remember the next time they fail. Examples:
  - I'm going to learn a lot from this.
  - I will focus, plan, and take action.
  - I will become stronger by adapting to failure.
  - I am not defined by how often I get knocked down, but how many times I get up.

(cont.)

## Slice 5: Activities

(cont.)

- As the facilitator, tell a story about a time when you or someone in your field faced a failure. Share what you learned from your personal experience or from the story of the person who failed.
- Project: Have learners write or orally present a reflection on what they have learned about the power of failure.  
Ask: **How do we use our ability to adapt to failure to fuel our success?**

*You're the expert! Share the supersize activities you create with us [here](#) and we may share them with the larger Career Tree community!*

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### Big-Picture View

This closure question is designed to show learners the relevance of your course of study to their lifestyle and career goals. They should be able to connect the dots between their personal competitive advantage and the material being covered in your learning environment.

- **In this course of study there are moments we succeed and moments we fail, so how will you adapt to both scenarios and continue to strengthen your competitive advantage?**

## Slice 6:

# Be Comfortable Being Uncomfortable

**Video Runtime: 7:50**

### Learners will discover:

- Why being uncomfortable can actually be a positive thing
- How to focus, plan, and take action when life gets uncomfortable
- Why we should “say yes, and then figure out how”
- How our personal “want-to” spurs us to do things we may be nervous about doing
- Why focusing on a personal competitive advantage now prepares us for when our personal “want-to” arrives

▶ Click on the video above to get started, or click here:  
<https://youtu.be/iRn3HF1GtFE>

### Facilitator Reflection

*“If you want something bad enough, you’ll figure out how to do it.”* This quote from Mark can be both encouraging and challenging. Think about what your learners want. How much do they want it? How can you help sharpen their picture of the lifestyle they want to enjoy someday? Reflect on the things you’ve wanted enough to work hard for and why they matter to you, because their things matter to them in the same way. A compelling narrative about your course of study as the on-ramp to their competitive advantage and achieving their “want to” will help drive their performance and desire for successful completion.

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## Slice 6: Activities

### Group Discussion Starters

- How does being uncomfortable help you focus, plan, and take action?
- What does it mean to “say yes, and then figure out how”? Why did Mark decide he needed to be comfortable being uncomfortable?
- What’s the power in stretching yourself and trying something new?

### Career Tree & Skill Tree Connection

- **Discuss:** Mark harnessed the power of being uncomfortable as a key attribute in focusing, planning, and taking action in the direction of his dreams. How can you use the Adaptability skill from your Skill Tree to break through to your Career Tree and life goals?
- **Revisit:** How will building your personal competitive advantage stretch you in a good way? How might it give you more options, opportunities, and successes?
- **Reflect:** Life goals and career exploration are critical on the journey toward success. The day the “want-to” kicks in will be the day you can employ your personal competitive advantage to supersize your chances at living the life you want on your Career Tree. How will you use the Coping and Self-Management skills from your Skill Tree to stay on course when things get challenging, life doesn’t go your way, and you get uncomfortable?
- **Commit:** Mark always says that “if the “want-to” is strong enough, the “how-to” will come.” How does this relate to being comfortable being uncomfortable? How will your “want-to” drive the progress you’re making toward your Career Tree goal?

### Supersize Suggestions

This is just a starter list to help you supersize the impact of this Slice. Customize these activities or create your own to fit your unique learning environment and course of study.

- Have learners consider any branch creak moments they may be experiencing at home, school, or work.  
Ask: **How are you currently focusing, planning, and taking action to meet those challenges? How might you focus, plan, and take action moving forward?**
- Encourage learners to think about the things that come easily to them.  
Ask: **If you want more, how can you challenge yourself to supersize your opportunities and success?**
- In this Slice, Mark stated, “If you want something bad enough, you’ll figure out how to do it.” Share this quote with learners to discuss.  
Ask: **What have you wanted to achieve so much, that you worked really hard to achieve it? If you don’t want anything that much yet, why should you still work on building your personal competitive advantage now?**
- As the facilitator, tell a story about a time in your life when your branch creaked, personally or professionally. Break down the steps you took to stabilize your situation in terms of focusing, planning, and taking action.
- Project: Have learners write or orally present a reflection on what they have learned about being comfortable being uncomfortable.  
Ask: **If most people strive to be comfortable, but growth is mostly developed during moments we are uncomfortable (focusing, planning, and taking action), describe how that fact helps us create a competitive advantage. How might being uncomfortable motivate us to be more resourceful, creative, and resilient?**

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### Big-Picture View

This closure question is designed to show learners the relevance of your course of study to their lifestyle and career goals. They should be able to connect the dots between their personal competitive advantage and the material being covered in your learning environment.

- **How does working on your competitive advantage in this course of study get you ready for when your personal “want-to” arrives?**