



HOW TO MOVE FROM FUNCTIONING TO *flourishing*

THE SIX TESTED, PRACTICAL STEPS TO WELLBEING

Talent Wellbeing |

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THEWELLBEINGLAB
A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM



INTRODUCTION

The word 'wellbeing' gets thrown around a lot these days. In fact, from Buddha to the explosion of the self-help movement, history is paved with hundreds of suggestions on how to create and cling to this concept. But just what is wellbeing and why might it matter to you, your team and your workplace?

In its simplest form, wellbeing is your ability to feel good and function effectively. It gives you the resources to navigate the highs and lows we all experience in our work and our lives, while enabling you to intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically 'flourish.'

As a result, studies are finding that people who have higher levels of wellbeing reap all sorts of benefits.

Studies have found that when people are thriving at work, on average, they are:



Nearly 6X

more likely to feel engaged³



29%

more likely to be more productive⁴



45%

more likely to be satisfied in their jobs⁵



46%

less likely to experience unhealthy days⁶



125%

less likely to burn out⁷



32%

less likely to quit⁸

Talent Wellbeing

In addition, workplaces that choose to invest in employee wellbeing and have happy and engaged workers experience, on average:



It turns out that wellbeing is what makes it possible for you to ‘be well and do well.’

Of course, it sounds simple enough. Yet the reality is that perhaps like most of us, you’ve discovered that maintaining your wellbeing is a lot harder than it looks. In fact, a recent study shows that when it comes to our wellbeing, 70 percent of us report that we actually spend most of our time somewhere between ‘functioning’ and ‘failing.’ In other words, instead of flourishing, most of us are just getting by.

Surely that’s just life, right?

After all, by now we all know that we should move regularly, eat wisely and sleep deeply, but the daily demands of life, unrealistic expectations at work, and even our own beliefs about our sense of worth mean that most of us wind up making choices that undermine our wellbeing. We get it. Despite your best intentions, finding the time and energy to look after yourself is challenging.

BUT WHAT IF IT DIDN’T HAVE TO BE?

WHAT IS WELLBEING?

In 1998, Professor Martin Seligman, then president of the American Psychology Association, urged his colleagues to expand their focus beyond merely fixing mental illness and start researching ways to build sustainable wellbeing. The result has been an explosion in our understanding of how people can create and maintain their wellbeing, with more than 18,000 peer-reviewed research articles published to date.

Researchers have proposed numerous theories of wellbeing. A popular recent model was put forth by Dr. Seligman himself and suggests that wellbeing is cultivated by the presence in our lives of:



POSITIVE EMOTIONS

the right balance of heartfelt positivity to boost our resilience.



ENGAGEMENT

the regular development of our strengths.



RELATIONSHIPS

the creation of authentic, energizing connections with others.



MEANING

a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves.



ACCOMPLISHMENT

the belief and ability to do things that matter most to us.

This framework is often referred to as 'PERMA.'

Other researchers – ourselves included – also believe that the cultivation of your health by eating well, moving regularly, and sleeping deeply is one of the hygiene factors of wellbeing. Everything just gets easier when this is present. So this framework is also sometimes referred to as ‘PERMAH.’

Dr. Seligman believes that no single element defines wellbeing, but each contributes to it. In order to flourish, you need to be cultivating each of the PERMAH elements.

How much you need of each element, he suggests, will vary depending on the type of person you are, the situations you’re in, and the outcomes you want to achieve. The bad news is that this means there is no single recipe for wellbeing; it looks different for each of us. But the good news is that researchers have found it is possible to improve your experiences in any of the PERMAH elements, it just takes some informed practice to figure out what works best for you.

We’ve chosen the PERMAH framework as the basis of the wellbeing measure and approaches shared throughout this book. We chose it not because we believe it has been conclusively proven as the roadmap to wellbeing - after all, good science is never proven but an evolving process of ongoing learning and fine-tuning. Rather, we chose it because we’ve found that the PERMAH framework is an easy way for people to understand, measure, and take action around the well-established, evidence-based elements of wellbeing.

CAN YOUR WELLBEING BE IMPROVED?

Just like muscle groups or areas of fitness, the PERMAH elements can be tested, targeted and developed through the practice of ongoing 'Positive Interventions.' Created by wellbeing practitioners and researchers around the globe, these include exercises like keeping a gratitude journal, breaking the grip on rumination, developing your strengths, finding meaning in small tasks, and overcoming self-doubt.

So does this mean that with the right positive interventions you'll soon be effortlessly flourishing?

Well, not quite. Researchers believe that your wellbeing – much like your body weight – has a genetically determined set-point range that for most of us is naturally stable and relatively positive. Just as when you eat well and exercise regularly, you can maintain your optimal body weight, the same seems to be true when you consistently engage in practices that support your wellbeing. Unfortunately, this also works in reverse. Just as when you don't eat well or exercise regularly, you're likely to end up weighing a little - or a lot - more than is ideal for your body type, it also appears that when you don't prioritize the practices that support your wellbeing, it becomes increasingly difficult for you to consistently be well and do well.

We'd love to be able to promise you that simply selecting and practicing a few of the positive interventions from this book for one week would magically ensure your wellbeing. But the truth is that just like eating one piece of broccoli won't suddenly make you healthy, or going for one five mile run won't suddenly make you fit, neither will trying one Positive Psychology intervention. Maintaining a high-level of wellbeing requires consistent effort.

So does this mean that if you create a daily practice of positive interventions and stick with them, you'll always be flourishing?

Well, not quite. Feeling good and functioning effectively will ebb and flow depending on what's happening at work and in your life. Rather than setting yourself the goal of flourishing all the time, we've found that the real prize is in becoming an informed, confident and active participant in shaping your own wellbeing, so you can wholeheartedly show up and be fully engaged in life.

As a result, we've discovered that we can enjoy long, steady periods of consistent flourishing, but that when life throws us an unexpected adversity or trauma – like the untimely deaths of people we love – we have the permission and the resources to simply function when we need to heal, whilst mindfully managing the risks of potentially flailing during these moments. Thus we've come to believe that the goal that serves each of us best is to become intelligent and empowered stewards of our own wellbeing.

SO HOW CAN YOU PULL THIS OFF?

