

ASCO[®]

Resilience Skills Training Program

Session 7: Keeping Purpose in View

Facilitator Guide

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Key points

- Purpose is a high-level goal that is deeply valued and motivating.
- We tend to wait for huge meaningful moments, but if we use the mindfulness skills we've learned, we'll see that meaning is everywhere.
- We build the meaning of our work every day—and we can strengthen our own sense of purpose by paying attention to the satisfactions we get daily.

Timetable & Talking Points:

00:00 – 00:10 **Check-in** = Did anyone work with their work life boundaries since we met last? What happened? Discuss in pairs for 5 minutes, then ask the group for a couple of examples. Or, simply lead a group discussion.

00:10 – 00:20 **Mindfulness exercise** = Think about a moment recently when it seemed like the world was cracking open. When you could tell that a patient was facing something unbearable, or nearly so. As you bring the moment into mind, notice your own reaction—to turn away, to distract yourself, to move towards the person, to worry about the future. You may have any of these reactions—but for a few minutes, can you just notice what's happening inside your body, heart, and mind? (pairs discuss, then ask group members to report)

00:20 – 00:30 **Learn** = Why cultivating a sense of purpose is something you can't do without.

Why keeping purpose and meaning front & center is worth it

- We often take for granted that our work as clinicians is meaningful and that we derive great satisfaction from it—and so we tend not to comment on how our daily work feeds our need for meaning unless something really big and dramatic happens.
- But in reality, we build the meaning of our work every day—and we can strengthen our own sense of purpose by paying attention to the satisfactions we get daily. Again, we return to mindful awareness. We move our attention back to the everyday and more monumental moments. We allow that meaning to exist, and we remain aware, even if it is not what we are feeling in the moment.
- Sometimes we allow small frustrations to chip away at the meaning of our work.
- Paying attention to your own sense of meaning at work isn't being touchy-feely—it's making sure that your internal compass is aligned with what you're doing. You'll no doubt have many opportunities where you'll need to choose in taking your next career step—knowing what's meaningful now will help you make a wise choice.

Here are some types of meaning and purpose

- What you contribute—to others, to science, to clinical care
- What you're learning about your craft, either as a clinician or researcher
- Your accomplishments, large or small
- The respect you feel from others
- Your ability to use power wisely and constructively
- What community you feel that you are part of
- The sense that you have autonomy and control over your work
- Your connection to humanity, your patients, their families, and the quest for helping in the midst of pain

What to remember

- Purpose is a high-level goal that is deeply valued and motivating
- The types of values that constitute a personal purpose matter
- Staying aligned with your purpose takes energy and willpower
- Staying on your purpose will make you feel energized at work
- Finally: don't wait for a Hollywood-type moment. You can find your purpose reflected in what you're doing, right now, every day. Can you think of one thing today that you did which reminds you of the meaning your profession brings to your life?

00:30 – 00:50 **Try** = [A writing + pairs exercise] Use the [handout](#) (page 5) to write a very rough first draft of your own purpose statement. OR facilitators may wish to simply build on the mindfulness exercise—depends on your group's willingness to dive further into the tough moments. If this is the case, it is fine to simply continue a group discussion, and not to use the handout.

00:50 – 00:55 **Prep** = How could you pay attention for moments when you're working in a way that fits what you're really trying to do as a clinician? How can you remind yourself? How could you keep yourself from losing your sense of purpose and meaning when frustrations, stressors occur? (pairs discuss, then report in big group)

00:55 – 00:60 **Check-out** = "One word"

Additional Resources

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About finding meaning at work even when the work itself isn't great

- <https://hbr.org/2012/12/finding-meaning-at-work-even-w>

Victor Stretcher's terrific book and an easy, quick read that summarizes the literature usefully

- <https://www.amazon.com/Life-Purpose-Matters-Changes-Everything/dp/0062409603>
- http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/living_with_a_purpose_changes_everything

A useful summary of the difference between a happy life and a meaningful one:

- http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/happy_life_different_from_meaningful_life

Handout: What's My Purpose?

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1. Consider your most important values—here's a list to jumpstart your thinking

Achievement	Relationships
Community	Reputation
Creativity	Responsibility
Enjoyment	Security
Expertise	Spirituality
Independence	Tradition
Kindness	Vitality

Or add your own!

2. Think of a couple of people you'd like to emulate (not imitate)—they could be from your professional life at any stage, or personal life, or even someone you've never met. Who are they, and what values do they live by?
3. Draw a headstone (yeah, like in a cemetery), put your name on it, your birthdate-TODAY...and your epitaph. What do you want your epitaph to be?
4. Now think about the big goals in your life that matter the most to you. Write a very rough first draft that assembles those goals into a life purpose. Ask yourself: "is this purpose bigger than myself?" and "In living towards this purpose, will I be treating others the way I want to be treated?" Feel free to use the back of this sheet.