

Work-Life Balance and Self-Care in the Helping Professions

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Mountain Plains (HHS Region 8)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
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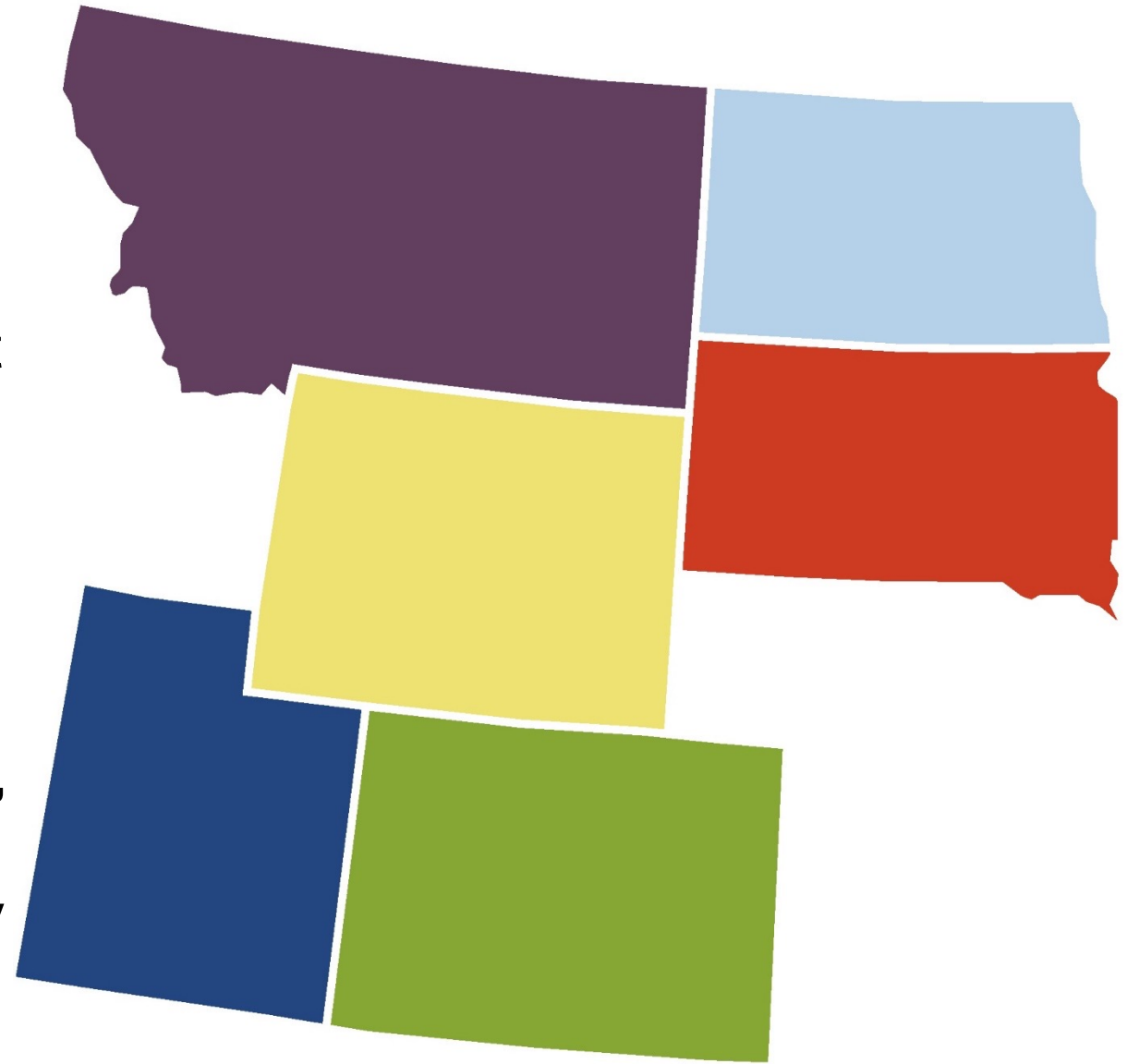
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The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Mountain Plains MHTTC) provides training and technical assistance to individuals who serve persons with mental health concerns throughout Region 8 (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming).

We belong to the Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network, a national network of training and technical assistance centers serving the needs of mental health, substance use and prevention providers. The work of the TTC Network is under a cooperative agreement by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).



Land Acknowledgement Statement

Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota. We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.



The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

**STRENGTHS-BASED
AND HOPEFUL**

**INCLUSIVE AND
ACCEPTING OF
DIVERSE CULTURES,
GENDERS,
PERSPECTIVES,
AND EXPERIENCES**

**HEALING-CENTERED AND
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE**

**INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
OWN JOURNEYS**

**PERSON-FIRST AND
FREE OF LABELS**

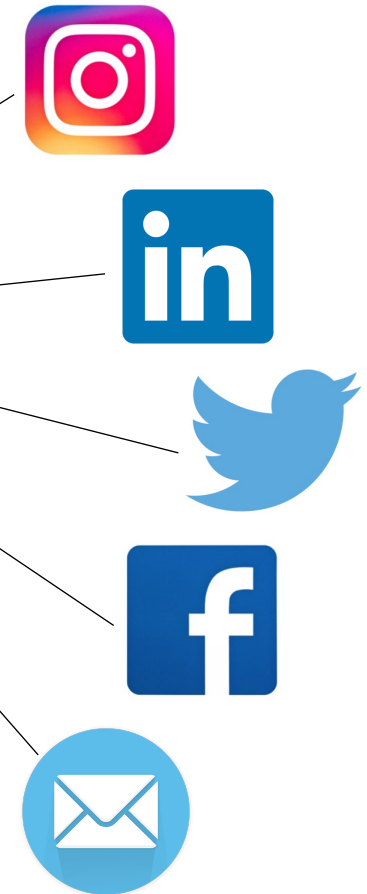
**NON-JUDGMENTAL AND
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS**