BUILDING A PRACTICAL, EVIDENCE-BASED WELLBEING PLAN

Figuring out what makes us flourish can feel like fumbling in the dark. This e-book has been created in the hope that we might be able to turn on the light by putting at your fingertips the latest evidence-based Positive Psychology findings and practices, along with free, easy-to-use tools for measurements that can help you navigate your way towards a consistently flourishing life.

HERE IS HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS 'HOW-TO' WELLBEING GUIDE:

1. STEP ON THE WELLBEING SCALES

Think about your experiences and feelings at work over the last week.

How often has each of the following occurred?

0 = Never, 5 = half the time, 10 = all the time

PILLAR	DEFINITION	SCORE
 POSITIVE EMOTION	I felt positive at work.	
 ENGAGEMENT	I was interested and deeply engaged in my work.	
 RELATIONSHIPS	I felt respected and appreciated by my co-workers.	
 MEANING	I felt that the work I did was valuable and worthwhile.	
 ACCOMPLISHMENT	I made progress towards reaching my work-related goals.	
 HEALTH	Physically, I felt strong and healthy.	

Want to dive deeper? Then use the free wellbeing survey at www.permahsurvey.com.

2. REFLECT ON YOUR WELLBEING

When you get your results, don't worry about your score; instead, tune into how you feel about your results. Consider these questions:

- Are you surprised? Inspired? Disappointed?
- Are there any elements in particular that are drawing your attention? Why?
- Are there any changes you'd like to create to help you feel better and do better over the coming months? Which PERMAH elements does this suggest you should prioritize?

3. SET YOUR WELLBEING HOPES

Of course, it's one thing to know what you 'should' be doing and another thing to actually find the energy and time to do it. We get it. Life is busy and creating change – no matter how much you want it – can be challenging. That's why we've tried to use all that science as learning to set you up for success when it comes to playing with these wellbeing approaches in your work and your life.

For example, researchers have discovered that while 89 percent of us believe that tomorrow will be better than today, only 50 percent of us believe we can make it so. The difference, they suggest, is between wishing and hoping. People who wish look for things to just happen. People who hope set clear 'want-to' goals; they try multiple pathways to achieve them and ensure up front they have ways to maintain their willpower.

This is why we recommend rather than trying to change your whole wellbeing profile at once, it's helpful to pick one or two PERMAH elements you are most hoping to improve right now. Studies suggest you will be more motivated and successful when it comes to creating the changes you want if you select the elements you really 'want-to' improve, rather than the ones you feel you 'should do' or 'have to.' If you're not sure where you'd most like to start, each of the following chapters offers an overview of the potential benefits working on different PERMAH elements may provide for your wellbeing.

So, if you could invest your energy into just one or two of the PERMAH elements right now, which ones would you most like to improve?

4. CHOOSE A WELLBEING ACTIVITY

Once you've selected the PERMAH elements you'd most like to improve, and gotten clear on the timeframe and time commitment you want to work within, turn to the chapter for that element and select a positive intervention that you can't wait to get started on. Try to choose something that will feel like you're giving yourself a little gift each time you do it.

We've put some suggested wellbeing activities throughout the book based on research we've conducted around the world. If you find that your wellbeing activities or habits work really well for a while, but then the joy tends to fade from them, don't despair. It turns out that the human brain has an unparalleled ability to adapt to our conditions; unfortunately when it comes to the good things in our life, it appears that we have a tendency to grow bored quickly. When your wellbeing habits or experiences no longer feel enjoyable, energizing or effective, it's just your brain's way of letting you know that it might be time to:

- mix it up (try a different intervention)
- start reminding yourself of why this change mattered to you (make it meaningful)
- dig in for a little more gratitude (remember why you're lucky to be able to do what you're doing)
- make sure you're not comparing yourself to others (don't let ever-increasing expectations undermine your wellbeing)

5. BE GENTLE WITH YOUR WELLBEING

We're going to make a safe bet that you don't need anything else to beat yourself up about. Improving and maintaining your wellbeing is a lifetime's journey. Your goal isn't about improving one score on a survey; it's about building the knowledge, tools, and support you need to be an intelligent and active steward of your wellbeing, so you can better navigate the highs and lows of work and life and flourish more consistently.

Give yourself permission to try, to fail, to learn, and to get up and try again. Be honest with yourself about where you are on the journey, be open to discovering better ways to care for yourself, and then use the PERMAH Survey and the interventions in this book - as you're ready - to take the next step - knowing that you are worthy of feeling good and doing well.

Please remember that wellbeing is neither a one-off nor a one-size-fits-all affair. Different support tools work for different people at different times in their life. If you believe you may benefit from extra support, we recommend using this e-book in conjunction with a trusted coach, psychologist or doctor.

Just like you, when it comes to improving wellbeing, we're all learning. It's our hope that this book and the online tools we've provided help make the journey a little faster, a little easier, and a lot more enjoyable for you.

SO, LET'S PICK A WELLBEING PILLAR TO IMPROVE AND LET'S GET STARTED.

MY WELLBEING HOPE

1. MY WELLBEING HOPE IS

[pick a PERMAH pillar to work on]

2. MY WELLBEING ACTIVITY

[pick an activity from the e-book]

WHAT:

WHEN:

