

RECIPE FOR WELLBEING

Flourishing is a “state of successful growth and happiness.” It represents your BEST possible future. You have emotional, mental, and social wellbeing when you are flourishing. How many of you can say that you are in a state of Flourishing? Could it better be described as a state of Languishing?

What factors contribute to your and your team’s languishing?

What contributes to your flourishing? I will share some ingredients to help you and your team flourish.

One factor is Burnout. Burnout is (WHO definition) “a syndrome conceptualized as a result of chronic workplace stress that has not been managed successfully.”

There are 3 dimensions to burnout:

1. Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
2. Increased mental distance from one’s job
3. Feelings of negativism or cynicism related to the job

What are your external and internal causes of burnout?

Another factor is empathetic exhaustion. Empathy is our superpower. It is the capacity to see things from another’s point of view and feel what that person is feeling – both in the positive and negative. Empathy is an innate (neurobiological) quality and can be a learned quality. There are different types of empathy – cognitive, emotional, and compassionate. Those that are born with this quality are at higher risk because it is a natural skill/gift. That also makes it our Kryptonite. This is the cost of caring. The price we pay to do our jobs and do it well. We are trained to be care-givers. It is our job. There is more to this job than we are aware of. Empathy leads to Compassion.

A healthy work environment can enhance wellbeing for all. It starts with Culture. Culture is “the shared passion for achieving a fixed outcome and the beliefs and values which develop within a group of individuals who have come together to achieve the fixed outcome.”

Leadership creates and drives the culture. The Leader is responsible for the vision and the values of the organization. They embody and encourage the desired behaviors of the organization. What is your vision for your practice? What are the values of your practice? Does your team know and live these?

Recipe for Flourishing

Instructions:

1. Use the best ingredients. Don’t substitute for convenience.
2. Blend together. Don’t force it. You don’t want things to separate out. (silos)
3. DO NOT BURNout or OVERcook.
4. Allow for the proper time to get this right.

Ingredients:

MEANING – your purpose, your WHY, your calling. The purpose/meaning in our life is rooted in core values and beliefs. This is the single most predictive factor for wellbeing. WHY do you do this job? WHY does your Team do this job? Meaning provides the beliefs and values in the culture. This is why the team works there – their values align with the practice’s values. Your clients align with your Why – this creates trust and loyalty.

ACHIEVEMENT – the outcome of purpose. This is the fixed outcome that a team works towards. Part of wellbeing is knowing that you have accomplished your goals and had successes in your life. We need to celebrate the achievements, big and small. Hunt the good things. Savor the positive events and emotions. Acknowledging

your successes means your focused on the positive instead of the negative, the failures. Positivity is the active ingredient to craft a happy life full of growth, creativity, and resilience. It is renewable and reigns whenever positive emotions touch and open our hearts. It reflects and produces success and health. Positivity spells the difference between languishing or flourishing. Pride is one of the top positive emotions, along with love, hope, awe, serenity, amusement, and Gratitude.

GRATITUDE – is a positive emotion that involves being thankful and appreciative and is associated with several mental and physical health benefits. When you experience gratitude, you feel grateful for something or someone in your life and respond with feelings of kindness, warmth, and other forms of generosity. The practice of gratitude increases happiness by 25%. Gratitude can facilitate teamwork and enhance meaning. There are 3 stages of Gratitude: Recognize, Acknowledge, and Appreciate.

INTENT – Intent, Influence, and impact. What you do matters. Assume Good intent – from self and from others. Our intent comes from purpose and leads to achievement. Leaders influence their teams to follow the vision and to use their strengths as value to the team.

COMPASSION - Deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the desire to relieve it. It is being present in an energetic way for someone who is hurt/suffering. Our job description. It says energetic – not exhausted. Being compassionate has positive effects upon us – energizes, not empties us. Compassion results in our brains releasing dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endogenous opioids. The benefit is same whether the compassion is focused on others or towards self. When we are stressed and cortisol is raging, it blocks oxytocin and our potential for compassion. A key point is that as caregivers only focus on the giving of care to others. We must focus as much on the caring for the giver. This is how we combat and prevent empathetic exhaustion.

Take these and whatever other ingredients and blend them together to create your culture. Each team member should add their own personal flavor – what makes them special – be it a skill, talent or experience. Burnout is about having to fit the same mold. Let your team Stand out!

Create a mission statement for your Team – how your culture will care and support them. Ask for their input for the Standards of Care for your Caregivers.

Instead of being stressed, we deserve to enjoy our just desserts – acknowledge the sweet smell of success, savor every morsel of joy from doing our jobs well and know that our souls are nourished and our purpose served.

FLOURISHING: How to Grow a More PERMANent Resilient Life

Flourishing is “a state of successful growth and happiness.”