**RESPECTFUL, CLEAR
AND UNDERSTANDABLE**

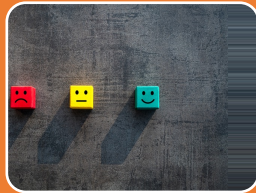
**CONSISTENT WITH
OUR ACTIONS,
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS**

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Objectives



Review burnout and compassion fatigue



Define and critically examine "work-life balance"



Define and critically examine "self-care"



Identify approaches to holistic wellness



About Mel

Ph.D., Counseling Psychology, University at Albany (2015)

- Internship: University of Florida 🐊

Currently: Augusta University (as of 2020)

- Previously:
 - Oklahoma State University (Director of Doctoral Training)
 - Louisiana Tech University (Director of the Psychological Services Clinic)
- Also: Licensed Psychologist (#PSY004400) and Board Certified (ABPP) in Counseling Psychology, in private practice (Aguirre Center for Inclusive Psychotherapy)

APA Board of Educational Affairs

- Chair, 2020
- Member, 2018 – 2023
- Member, *Hallmarks of High Quality Graduate Training* workgroup; *Holistic Admissions* workgroup





Multicultural Psychotherapy and Training



Racial and Economic Inequity in Higher Education

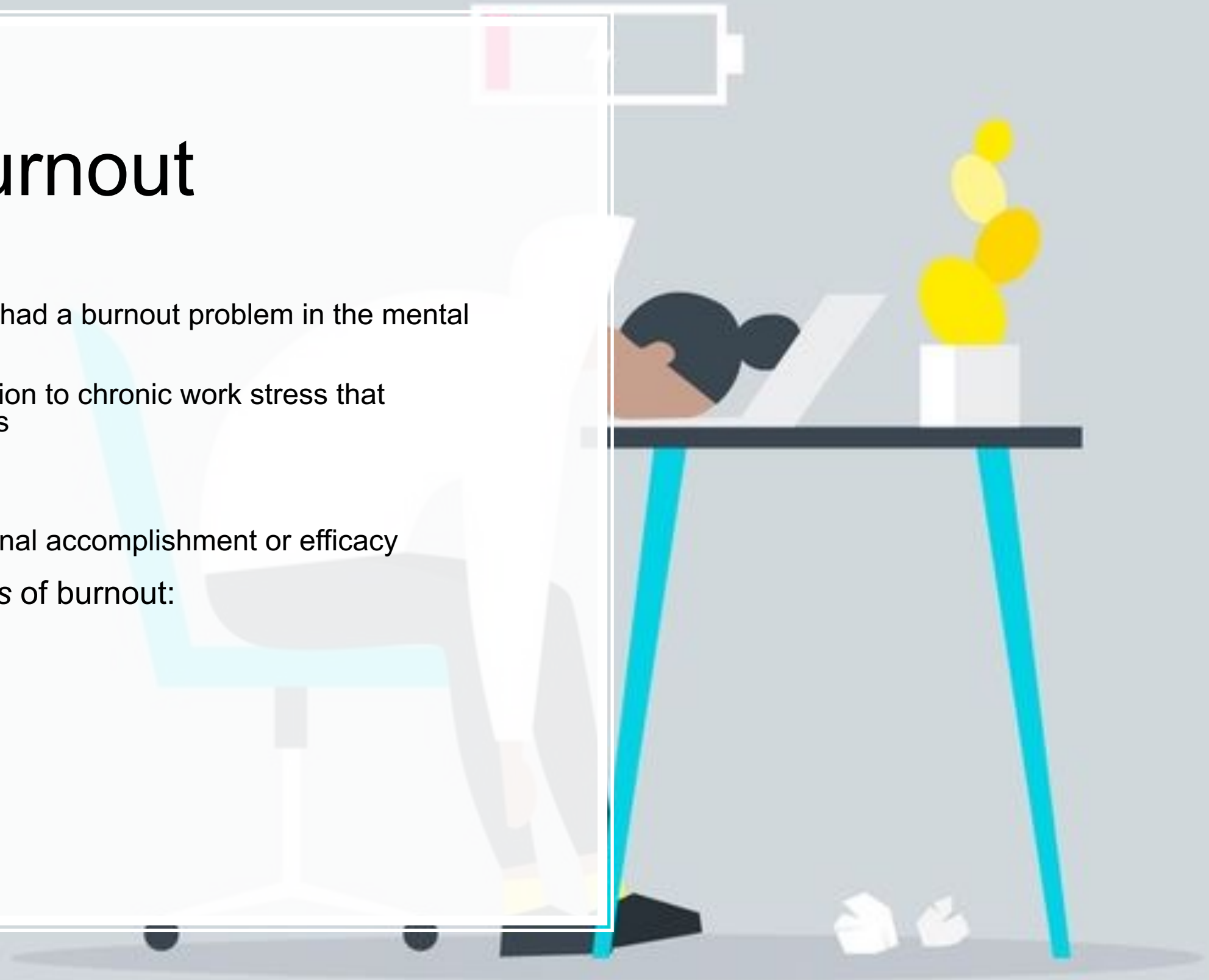


Racism and Antiracism



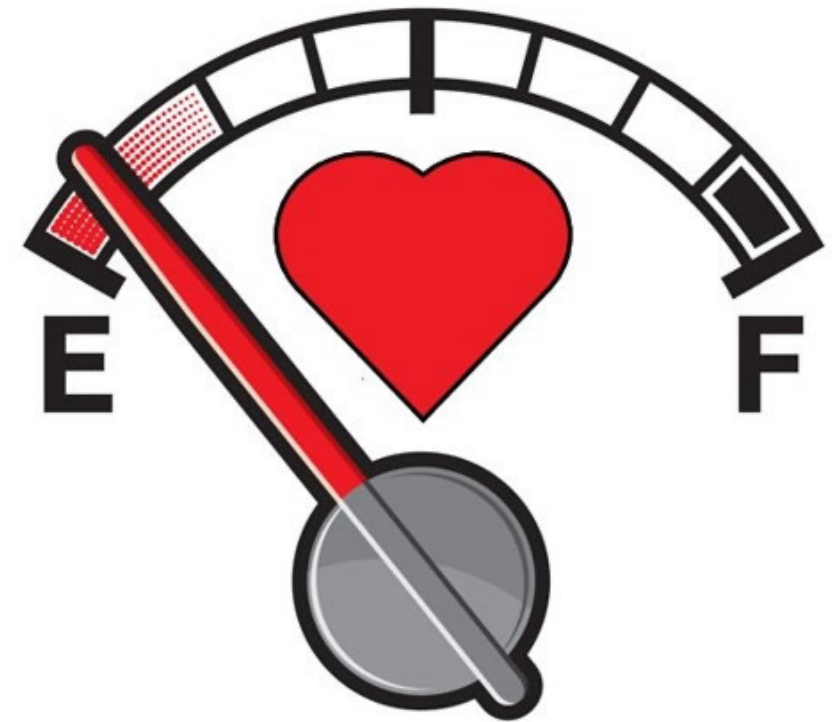
Review of Burnout

- Long before the pandemic, we had a burnout problem in the mental health professions
- Burnout: A psychological reaction to chronic work stress that encompasses three dimensions
 - Emotional exhaustion:
 - Cynicism
 - Reduced sense of personal accomplishment or efficacy
- Five categories of *symptoms* of burnout:
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Behavioral
 - Work-related
 - Interpersonal



Review of Compassion Fatigue

- Compassion Fatigue: The natural, predictable, treatable, and preventable unwanted consequence of working with suffering people (Figley, 1995, p. 5).
- Sometimes also referred to as *Compassion stress*, *vicarious traumatization*, or *secondary traumatic stress*.



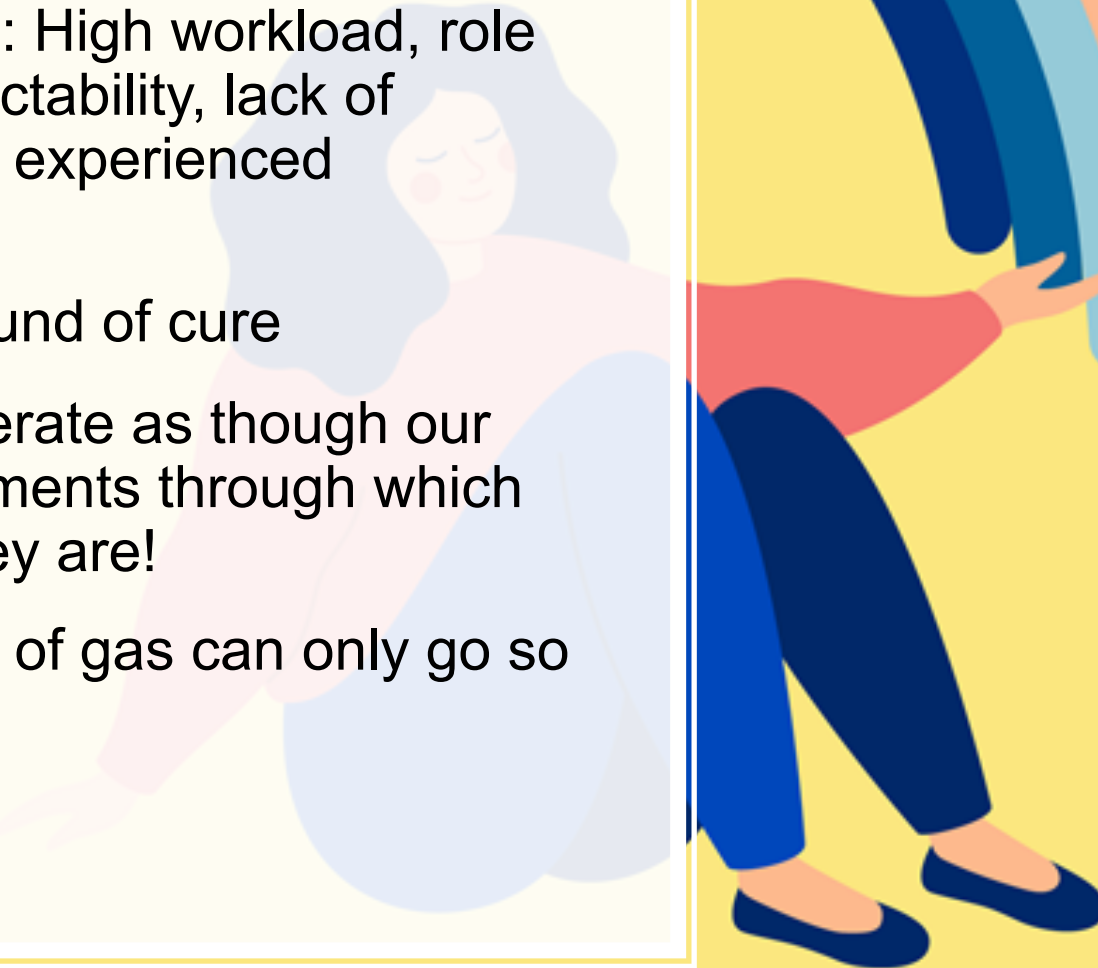
Preventing Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