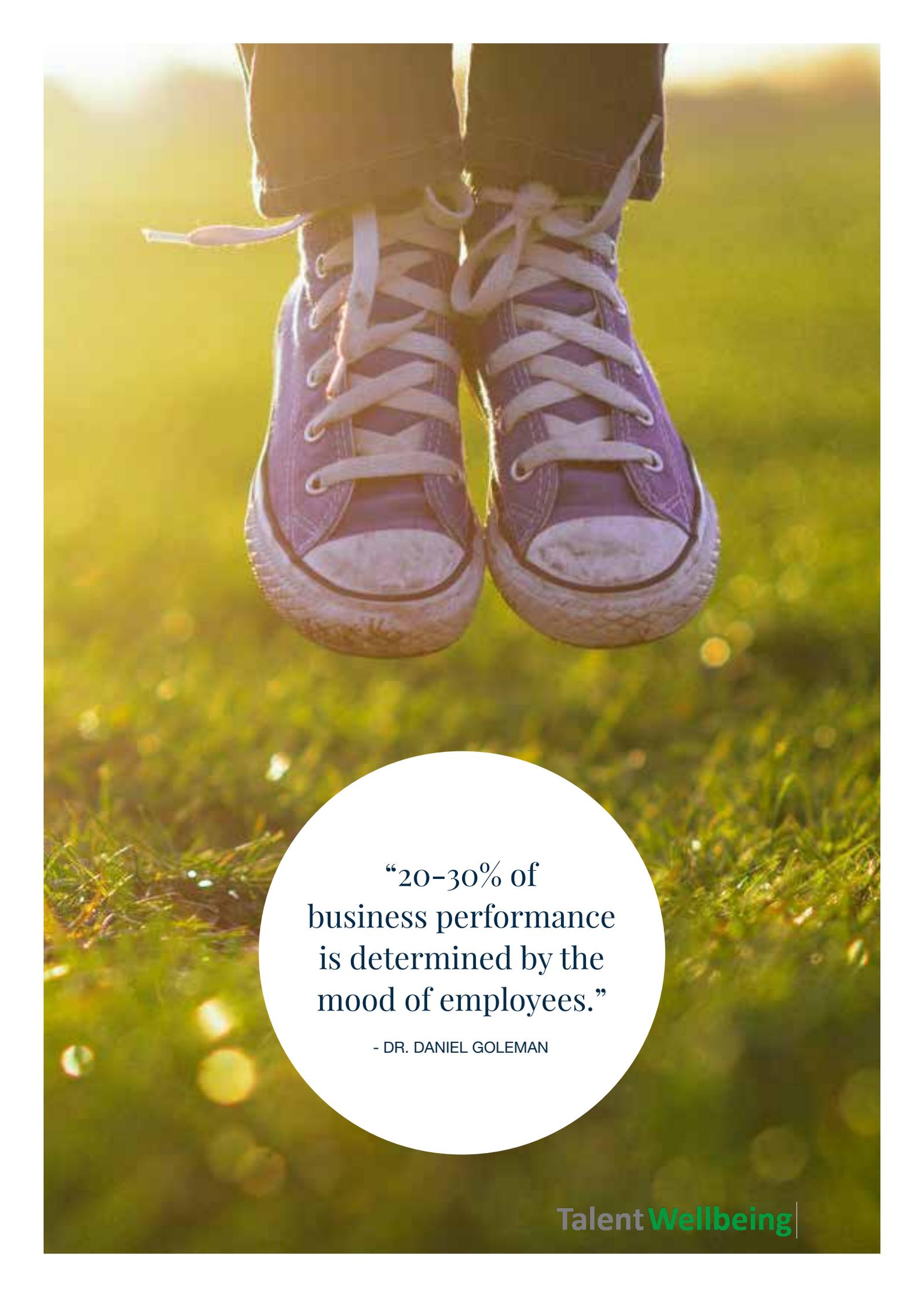
HOW:

3. MY WELLBEING TRACKING

[how will you track your progress?]

4. MY WELLBEING BUDDY

[who can help encourage your wellbeing efforts?]



“20-30% of
business performance
is determined by the
mood of employees.”

- DR. DANIEL GOLEMAN



PRIORITIZING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

THE SCIENCE

Researchers have found the experience of heartfelt, positive emotions - like joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love - can help you to be more optimistic, resilient, open, accepting, and happier and healthier overall. When it comes to your work, these emotions have also been found to improve your relationships, job satisfaction, and success. But how?

Studies conducted by Professor Barbara Fredrickson from the University of North Carolina have repeatedly demonstrated that positive emotions help you broaden and build the way your brain responds to opportunities and challenges. It turns out that positivity doesn't just change the content of your thinking, trading bad thoughts for good ones; it also changes the scope and boundaries of your mind, impacting your performance and wellbeing.

While your experience of positive emotions may often feel brief and fleeting, it appears that just like putting money in the bank, as positive emotions accrue, they help build your psychological, social, intellectual, and physical resources, placing you on a positive trajectory of growth. This is because the broadened mindset that is enabled by the experience of positive emotions seems to be the basis for the discovery of new knowledge, new alliances, and new skills. In turn, these lead to more positive emotions, in what can be a positive spiral.

But it is important to also remember that people who consistently thrive also experience negative emotions. In a world where rejection, failure, self-doubt, hypocrisy, loss, boredom, and annoying and obnoxious people are inevitable, you can't really be connected and grounded to life without encountering difficulties, challenges, and pain from time to time. While it can be tempting to ignore, suppress, or distract yourself from feelings of apprehension, anger, or sadness, these emotions can also offer important emotional, mental, and social learning opportunities.

Rather than trying to avoid the discomfort these emotions can bring, researchers suggest your goal should be to feel robust enough to withstand emotional distress by being able to realize that these emotions are merely signs that something is not going right, to take the required actions, and to let the emotion pass. After all, emotions themselves are neither good nor bad; it's what you do with them that really matters.

WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

1. TAKING THE POSITIVITY RATIO TEST

Use this free two-minute survey – www.positivityratio.com – to measure your positivity ratio, at roughly the same time every evening for two weeks. Take note of where your ratio of positive to negative emotions sits on your best days and think about how you can build more of these activities in your work.

2. CREATING “JOLTS OF JOY”

Write down five jolts of joy – something that genuinely brings a smile to your face – that you can quickly reach for when need to inject some heartfelt positivity into your day. It might be a favorite song, a funny YouTube clip, a piece of poetry, someone who makes you laugh, a game that relaxes you, or a place that brings you peace. Keep your list somewhere handy, so when you feel negativity narrowing in, you can reach for a jolt of joy, and notice how your brain responds.

3. PRACTICING KINDNESS

Practicing kindness – even when you expect to receive nothing in return – helps you see others more positively, feel more connected and be more grateful. Try letting others in front of you when driving through traffic, offer someone a genuine compliment, take time to really listen to someone, check in on how others are doing, bring a small gift – like a cup of tea or a healthy muffin – for a colleague, or donate money to charity. To boost your practice, choose one day each week where you set yourself the challenge of doing five kind things for others. You'll find more ideas at www.randomactsofkindness.org.

