



The Light and Shadow of Helping

Caring for yourself while caring for others

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Agenda

- Helping as a calling
- The shadow side of being a helper
- Occupational risks of helping
- ***BREAK***
- How to sustainably respond to your calling
- The responsibility of the organization
- Wrap-up

“We do not really choose a vocation; rather, it chooses us. Our only choice is how we respond.”

James Hollis

“Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Viktor Frankl

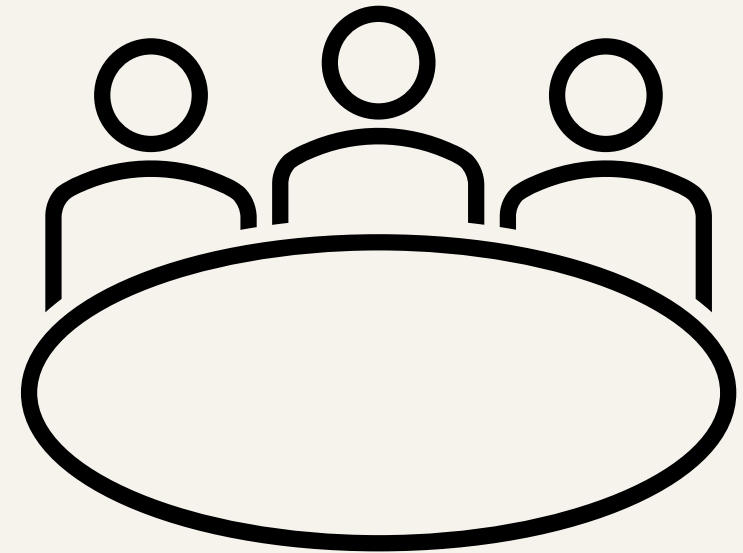
PICNIC: A Framework for Responding

- **Pause** and check-in
- **Identify** qualities of experience
- **Connect** with self and others
- **Name** your experience
- **Ideate** plans for responding
- **Consolidate** experience



Discussion Guide

- Take care of yourself
- Participation is voluntary
- Respect boundaries
- Discomfort can be valuable
- Be open to new and old ideas



The Meaning of Work

“Love and work are the cornerstones of our humanness.”

Sigmund Freud

“To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness.”

John Dewey

“With harmonious passion, the activity occupies a significant, but not overpowering, space in the person’s identity and is in harmony with other aspects of the person’s life.”

Robert Vallerand, PhD

Breakout

1. What gives your work meaning?

2. What gets in the way of experiencing that meaning?

Meaningful Work is Hard

“When work is a calling, it is deeply meaningful, but it also opens the door to exploitation, overwork, and a sacrifice of personal life for the sake of the mission.” Amy Wrzesniewski

Core psychological functions → Meaning

Light	Shadow
Connection with Others	Flight from aloneness
Identity	Self-neglect
Purpose	Grandiosity
Competence	Not asking for help
Hope	Denial



Pause + Identify

- Of the six shadow experiences, which of these feel most present in your work right now?

Light	Shadow
Connection with Others	Flight from aloneness
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Purpose	Grandiosity
Competence	Not asking for help
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Common Helper Beliefs (which probably started in childhood)

- I should be able to handle this
- Others need support more than I do
- Taking care of myself is selfish
- If I were stronger, this wouldn't affect me

Distress and struggle are normal reactions to meaningful work

“If you deliberately plan on being less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be unhappy for the rest of your life.” Abraham Maslow

“The dedicated and the committed are the most vulnerable to burnout. They work too hard, too long, and under too much pressure.” Herbert Freudenberger

Occupational Wellbeing Risks

The hidden costs of caring work

Risk	What It Is	Common Trigger	Hallmark Sign
Overwhelm	Feeling overloaded by demands	High volume and competing demands	Feeling behind, scattered focus
Compassion Fatigue	Depleted capacity to care and empathize	Prolonged empathic engagement	Numbing, reduced capacity to care
Secondary Traumatic Stress	Trauma symptoms from exposure to others' suffering	Indirect exposure to trauma material	Intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal
Vicarious Trauma	Changes in beliefs about safety, trust, or the world	Repeated exposure to trauma narratives	Loss of trust, shifts in worldview
Moral Injury	Wounds to one's values and ethical identity	Being unable to do what feels right	Guilt, shame, frustration
Burnout	Occupational exhaustion	Chronic demands without enough support or control	Exhaustion, cynicism, reduced efficacy



Breakout

1. What are signs you notice when you may be experiencing distress because of work?
2. What does it mean to you when you are reaching your limit? What do you tell yourself? What is the message?