- Three types of burnout interventions (prevention framework!)
 - Primary (Reducing known risk factors to prevent burnout)
 - Secondary (Aimed at those at high risk, to prevent burnout)
 - Tertiary (Aimed at those already experiencing burnout, to alleviate suffering and prevent adverse consequences)
- Or, can be categorized by individual (increase psychological resources, coping) vs. **organizational** (alter organizational context; reduce sources of stress) interventions



Lessons From the Research

- Individual-level interventions alone are not sufficient to prevent or treat burnout (Ahola et al., 2017)
 - Many causes are organizational: High workload, role conflict and ambiguity, low predictability, lack of participation and social support, experienced unfairness
- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure
- It is absolutely imperative that we operate as though our minds and bodies are the very instruments through which we engage in our work – because they are!
- Even at maximum efficiency, a gallon of gas can only go so far.



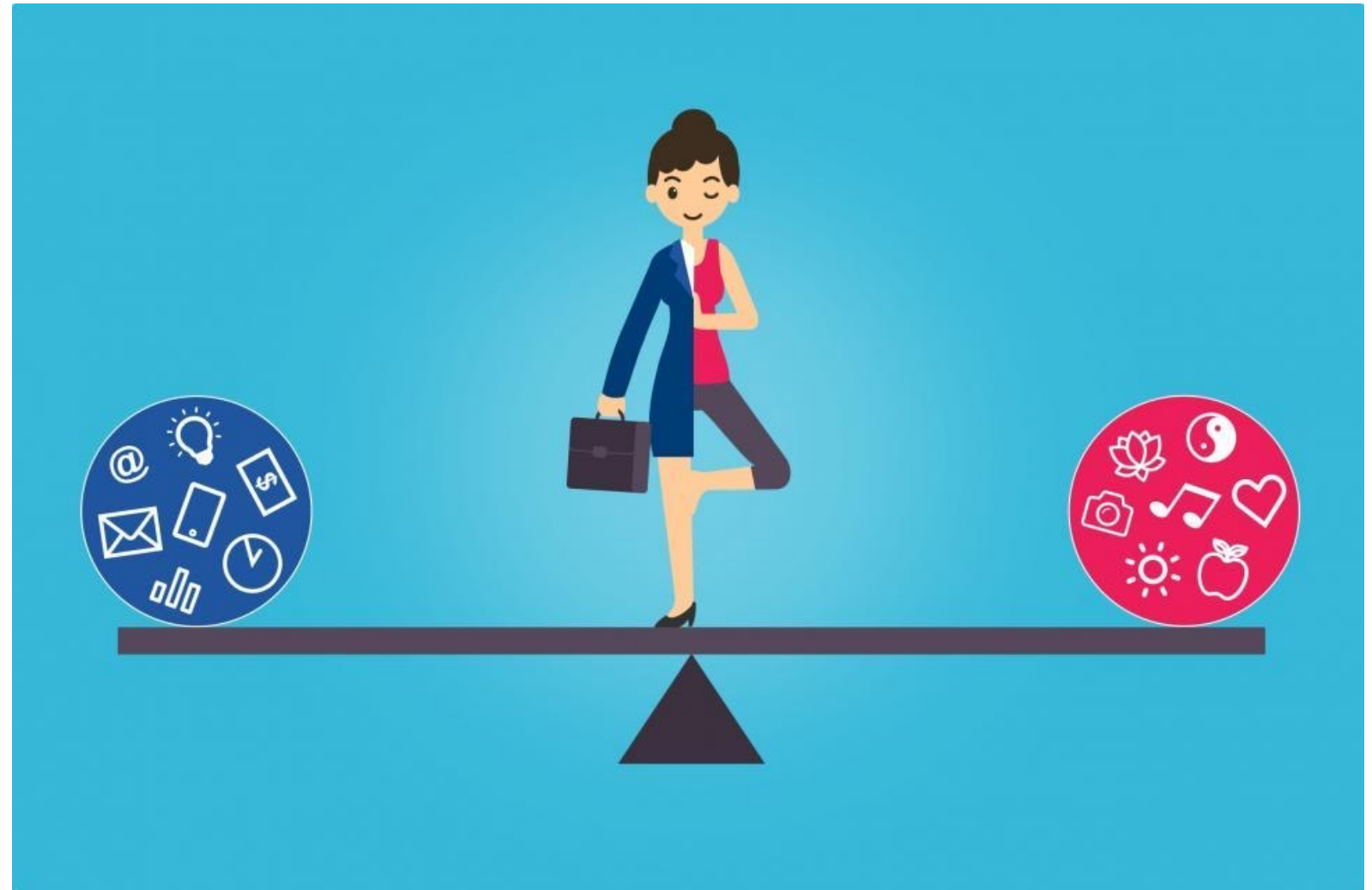
**GRANT ME
THE SERENITY**

**TO ACCEPT THE THINGS
I CANNOT CHANGE,
THE COURAGE TO CHANGE
THE THINGS I CAN, AND
THE WISDOM TO KNOW
THE DIFFERENCE.**

-NIEBUHR-

Work-Life Balance: Goals or Mythology?

- Multiple, conflicting definitions of “work-life balance”; no necessarily agreed-upon definition
- *Terminology* not even agreed upon!
- Why is this?
 - Early perspectives time-equality based, but is this possible? Is it even what everyone wants?
 - Emphasis on conflict negates the potential enrichment
 - Emphasis on enrichment negates the reality of time scarcity
 - Over-focus on *time* ignores *affective, salience, efficacy, satisfaction, involvement* components
 - Non-work focus often on “family,” when we are so much more than work or family





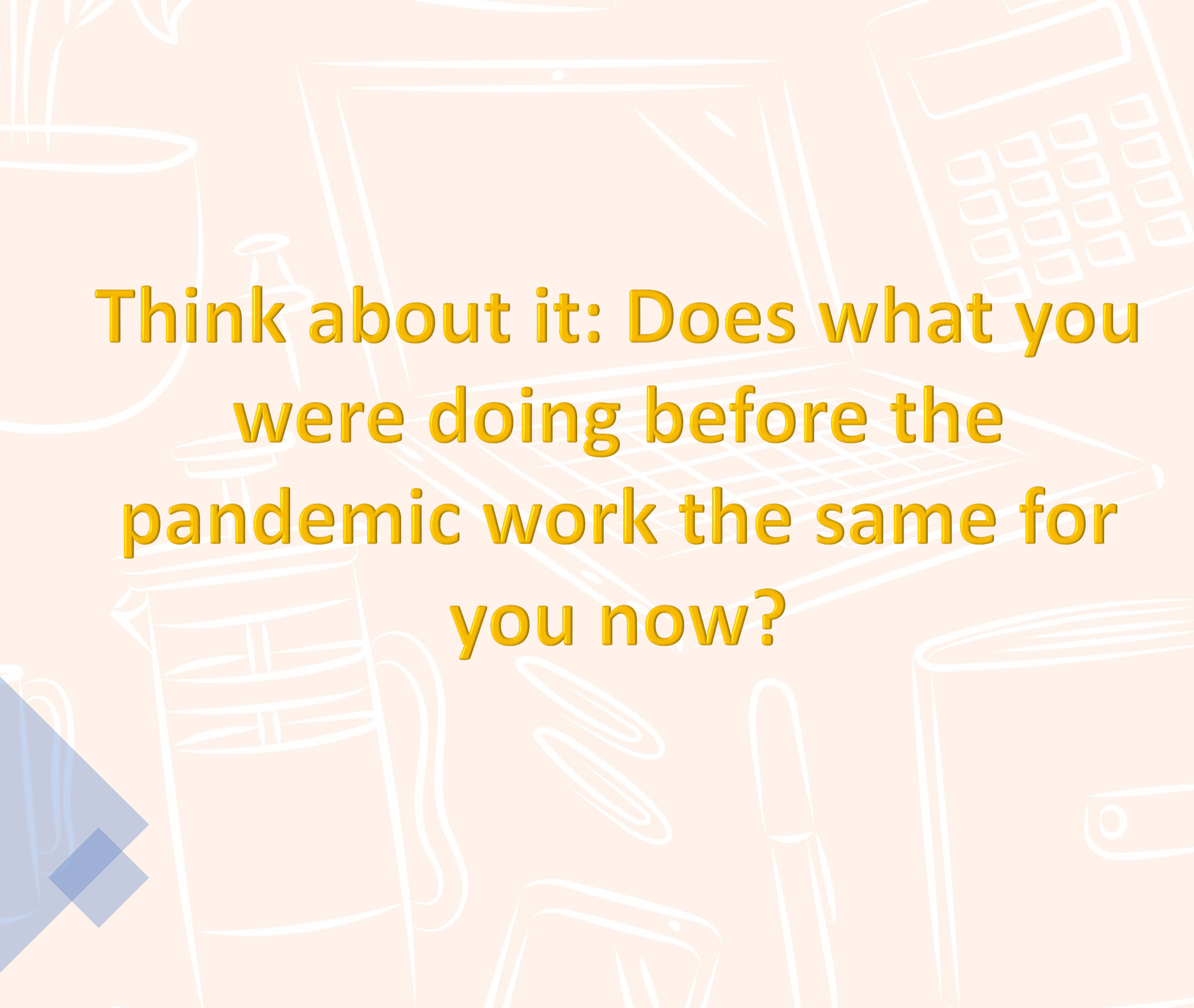
Work-Life Balance: Goals or Mythology?