4: SHORT-CIRCUITING STRESS

Despite the message that all stress is bad, it seems that stress is neither good or bad - it's your beliefs about stress that can have the most influence on how stress affects you. When you fear it less and use it as a resource for engaging with life, you can change your stress response. When you're feeling stressed, acknowledge it as your body's way of telling you something that matters to you is at risk. Consider what is at stake and why it matters to you. Do you need to fight, escape, challenge, connect, find meaning or grow? Try to make use of the energy stress gives you to respond in ways that reflect your values and goals.

5. LIMITING MEDIA TIME

Unfortunately, most of the media coverage you watch, listen to or read contains more bad news than good news, which can overload you with negative emotions. In addition, studies are finding social media consumption can have us comparing ourselves in unhelpful ways to others. Be mindful of how the media you're consuming is making you feel. If you want to find more positive ways to stay attuned to what's happening in the world, visit sites such as Upworthy and the Good News Network.



“Ignoring strengths in favor of weaknesses has a profound impact on individual performance. Emphasis on strengths is linked to a 36% improvement, while emphasis on weaknesses is linked to a 27% decline.”

- THE CORPORATE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL



ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT

THE SCIENCE

Engagement is the feeling you get when you're fully absorbed in what you're doing. It's that feeling of "being in the zone" or "one with the music" that comes when time seems to stop, and you lose all sense of self-consciousness. Performing at your best feels absolutely effortless, and you're left feeling genuinely proud of what you've been able to accomplish.

Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi of Claremont Graduate University describes a state of high engagement as "flow." Researchers suggest that experiencing a state of flow comes with a host of benefits. In these moments, you feel more involved in your life, rather than isolated from it. You enjoy activities far more, rather than feeling bored. You have a stronger sense of control, rather than feelings of helplessness that can overwhelm you. You also enjoy a stronger sense of self, have more self-belief, and a higher level of confidence in what you're actually capable of doing.

Csikszentmihalyi has found that flow is more likely to occur when you have a clear goal that balances your strengths with the complexity of the task at hand; when you feel a sense of autonomy and choice about how you're approaching the task; and when you receive regular feedback on how you're doing. In flow, your skills are fully utilized, stretched to a manageable limit so you're learning, growing, improving, and advancing.

It's also necessary to create conditions that allow engagement to occur. Distractions make it hard to stay engaged. You sit down to work on a project and emails pop up, people stop by to chat, and you are pulled into yet another meeting. Technology constantly pulls on your attention, making it a challenge to focus on the task at hand, despite your best intentions. Finding ways to structure your schedule and environment to reduce distractions can help you engage and be more productive.

WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

1. DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS

One of the best places to start is to take the free VIA Survey at www.viacharacter.org. Then think back on your best moments at work – those times when you’ve felt really engaged, energized and enjoying what you were doing. Try to spot which of your top strengths were in play – it may be one or more – to find ways to successfully apply your strengths in your role.

2. MEETING YOUR BEST POSSIBLE FUTURE SELF

Once you’ve discovered your strengths, boost your levels of optimism and self-belief by imagining what might be possible in the year ahead if everything went as well as it possibly could because you were using your strengths each day. Journal whatever comes to mind for 15–20 minutes. Don’t overthink it or edit it, just let it flow. Try to detail as vividly as possible what you’d spend your time doing, how you’d feel about coming to work, what your colleagues or clients might notice and value about your efforts, and why you’d feel truly proud of what you were able to achieve. Try to repeat this exercise for three days in a row and review what you’ve written, noting which strengths you’d be using, and which ideas give you the most energy and hope. Consider what you can do to use these positive images to start pulling you forward into positive actions.

3. RE-CRAFTING YOUR JOB

No matter what your job description says, it’s possible to re-craft your job (even without your manager’s permission) by making small changes that allow you to use your strengths more to feel fully engaged each day. This might involve: changing the type and number of tasks you undertake to better suit your strengths; being more selective about who you spend time with; or shifting how you think about your work and the meaning you take from it. These small changes can boost your levels of engagement and help you reclaim your power, motivation and improve your relationships. Grab a job-crafting kit at www.jobcrafting.org.

4. PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

Our minds often wander - ruminating on the past, worrying about the future, or thinking we know all the answers - rather than being engaged in the here and now. Mindfulness involves training your mind to focus on the moment in an open, curious and non-judgmental way. When you find your mind wandering, it’s an opportunity to gently bring your attention back to the present. As you move through your day, try to actively notice new things. By opening your mind to look for new ways of seeing what’s unfolding, you can discover new possibilities for learning, growth, connection, and joy.

5. STAYING PLAYFUL

Rather than seeing play just as purposeless fun, play can help you explore new behaviors, thoughts, ideas, strategies and ways of being that stimulate your brain for learning, growth, creativity and seeing new possibilities. Use rapid prototyping as a playful way to bring your ideas to life in a visual and tangible way. This might include drawing a sketch, making a collage or model, role-playing a customer experience, or creating customer avatar scenarios. Be as creative and playful as you wish.



“More than
seventy years of
research proved one
very important thing. Our
relationships with other
people matter, and matter
more than anything
else in this world.”

- DR. GEORGE VAILLANT



NURTURING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

THE SCIENCE

A sense of belonging correlates with a range of positive outcomes, including higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, faster recovery from disease, lower levels of stress, less mental illness, and a longer life. Loneliness, social isolation, and the lack of social support place a person at high risk for psychological distress, physical and mental illness, and early mortality.

This is why research suggests that more than what you're doing at work, it's who you're doing it with that ultimately determines your levels of engagement and wellbeing. For example, if you have a best friend at work, you're seven times more likely to be engaged in your job, produce higher quality work, and have higher levels of wellbeing. Furthermore, it's also less likely that you'll be injured on the job.

How?

The truth is that you have a biological need for social support, and each time you joyfully connect with another person, the pleasure-inducing hormone oxytocin is released into your bloodstream, immediately reducing anxiety and improving your concentration and focus. In fact, studies have found that each positive interaction you have during the course of a work day actually helps to return your cardiovascular system back to resting levels; over the long-term, this protects you from the negative effects of job strain.

Unfortunately, workplaces don't always make it easy to create positive connections with each other. Mistakenly believing that people will work harder to prove themselves when pitted against one another for limited resources and opportunities, they encourage cultures of cutthroat competition, rather than connected collaboration. Yet Professor Adam Grant of Wharton Business School and his colleagues have found that when employees invest in effective high-quality connections and behave like "givers" rather than "takers," they are more efficient at solving problems, getting their work done, and balancing their workloads to ensure consistent performance. They build teams that are cohesive and coordinated and establish environments in which customers and suppliers feel that their needs are the organization's top priority. As a result, they have higher levels of profitability, productivity, and customer satisfaction, along with lower costs and turnover rates.

WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

1. RESPONDING ACTIVELY AND CONSTRUCTIVELY

Next time someone shares their good news with you, try to respond actively and constructively by asking positive questions that allow the other person to continue sharing and savoring their positive feelings, like: “The promotion sounds so exciting, how did you find out?”

2. CREATING CONNECTION RITUALS

One of the best ways to nurture your relationships at work is to create rituals, which allow you to connect with people you value on a regular basis. This might include a daily walk at lunch, a weekly coffee, or a monthly dinner with your colleagues. Studies show that when you get at least six hours of daily social time, it increases your wellbeing and minimizes stress and worry.

3. SHOWING APPRECIATION

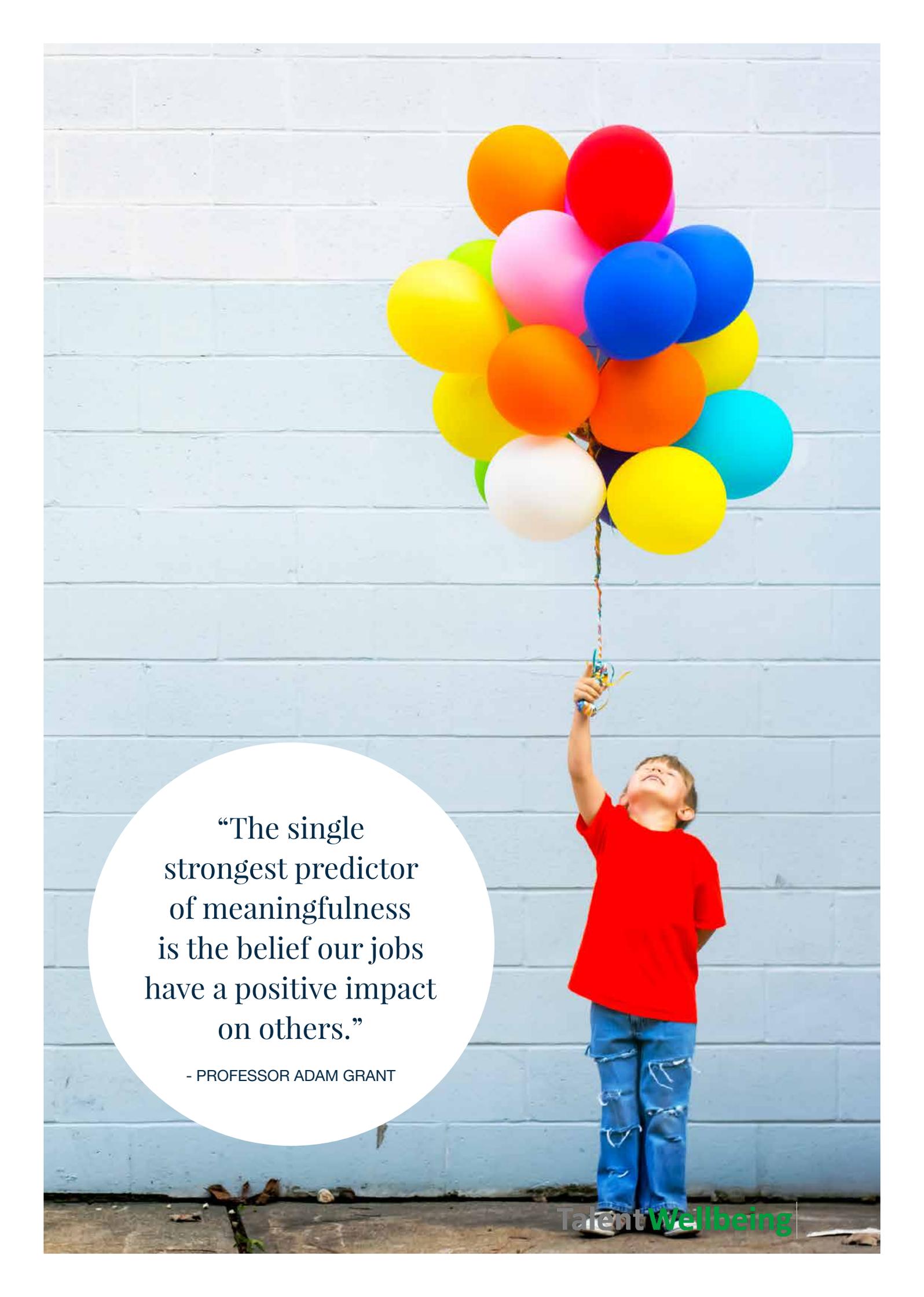
Practicing appreciation and gratitude is a kind of mega strategy to improve your levels of positivity and your relationships. It opens your heart and urges you to give back – to do something good in return – helping to nurture new relationships and improve existing ones. Try taking the time to genuinely thank someone for what they’ve done to help you each day before you log off, and be specific about what they did that you valued.

4. INVESTING IN FIVE MINUTE FAVORS

Spend five minutes each day helping someone else in your network. You could share information, connect contacts, offer feedback, or make a recommendation. If people offer to repay you in some way, ask them to pay it forward instead, by helping or supporting someone else.

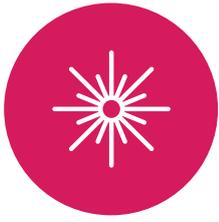
5. BEING COMPASSIONATE

It seems that you can assume that there is pain in every room in every organization. Pain colors the way we think, feel and perform at work. Practicing compassion – when you notice and act on a desire to alleviate others’ suffering – no matter how small your gesture is, doesn’t have to take a lot of your time and energy but can make a real difference in helping someone feel like their suffering is acknowledged. It might be offering to help with their workload, checking in with them regularly to see that they’re doing okay or giving them a small gift or card to brighten up their day.

A young child in a red shirt and blue jeans is holding a large bunch of colorful balloons (yellow, orange, red, blue, pink, white, and cyan) against a light blue brick wall. The child is looking up at the balloons with a joyful expression. The balloons are tied together with a colorful string.