Signs you may be struggling

- Feeling like you are not doing enough
- Hypervigilance or feeling “on edge”
- Exhaustion
- Avoidance or isolation
- Cynicism
- Anger and rage
- Externalizing/blame
- Blind spots, being overly judgmental or biased
- Self-righteousness or entitled
- Addiction
- Difficulty experiencing joy
- Numbing
- Signs in relationships:
 - Less patience
 - Irritability at home or work
 - Emotional withdrawal
 - Not feeling present

Compassion Satisfaction: Pleasure and fulfillment derived from helping others

- Feeling effective
- Making meaningful connections
- Pride in work
- Sense of contribution and purpose



Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL 5)

- A **free**, validated, 30-item self-assessment built specifically for helping professionals
- **Measures:** 1) compassion satisfaction, 2) burnout, and 3) secondary traumatic stress
- Descriptive, not diagnostic
- **You will not share your score with anyone.** It's simply a way to put a number next to what you already sense about yourself



“Some people work hard, day and night, in the field of helping others, but their strongest motivation is to stay busy so they can avoid feeling their own pain.”

Pema Chodron

Find practices you can do every day

1. Easy to access
2. Inexpensive
3. Don't take a lot of time

“We are what we repeatedly do.”

Will Durant

Breakout

1. When things get hard, what helps you stay positively connected to meaning in your work?
2. What gets in the way of utilizing those resources?

Accessible Practices



Body

- Movement/Exercise
- Nutrition and Hydration
- Relaxation/Sleep



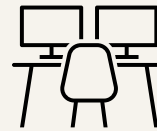
Mind

- Mindfulness(or staying conscious and intentional)
- Gratitude
- Grounding



Relationships

- Supportive People
- Pets
- Nature

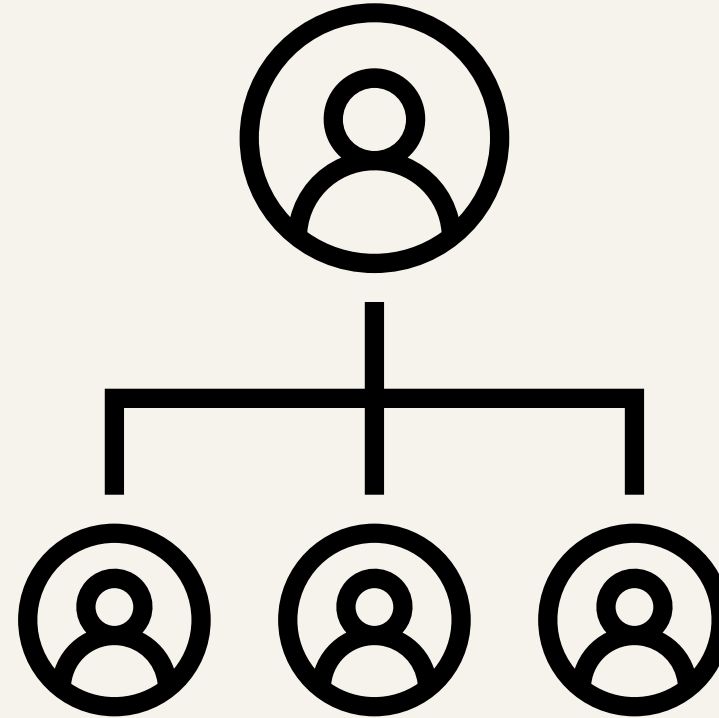


Work

- Transition Rituals
- Supportive colleagues
- Tending to your life outside of work

What organizations can do

- Adequate staffing
- Protected breaks and time off
- Team support
- Psychological safety
- Recognition
- Healthy supervision



Key Takeaways

- Helping is meaningful and hard at the same time
- Distress is an occupational risk, not a personal failure
- Small, consistent practices that fit your life protect your ability to find meaning and keep helping
- You are not alone!