- Also important to recognize that *time* is not the only resource allocation issue
 - *Strain*-based (cognitive) demands
 - *Emotional* demands
 - *Physical* demands
- Eight hours of high-demand work (strain, emotional, physical) much more taxing than eight hours of low-demand work
- Resources can *buffer* demands
 - E.g., time flexibility

“Balance”??

- Perhaps most importantly, “work-life balance” suggests an achievable end-state.
- More like walking a jagged path – need to continuously re-assess the landscape and how sure-footed we feel
- Does not, should not, *cannot* look the same for everyone
- Will not look the same *for you* throughout your life. Things change!





**Think about it: Does what you
were doing before the
pandemic work the same for
you now?**





The Wisdom to Know the Difference

- We might not be able to fix or address all of the structural and systemic causes of burnout, but we still have to understand them in order to disengage from toxic messaging
- Petersen (2019): We are often taught that everything that's bad (e.g., overworking) is good, and everything that's good (e.g., relaxing; setting boundaries) is bad.
 - In this context, the only thing that is “good” is what makes money!
- We are further taught that the ways to find happiness, joy, peace, are to
 - Spend money
 - Task manage (achieve happiness! Schedule your mindfulness!)

If “self-care” becomes just one more *task* we have to *accomplish*, it is unlikely we will commit to it...

... and even if we do, it may *contribute* to, rather than ameliorate, exhaustion and burnout.

A Very Good Place to Start

If the answers don't lie in the wellness industry (spoiler alert: they don't) or some magic, achievable "balance" state, then where can we begin to take better, more holistic care of ourselves?

Well, let's start at the very beginning.



When is the last time you...

- Drank a glass of water?
 - Drank at least 64 oz of water in a day?
- Feel like you ate healthily on a regular basis?
- Regularly slept 7 to 8 hours a night?
- Built activity that works for you into your routine?



When is the last time you...

- Nurtured a hobby?
- Tried something new?
- Took time to do something *just for yourself* that brought you joy?



How often do you allow yourself to....

- Build regular, deep, and present social connections into the regular rhythm of your life?
- Be fully present, without work or other task-distractions, with friends and family?

