

Re-Framing Well-Being: Optimizing the Work and Learning Environment

Amplifying Meaning

Meaning

Although not a basic psychological need, meaning (meaningful work) is one of the greatest predictors of well-being at work. In SDT meaning emerges out of a workplace that supports the three basic needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence. However, because of its strong impact we have chosen to call it out specifically to keep it salient. Meaning is a perception that one's efforts are significantly valuable, align with one's personal values, and contribute to pro-social outcomes. Purpose is the guiding direction of one's efforts, while meaning is what comes out of those efforts. A leader's job is to identify, amplify, and reflect back meaning to the team. Note that as a leader, you cannot avoid sending signals about what is and is not meaningful. You cannot opt out of this process. So being deliberate about what you identify as meaningful will yield the most impact on your team. Additionally, deliberate practices around meaning not only help those around you but they also have direct impact on your own well-being and engagement.

Personal practices to deliberately amplify meaning

- Begin each day priming the team to be aware of meaning. Tell the team that at the end of the day the team will reconnect and everyone will share one thing they did that day that made a difference to someone else (patients, families, colleagues)
- At least once a day be sure to connect something a team member is doing directly with the pro-social outcome. So, not only commenting on what they did clinically but specifically noting the likely or observed positive impact on a fellow human being.
- When you point out pro-social meaning to a team or team member, periodically ask them to “take 15 seconds and let that sink in.” This gives permission to feel positive emotions. Positive emotions are often dismissed or even rejected among healthcare workers. We can take in negative events without needing permission, but positive events often “bounce off” unless you are deliberate in letting them in and amplifying their impact.

Program practices to amplify meaning

- Develop mini-fellowships that allow trainees to focus on a particular area that they select which is meaningful to them. Emergency medicine has been the specialty with the most frequent mini-fellowships, so reach out to the EM program directors or to the well-being team to learn more about how to do these.
- Start a cadence of *What Went Well* at didactic days
 - Team members note something that went well for them in the past week
 - Faculty (or chiefs) amplify competence by noting the growth that occurred when appropriate
 - Faculty (or chiefs) amplify meaning by tying the activity to pro-social meaning
- Identify and invite patients/families to return (in person or virtually) to share their experience and comment on the meaning of their interactions with trainees/faculty. Note that there are some HIPAA rules involved here, so reach out to the well-being team for more information on how to do this within the HIPAA regulations.
- Ensure that patient comments with positive sentiment, routinely collected by the hospital patient survey, are sent to the program to read aloud and distribute. Your CMO will know who to contact for these patient experience comments.
- Identify “good saves” or cases where prediction suggested a bad outcome but a good outcome ensued (Reverse M&M). Discuss these cases for learning points and point out the pro-social impact to the patient/family of this result.
- Convert hospital quality metrics into human lives. For example, when the septic shock mortality drops from 35% to 28%, have the VPQI provide actual numbers. That is, rather than only say that there was a 7% absolute drop say, “...this translates into 12 people who are still with their families.”
- Some programs have had the families and significant others of trainees write notes of encouragement to them at the beginning of the residency program. These can then be shared with the residents around the time of the rotations most known to be difficult. For examples or help with this, reach out to the well-being team.
- Create an “Impact Jar” in which trainees can put a chip/marble/bead to represent a pro-social impact they had during the past day/week/month or year. The object can be color coded to represent specific impacts: reduced pain through a procedure or medication, diagnosed and treated a chronic condition that may lengthen someone’s life, helped someone understand a diagnosis or treatment, made someone smile, cured someone’s condition, diagnosed a potentially life-threatening condition, etc.

Thus, there is one large jar for all of the impacts to collect throughout time, and several small containers with each type of impact around the large jar. Ritualize this at the end of the day or beginning of didactics. Trainees can take the appropriate object and put it into the jar.

- PD can contact graduates 3-6 months after completion of training and asks them to share in an email (or HIPAA compliant video) what they took from their training, any clinical “saves” they attribute to their training, and pointing out specific faculty that made a difference. These are shared with faculty to support faculty well-being and meaning.