“The single
strongest predictor
of meaningfulness
is the belief our jobs
have a positive impact
on others.”

- PROFESSOR ADAM GRANT



FINDING MORE MEANING

THE SCIENCE

For decades, people have ranked having a sense of purpose in their work as more important than promotions, income, job security, or even flexible hours; yet, for many of us, finding meaningful work feels like something we just can't afford. While researchers have noted that people struggle to find meaning in their jobs when they lack autonomy, variety, challenges, feedback, and the chance to see things through from start to finish, the single strongest predictor of meaningfulness is the belief that your job has a positive impact on others.

When a sense of meaning is found in your work, a growing body of evidence suggests you'll be happier, more motivated, more committed, and more satisfied, which enables you to perform better.

Researcher Emily Esfahni Smith suggests that meaning can be reached through a number of different paths. These include:

- Feeling like you belong to a tribe that values your contributions and provides opportunities for frequent pleasant interactions.
- A purpose that motivates you to be of service to others.
- Being able to create a story that helps you make sense of your place in the world and craft a positive identity.
- Transcendent experiences that lift you above the everyday world to feel connected to a higher reality and something bigger than yourself.

Of course, like all the wellbeing tools we're exploring, it's important to use meaning in intelligent ways to improve your wellbeing. Professor Robert Vallerand of the Université du Québec à Montréal has found that our passions can be either harmonious or obsessive. When you feel in control of what you love doing, you have the kind of harmonious passion associated with higher levels of physical health, psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, and work satisfaction. But when your passion starts taking control of you and making it difficult to engage in other things or with other people, this is a sign that you have developed an obsessive passion. This leads to your self-esteem and self-worth becoming dependent on the outcomes of the passion, which can damage your relationships, undermine your wellbeing, and eventually lead to burnout. The key becomes finding the right balance between being led by and following your passions, and not letting them take control of you.

WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

1. FOCUSING ON YOUR CALLING

Studies suggest we can find our calling in any job; it's all a matter of how we view the tasks we're undertaking. Take the tale of three men crushing stones: when asked what they're doing, the first replies, "Breaking big rocks into little rocks," the second says, "Feeding my family," and the third explains, "Building a cathedral." Simon Sinek suggests one of the simplest ways to discover your why is to try and complete this sentence: Everything I do is to _____ so that _____. For more on discovering your why, visit www.startwithwhy.com

2. FINDING PURPOSE IN LITTLE TASKS

Rewrite your "job description" into a "calling description" by turning a piece of paper horizontally; on the left-hand side, write down a job task that feels devoid of meaning. Then ask, "What is the purpose of this task? What will I accomplish? Who does it help?" Draw an arrow to the right and write this answer down. If what's written still seems unimportant, ask once more, "What does this result lead to?" Draw another arrow and write it down. Keep working through this process until there's a result that is meaningful to you, so it's possible to see the sum of the tasks.

3. GIVING AT WORK

Find out if your workplace has a workplace-giving program. This might involve sponsoring a charitable organization or event, or providing time to volunteer in the community. If so, commit to being involved in the program. If your organization doesn't have an established program, look for other meaningful opportunities to volunteer and help others in your workplace or in the community. If you can, make this a regular weekly or at least monthly activity.

4. OUTSOURCING INSPIRATION:

Gain inspiration and meaning by connecting to the people impacted by the work you do. They may be people or groups internal or external to your organization. Try to learn more about the challenges they face and the differences your work can make in their lives. Keep the insights you gather somewhere you can see them regularly, to remind you of the opportunity for meaning that you have.

5. CULTIVATING ALTERNATIVE PASSIONS:

Having more than one passion in your life will help you keep a single passion from getting out of control. Each additional passion you cultivate outside of work gives you an opportunity to value the strengths you have beyond your job, and lowers your chance of burnout. Think about what else interests you. What would you like to pursue purely for the joy of the activity? What lights you up outside of work?



“More
important than
believing in
our abilities, is the
belief we can improve
upon them.”

- PROFESSOR CAROL DWECK



AMPLIFYING ACCOMPLISHMENT

THE SCIENCE

Gritty people have a deep underlying belief that with effort, practice, and the willingness to learn, they can always improve. They focus on controlling what they can; instead of simply setting performance goals for the outcomes they want, they prioritize learning goals that highlight the knowledge and skills they need to build to have the best chance of producing their desired results. This boosts their confidence to take on new challenges, to learn from criticism and feedback, and to see failure as a teachable moment. Professor Carol Dweck of Stanford University describes this as a growth mindset.

Studies have found that a growth mindset makes it easier to set yourself stretch goals, to ask for help as you go, and to feel motivated to achieve the things that matter to you most. It sparks hope by helping you feel like you have nothing to lose and everything to gain if you step outside your comfort zone. It appears to help you move beyond your present limitations and achieve your true potential. As Thomas Edison is quoted as saying, “I have not failed. I have just found 10,000 ways that won’t work.” So now, when we’re in the middle of a good failure, we can remind ourselves that we’re not up to 10,000 yet, and our light bulb moment might be right around the corner!

But can grit and a growth mindset backfire? Author Caroline Adams Miller writes of “stupid grit” - when you are consumed by obsessive passion and persevere at all costs, despite all the signs that you should stop. Similarly, Dweck recently told us that a growth mindset can go wrong when we persist with something to the detriment of the wellbeing of ourselves and others. For this reason, she believes that in addition to cultivating a growth mindset, it’s important that we also practice self-compassion.

Dr. Kristen Neff explains that when your efforts to learn and accomplish the things that matter most to you don't go as planned, your brain is wired to protect you from pain and tries to attack the source of the problem. Which, in this case, is you! It fires up your inner-critic and feelings of self-doubt by telling you stories about why your efforts aren't working and what could go wrong to try and motivate you to push forward or to disengage entirely from the effort. Over time, this can heighten your stress and anxiety and undermine your confidence.

Self-compassion involves being mindful of the pain you're feeling, and reminding yourself that you're human, just like everyone else. It involves stepping away from your inner self-critic and talking to yourself like a wise and kind friend. Would you say the things you say to yourself to a friend? Instead of taming, shaming, or blaming the voice of your inner-critic, self-compassion helps you see things in a clearer and more balanced way. You can make informed choices about when to persist, when to try a different path, and when to let go, and put your energy into something that will serve you better in the long-term.