Forget

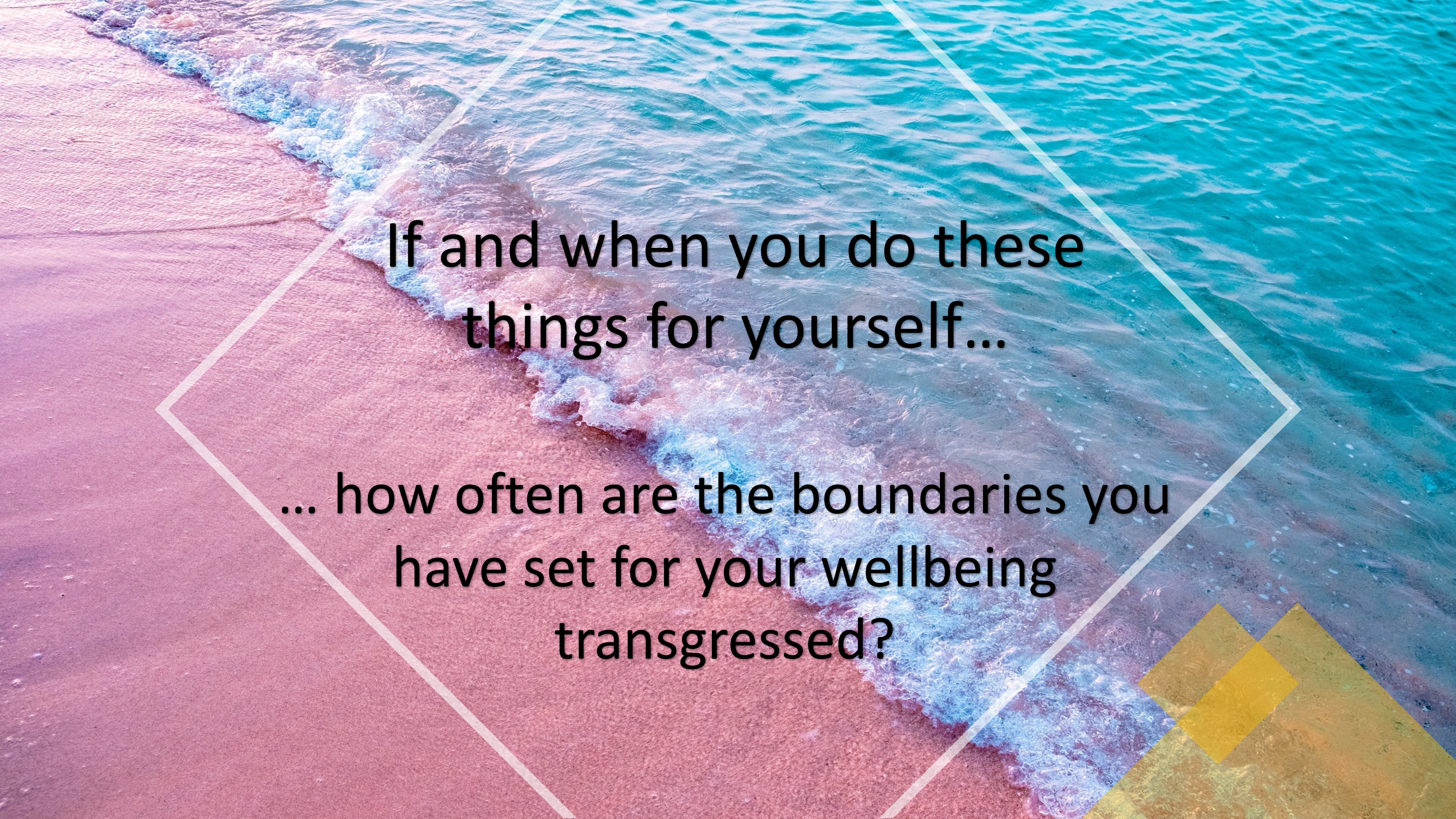
About

Work?

Surely It Can't Be That Simple

- *Simple* and *easy* are two very different things
- Much of what we need the most is very simple, but we are trained to believe that the answers to our problems are complex and only attained through "hard work" (and often purchasing some product or service)
- Much of what is "simple" – enjoying nature, for example – is also genuinely made *difficult to attain* via systemic and structural constraints
 - Here again is why it is necessary to understand our capitalistic context





If and when you do these
things for yourself...

... how often are the boundaries you
have set for your wellbeing
transgressed?

**Are you *allowing* those boundaries to
be transgressed?**

These have different solutions.

Or are the organizational and systemic
constraints that you are under incompatible
with healthy boundaries?

Attending To Our Wellness

If you are *allowing* some or all of your boundaries to be pushed, remember.....

- You really do need to put your oxygen mask on first.
 - You deserve this, full stop; and, you are useful to no one if you are incapacitated.
- In a capitalistic society, no one else is going to protect your boundaries or your wellness for you.
- Work will still be there, no matter how many more minutes you spend on it or how many additional clients you take on.
 - Your time, energy, and resources, however, are finite.

You Are More Than Work

There is no agreed-upon conceptualization of wellness, but most sources (including the CDC) emphasize:

- Physical well-being
 - Emotional well-being
 - Social well-being
 - Economic/Financial well-being
 - Purpose/Meaning in life
- ..as well as Work Satisfaction

Take a moment to reflect on how much you allow yourself to attend to the non-work dimensions.

How “balanced” is your time and resource allocation?

- **1994 DIVISION 17 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

**No One Ever Died Wishing
They Had Spent More Time in the Office**

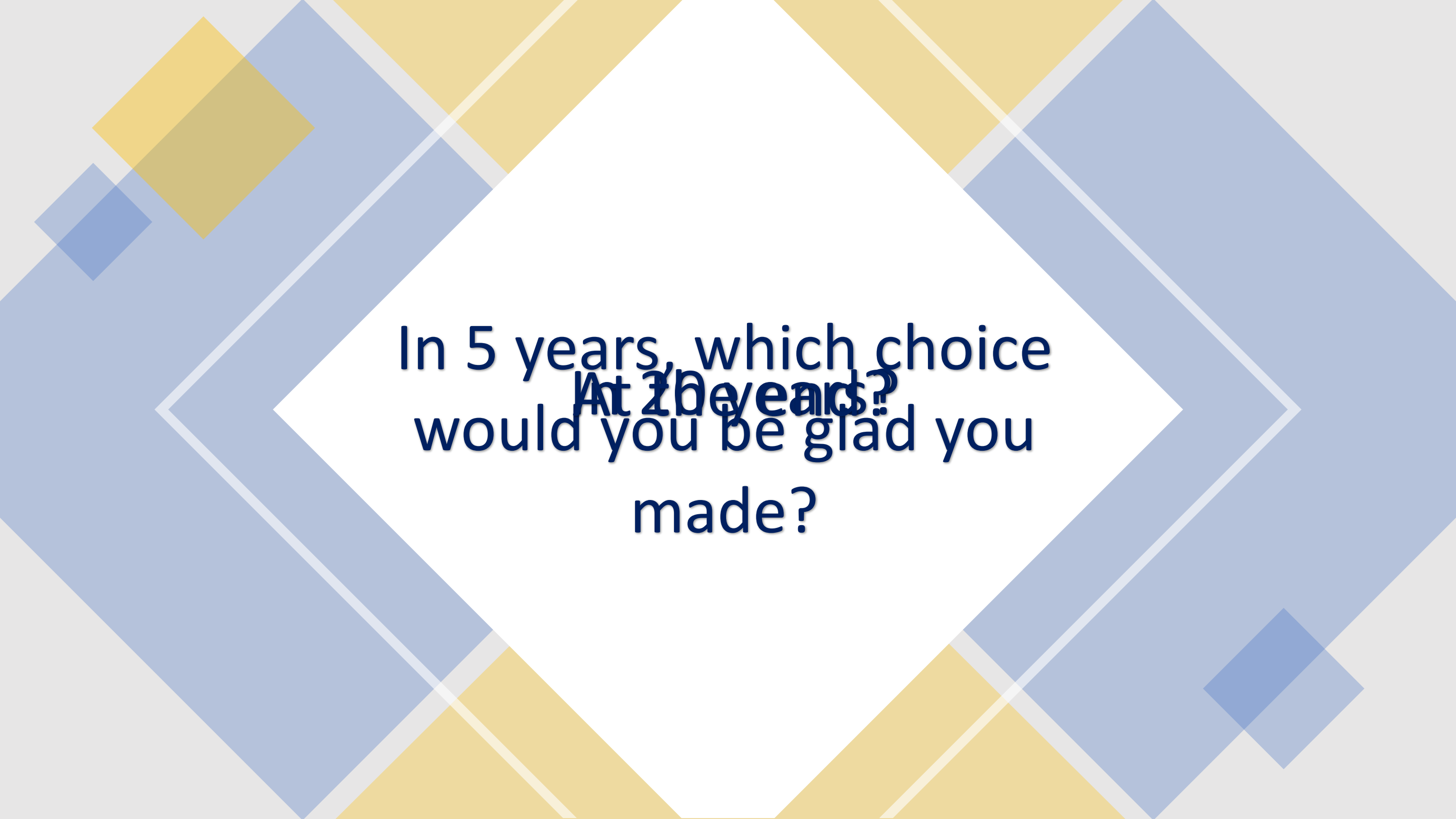
Jo-Ida C. Hansen
University of Minnesota