What positive qualities, relationships and activities do you want to nurture and flourish in your life – personally and professionally? Do you spend your time planting a garden of what you want, or are you too busy pulling up the weeds? Seeds of Flourishing? Weeds of Frustrations? Your mind is a garden, and you have ways to tend to it – observe it, pull weeds, plant flowers. Observing is fundamental and sometimes that is all you can do. The mind is grounded in the brain, which is a physical system that doesn’t change for the better on its own.

Your brain is designed to be changed by your experiences – the good and the bad. This is called Experience-dependent neuroplasticity. Unfortunately, we are wired to be Velcro for bad experiences and Teflon for the good ones. We must retrain our brains to focus on the positive instead of on the bad all the time because of our inherent negativity bias. To do is called Positive Neuroplasticity. Hunting the Positive. Savoring the Good.

Happiness is the natural result of building up our wellbeing and satisfaction with Life. How then can be happier? Happiness results from many things and is temporary. What we really want is Joy - a feeling of great pleasure or happiness that comes from success, good fortune, or a sense of well-being.

The Foundations of Wellbeing

Well-Being is defined as having a happy and fulfilled life. Well-being is having more positive emotions, engagement, healthy relationships, Meaning and accomplishments in your life. That is what PERMA is – the building blocks/foundation for Well-being and happiness. Everyone will gauge their happiness differently among the elements of PERMA.

P = Positive Emotions (optimism, love, joy, humor, awe, pride, etc)

E = Engagement. “Flow,” complete immersion in what you are doing.

R = Relationships. Good relationships with self and with others

M = Meaning and Purpose. Belong to and serve something bigger than you. A Calling.

*The single most predictive factor of Well-being!

A = Achievement. Personal success. Professional Success.

Savoring

Savoring is a positive intervention. It is one way to respond to the good in your life.

How often do we just brush off the good in our lives? The way in which you respond to the positive events in your life has a huge impact on our experiences and our life in general. These are the events that we need to pay attention to, to put into our reference data (block the negativity bias). “Hunt the Good!”

We can savor things from the past, in the present and of the future. It is not enough to recognize the moment but to relish the moment.

There are 4 ways to savor the good events in our lives:

1. Thanksgiving – process of savoring feelings of gratitude
2. Marveling – savoring feelings of awe (art, music, spiritual, nature, etc)
3. Basking – savoring feelings of pride / self-focused savoring – experiences that connect us with something in ourselves.
4. Luxuriating – savoring pleasures (chocolate, bubble bath, wine)

Optimism is a positive emotion and arises from our ability to see the good that is in the world. Positivity is the fuel for the engine of Optimism that drives our Resiliency.

RESILIENCY

Resiliency is a dynamic between self and the environment. Sometimes we can handle what life gives us. Sometimes we need the help and support of others to handle adversity.

“Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.” It is an active, ongoing, and intentional process. Resiliency is not about avoiding the difficulties or challenges in life. It is about facing them and learning from them.

Coping is the ability to get past a difficult situation in the moment. Coping is about “getting through.” Does not prepare you to get through the next moment or the next. Resilience is built over time and intentionally, so when a moment hits, you are prepared, energized and elevated by it.

Micro-Resilience:

Reset your Alarms

Refocus your Brain

Reframe your Attitude

Refresh your Body

Renew your Spirit

Macro-Resilience:

Traits, Skills, and Behaviors

1. Reduce negative thinking.
2. Learn good problem-solving skills.
3. Cultivate Gratitude
4. Have Strong Relationships
5. Manage energy / Self-Care.

Your Mind is a Garden. Your thoughts are the seeds. You can grow flowers or you can grow weeds.

BETTERINARY CARE – Caring About the Care-Givers

Welcome to this discussion on Empathetic Exhaustion. Why SOS? The essence of WHAT we do is to care for our patients and their owners. In doing so, we very often forgo our own care. This leads us down the path of EE – the cost of caring paid by the caregiver. And what price do we pay? For some, it is a very high price to be paid. This talk is focused on the care of the caregiver – Saving Ourselves so that We Can Save Others.

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet. This sort of denial is no small matter. The way we deal with loss shapes our capacity to be present to life more than anything else. The way we protect ourselves from loss may be the way in which we distance ourselves from life. We burn out not because we don’t care but because we don’t grieve. We burn out because we’ve allowed our hearts to become so filled with loss that we have no room left to care.”

We care a great deal – that is why we are in this profession. The problem is that we do NOT grieve. We do not acknowledge our feelings in the moment. We go from appt to appt to appt every day. All the negative, sad, difficult emotions/interactions from each appointment are held onto – “I will deal with that later.” They become *our* negative emotions. That is why we burn out – because our hearts become so filled with loss/stress/anxiety/fear, that we have no room left to care about anything. This is Empathetic Exhaustion.

This can affect anyone within the profession - *“All of us who attempt to heal the wounds of others will ourselves be wounded; it is, after all, inherent in the relationship.”* To care for someone in pain requires you to be vulnerable, to walk through that water and get wet. We have to be careful not to drown though in the suffering of others.