As a result, studies have found that self-compassion helps you generate more positive feelings that balance out your fears, allowing you to feel more joyful, calm, and confident. It helps you activate your brain's caregiving and self-awareness systems, making it easier to believe that you are capable and worthy, and making you less self-conscious, less likely to compare yourself to others, and less likely to feel insecure. And far from being self-indulgent or "soft," the deliberate use of self-compassionate talk has been found to be an effective means of enhancing your motivation, your performance, and your resilience.

WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

1. SETTING LEARNING GOALS

Each week, set at least one learning goal to build your competence in something. It might be a skill you want to gain, a task you want to master, or simply the desire to understand something better. Notice what happens as you practice, make mistakes, make adjustments, and eventually start to do better in the competence you're building. As you tackle this goal, practice letting go of the outcome, embracing your mistakes, and identifying the processes and efforts you can build upon to keep improving.

2. GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH FAILURE

Write down the three biggest mistakes or errors you've made at work in the last year. Next to each one, list the lessons or insights you gained from making these mistakes. Put the list somewhere handy, so you can reread it when you need a reminder that mistakes can sometimes offer the best opportunities for learning and growth.

3. CHALLENGING YOUR FIXED MINDSET

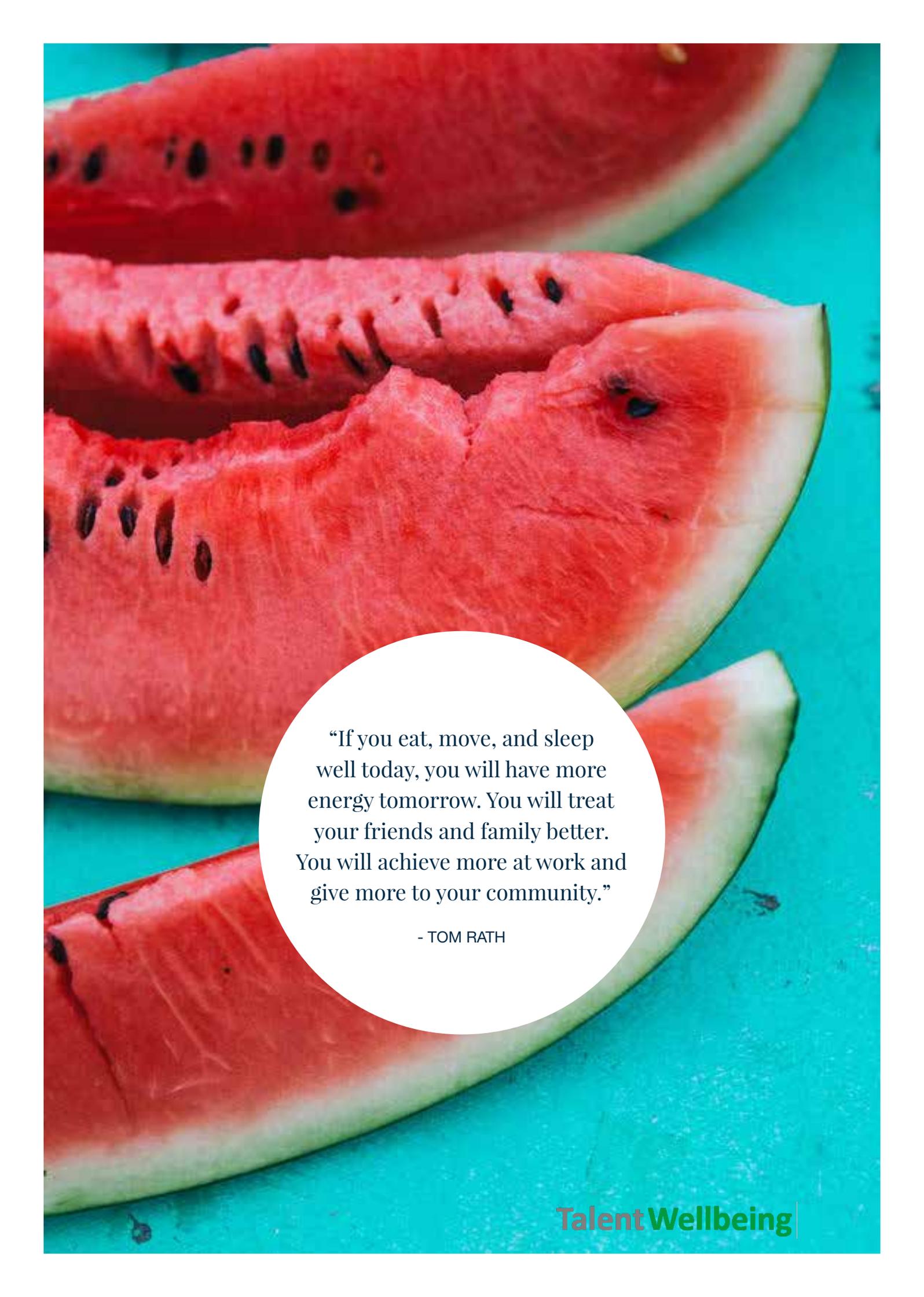
Give your fixed mindset voice a name; it might share the name of one of your parents, siblings, friends, teachers, or bosses. Start tuning into the stories this voice is telling you when you fear failure or criticism. For example, when you approach a challenge, it might say, "Are you sure you can do this? Maybe you're not good enough?" When you hit a setback, it might say, "You see, I knew you couldn't pull this off, now everyone will know you're not as good as they thought." Or, as you face criticism, you might hear, "It's not my fault. That was never going to work!" Recognize that this voice is simply trying to protect you. But like a helicopter parent, it is overzealous in its effort, so try to talk back to it in a growth mindset voice. For example, "I don't know if I can pull this off, but I'll learn from the experience and I'll get better over time." Or, "Okay, I got it wrong. Let's own this failure and see what I can learn from the experience." Then take the growth mindset action.

4. ACKNOWLEDGING "NOT YET"

Tune into the stories you tell yourself about what you can't do, what you've failed at, or why you're not good enough. Acknowledge that you can't do these things "yet," but recognize that with enough effort and learning, you can keep improving upon your abilities. When you hear yourself say "I can't," add on the word "yet." Let it remind you that you're on a learning curve.

