

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

Supporting Autonomy Interpersonally

Basics

Autonomy is a basic psychological need and supporting it results in flourishing while ignoring or thwarting it results in distress. Autonomy is NOT the lack of supervision, is NOT independence or freedom, or lack of structure. Autonomy is the sense that we self-determine our actions versus feeling forced, coerced or compelled to do them. One has autonomy if they feel they have true decision latitude or if they willingly endorse an activity because they see the value in that activity. The way we communicate with others always either supports or thwarts autonomy through both verbal and non-verbal content. Leaders and team members cannot “opt out” of this process.

Perspective Taking, Seeking Input, Recognizing Emotion

- Deliberate practice of asking for team member’s perspectives, input, and ideas: “How are you doing today?” “Does anyone have any suggestions for doing this differently?” “How are we doing with the way we do our work and education today? Anything we could do better or differently that would be helpful?”
- Structure time during didactics to seek out input into how resident/fellow work might be done slightly differently. Team members want input and to know that their perspective is considered.
- Note that emotions happen at work whether one acknowledges them or not. Recognizing emotion is important for team members to feel recognized and that the course of the day is more aligned with their values. When appropriate simply saying “I can see this is frustrating for everyone” or “That was a really tough loss, I would think everyone is a little shook up and sad after that.”

Decision Latitude

- Ask first “what do you want to do?” instead of simply telling people what to do.
- If correction is needed, teach the principle, then ask “knowing that, now what do you want to do?”
- Reinforce ownership and autonomy through language “Your plan sounds good, let’s do that.” “if that’s what you want to do, I agree, let’s do that.”
- Allow trainees latitude in their approach – even if you personally would not do things a certain way but you know they are acceptable let the trainee own the decision. “I probably wouldn’t bother with a chest x-ray but I it isn’t a crazy thing to do here so if you want to do that go ahead.”

Explanatory Rationale

- Whenever someone feels “forced” to do something an explanatory rationale helps to align the task and move it from being forced to being endorsed. So, if it is unclear why the team has to “waste time” in multi-disciplinary rounds, for example, providing the rationale that these activities improve care, allow people to go home to their families faster, and identify system problems that need resolution, may change the experience and support workplace well-being.