Why then do we do this? Do you ask yourself that question? You need to be able to answer that question – I do this because Knowing your meaning and purpose in life is the single most predictive factor in Well-being. WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

One of the reasons why and one of the reasons that we have this profession is the Human Animal Bond. That mutually beneficial relationship between people and animals. We have a very important role in this bond – to nurture it, protect it, maximize it and respect it. We have responsibility to care for both sides of this – the pet and the human. We are a people profession. That makes it special and makes it difficult – in respecting the bond, we must advocate for the pet knowing that will be bringing sorrow to the human side. Personally, we each experience this bond with our own pets as well.

Navigating all of this can be difficult. We are going to look at how we navigate these oceans of emotion (ours and others) and the waters that “walk through” daily. How do we prepare for this journey? What skills and resources do we need to successfully and safely make it through?

What are the waves (frustrations) that drive you crazy and mess up your world. What are the ripple effects of these frustrations – for you and for your team? _____

What are the Joys/Life-preservers that keep you afloat? Why do you do this? _____

Empathy. Empathy is at the core of who we are as care-givers. Empathy is the capacity to see things from another’s point of view and feel what that person is feeling.¹ It is both innate and learned. This applies to both about positive and negative feelings. Unfortunately, due to our negativity bias, the brain/amygdala is always looking for the negative and latching on to it.

Once empathy is established, that leads to Compassion.

COMPASSION is the Deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the desire to relieve it. It is both emotion and action. It is being present in an energetic way for someone who is hurt or suffering.

Compassion Fatigue/Empathetic Exhaustion is defined as The Cost of Caring. The price paid for by the Caregiver. A price that we pay for with our emotional, physical and psychological health and sometimes, the ultimate price, our life. Why are we so willing to pay too much to do what we want to do?

The components of Empathetic Exhaustion are Burnout plus Traumatic Stress (primary and secondary).

Burnout.

Burn-out is a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

1. Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
2. Increased mental distance from one's job
3. Feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job

To avoid burnout!:

Work with purpose.

Perform a job analysis and eliminate or delegate unnecessary work.

Give to others.

Take control, and actively manage your time.

Get more exercise.

Learn how to manage stress.

Traumatic Stress is more a factor for us. The resulting clinical signs from both look the same. It is the causes that are different. Primary – a trauma, injury, challenge occurs to you. Secondary – you witness/hear about the trauma (the drama of the trauma). This is what we encounter every day with patients and clients. You witness their pain, fear, anxiety, stress, regret, and anger.

We are “infected” with this Secondary Traumatic Stress. It begins with Empathy - seeing and hearing what our patients /clients are experiencing. Our brain’s tendency to seek out and find the bad leads to focus on negative emotions and activation of SNS - fight/flight reaction. As this SNS activation goes on and on, we become fueled by cortisol. This will be significant later.

Allostatic Load

Psychological Inflammation

Who is at risk for this. Anyone at the hospital is at risk. Everyone is exposed to the traumatic stress of patients and clients. Knowing you are at risk is important. This knowledge allows you to do something about it. We address risk factors for disease in our patients everyday so that we can minimize the effect that they have. The same is true for ourselves and empathetic exhaustion.

Risk Factors: _____

Empathy and Compassion are at the core of our ability to do the work and to be wounded by the work.

Empathy is our Superpower but it can become my Kryptonite.

Double-edged sword of empathy THIS IS THE MAIN POINT OF WHOLE TALK!

Empathy is an innate response that allows us to connect with others. Not everyone has the same type or level of empathetic response though.

Those of us that go into care-giving fields have higher levels of empathy. We fight to save others. It is our gift. It allows us to share emotional empathy and empathic concern with those we are taking care of.

However, without managing & protecting our own feelings (self-awareness & self-care), we give away our empathy and we take on the pain of others as our own – thus we end up falling on our own sword and being injured by our own good intentions. Cost of Caring

How often do you willingly fall on your “sword” in the name of caring for others? And we wonder why we are so tired, weak, angry and hurt all the time.

The cost of caring has a high price for those that don’t put value on their own lives.

Clinical Signs.

Diagnosis – ProQOL

The Infection of Secondary Traumatic Stress.

The sympathetic nervous system is allowed to take over and infect you

No boundaries

Your days are full of “perceived” threats.

Your patients’ traumas become encoded into your memory/being = mirror neurons

Your resiliency is eroded; become more reactive, fatigued, etc.

Treatment

Redefine “Care-Giver”

Benefits of Compassion – for others and self.

Unlike empathy, compassion increases activity in the areas of the brain involved in dopaminergic reward and oxytocin-related affiliative processes. This enhances positive emotions in adverse situations.

Oxytocin is the moral/Love/cuddle hormone. Connects us to others emotionally.

Blocked by Stress (cortisol) and Testosterone

Identify your Life- preservers – seek the good in what you do.

Flip the Switch!

Self-Care – An ethical imperative. Improved self-care is the cornerstone of mitigating the impact of compassion fatigue¹ (Compassion Fatigue Workbook)

Resiliency

Set Healthy Boundaries