My Second-Favorite Journal Article Title of All Time

If you have a choice to make....

- Do I stay late and write more notes, or do I go out for dinner with a loved one?
- Should I set aside time on vacation to catch up on work, or should I set a firm boundary and focus on being present?
- Should I take on this additional client, even though I said my caseload is full?
- Should I set aside Saturday morning to catch up on administration, or go on a hike since it's a beautiful day outside?





In 5 years, which choice
At 20 years?
would you be glad you
made?

You Can't Buy Wellness*

- To be very clear, even the most fundamental health necessities (clean water, healthy food, time for self, and more) are easier to obtain when you have financial stability
- Many hobbies that people enjoy also cost money
- However, *wellness industry* – driven “solutions” that cost money do not, cannot, solve the problem of inadequate and inconsistent attention to the non-work parts of yourself
- Instead, it is crucial to:
 - Remain in touch with your mind and body, and monitor for early symptoms of *imbalance* (stress, burnout!)
 - Renegotiate your apportionment of time, energy, and resources accordingly – and throughout the lifetime
 - Still, no part of the self should be relegated to zero (or minimal) apportionment





If At First You Don't Succeed...

We should know better than anyone that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions!

- Trial and error
- Know yourself and roll with your resistance!
 - If you are a night owl, a behavior change reliant on a 5am wakeup is unlikely to stick
 - If you are seriously time-strapped, healthy meals that are complex and time-consuming are unlikely to be successful
- Ignore cultural messages about what is *best* and find what works for *you*
 - Something could be the best habit in the world; but it is of no benefit if it won't actually work!
- Try something that you don't think you'll love. You may surprise yourself.
- Don't. Give. Up.

What If It's Not Me?

Sometimes, the organizational demands, expectations, and/or lack of resources are genuinely the primary or sole culprit of burnout and imbalance. Then what?

- Still necessary to attend to your individual wellness and balance and best possible; in fact, possibly even more important to set and maintain boundaries, find joy
- However, must register and attend to another component: Not all work environments are sustainable, and **nothing changes if nothing changes**.

So what's going to give?



What If It's Not Me?

- Where possible, communication with colleagues and leadership about work conditions are crucial
- Advocacy, especially collective advocacy
- Organizational leaders: *No one benefits from unsustainable working conditions. No one.*
 - Once a week goat yoga is not going to change this.
- What are the things I can control, what are the things I can't?.....
 - Can this, or can this not, work for me? What needs to change?



In Sum

We should know better than anyone that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions!

The things you can control:

- Regularly assess how you are feeling and whether what you are doing is working for you
- Set and reinforce boundaries
- Foster wellness in *all* parts of yourself and your life, with intentionality
- Use what you know about behavior change to roll with, rather than against, your resistance—and if one thing isn't working, try something else
- **Be creative!**

The things you can't control:

- Work with colleagues and leadership to advocate for more sustainable working conditions
- If you are *in* leadership, remember that the research is clear: Employee wellness benefits everyone
- If nothing can change about the environment, and the environment is not able to work for you, then reconsider the environment and/or your relationship to it

Thank You!



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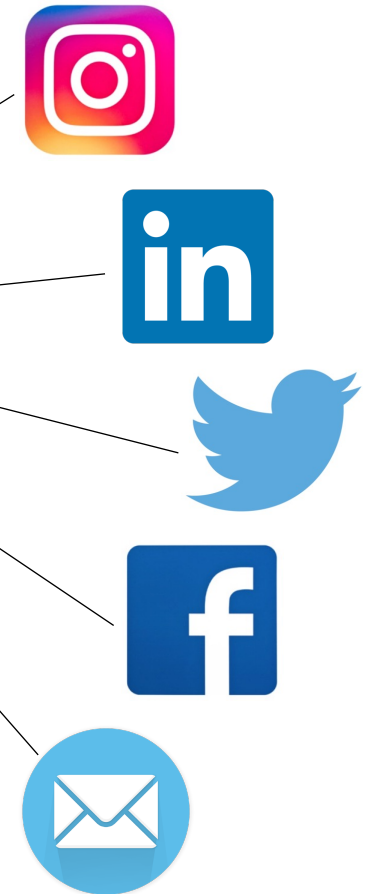
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THANK YOU!



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