5. REACHING FOR SELF COMPASSION

Physical gestures can have an immediate effect on our bodies, activating the soothing parasympathetic nervous system. To get away from the stories in your head and drop into your body, try putting your hands over your heart, or simply place one hand over the top of the other in a comforting way when you need some self-compassion.

A close-up photograph of several slices of watermelon with red flesh and black seeds, arranged on a teal-colored surface. The slices are cut into wedges and are the central focus of the image.

“If you eat, move, and sleep well today, you will have more energy tomorrow. You will treat your friends and family better. You will achieve more at work and give more to your community.”

- TOM RATH



HEIGHTENING HEALTH

THE SCIENCE

Let's face it—when you feel bad physically, it affects your energy levels, happiness, thoughts, behaviors, productivity, and relationships. Think of the last time that you had the flu. How did it make you feel? Probably pretty lousy. This is because your mind and body are closely interconnected.

Unfortunately, researchers suggest that we tend to be poor judges of how much looking after our body impacts our performance and our wellbeing. We assume that one less hour of sleep to finish off that report or to catch up with friends won't make that much difference to how we'll feel in the morning. And indeed, getting a bit less sleep once in a while probably has little impact. The problem is that we do it repeatedly. We cheat ourselves of sleep a little at a time, creating a growing deficit, which becomes more problematic with time. For example, one study found that losing 90 minutes of sleep is likely to reduce your daytime alertness by nearly one-third. And according to another researcher, four hours of sleep loss produced the same level of impairment as drinking a six-pack of beer before work.

What and when we eat also affects how we feel and function. For example, foods like pasta, bread, cereal, and soda release glucose quickly, giving you a burst of energy, followed by a slump. Meanwhile, other foods, like high-fat meals (think cheeseburgers), can provide more sustained energy but require your digestive system to work harder, reducing oxygen levels in your brain and making you groggy. Eating one huge meal makes your system work harder than smaller meals scattered throughout the day. The problem is that you're often at your lowest point in both energy and self-control by the time you try to decide what to eat, making a large burger and fries, or even a small chocolate brownie, hard to resist.

And then there's physical activity. We are made to move. Our bones and muscles need movement - without use, they atrophy, cells weaken, the body breaks down, ultimately resulting in frailty and illness. Unfortunately, if you have the belief that exercising three times a week should have you covered when it comes to getting enough movement, we hate to tell you that it is probably nowhere near enough to counter all the hours you spend sitting. Declared the most underrated health threat of our time, it turns out that on average, most of us sit for around nine hours a day. Frighteningly, researchers have found that inactivity is now killing more people than smoking, with some evidence that sitting for more than six hours a day greatly increases your risk of an early death. While movement keeps our metabolism up, keeping cholesterol in check, breaking down fat, and activating our muscles, sitting shuts these processes down. Over time, the effects accumulate, negatively impacting our health and wellbeing.

While this may all sound a little overwhelming, the good news is that researchers are finding that by making small, everyday changes to the way you sleep, eat, move, and restore yourself, you can create the kind of consistent thriving that you've been hoping for.

WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

1. EATING WISELY

The trick to eating right is not learning to resist temptation, but to make healthy eating the easiest possible option. Choose foods with less fat, fewer carbs, minimal processed sugar, and more protein to feel healthier. Set your sights on foods that are good for your near-term energy and long-term health. If you make a decision that does more good than harm - such as opting for water over soda - think of it as a net gain. When you pick a side of fries instead of vegetables, think of it as a net loss. Ask yourself if what you are about to eat is a net gain or net loss. If you develop a habit of asking this question, you will make better decisions in the moment.

2. MOVING REGULARLY

While researchers suggest that thirty minutes of physical activity five times a week is a good guide, this is not enough. Being active throughout the day is what will keep you healthy. Every hour you spend on your rear end – in a car, watching television, attending a meeting, or at your computer – saps your energy and ruins your health. The key is to stand, stretch, and increase activity as much as possible – every 20 minutes try to move for at least 2 minutes if you can. Walk to someone’s office instead of calling. Park the car a block from where you need it. Have “stand up” or “walk ‘n talk” meetings. Grab a pedometer or Fitbit and aim for 10,000 steps each day.

3. SLEEPING WELL

Losing 90 minutes of sleep has been found to reduce your daytime alertness by nearly one-third; it’s no wonder when you get less sleep you achieve less at work, skip regular exercise, and have poorer interactions with your loved ones. To improve your sleep, turn off technology an hour before you go to bed – as the blue LED light interferes with your sleep hormones - and try to get up at the same time each morning, even on the weekend. And if you find yourself waking in the middle of the night, rather than lying there anxiously watching the minutes tick by, try some slow breathing or meditation. Even if you’re not sleeping, quietly resting is beneficial - provided you’re not worried about being awake!

4. MINDFULLY RESTORE

Your energy is a finite resource, so when you expend too much without sufficient recovery periods, eventually your body may burnout. Make time each week for activities outside of work that you enjoy. You can also recharge and renew your energy at work in just a few minutes through small rituals that allow you to disengage from your tasks. It might be getting up to talk to a colleague about something other than work, listening to a favorite song, doing some stretches or walking up and down the stairs. Set your alarm for 90 to 120-minute intervals to remind you to take a recovery break.

LOOKING FOR MORE?

THE PERMAH WORKPLACE SURVEY

YOUR TESTED, PRACTICAL GUIDE
TO FEELING GOOD + FUNCTIONING
EFFECTIVELY AT WORK



The PERMAH Workplace Survey was created for people just like you who want tested, practical ways to improve their wellbeing. The psychological equivalent of a ‘Fitbit,’ it’s been designed to help you set, measure and celebrate your wellbeing goals - all at the touch of a button.

Taking just a couple of minutes to complete, the tool is designed to walk you step-by-step through:

- MEASURING YOUR CURRENT WELLBEING
- SETTING REALISTIC WELLBEING GOALS
- CREATING YOUR WELLBEING PLAN

With over 200 positive interventions to choose from, The PERMAH Workplace Survey allows you to create a wellbeing plan that is personalized, enjoyable and supported by leading scientific research. It gives you the lessons and resources to become your own personal wellbeing coach, so you can consistently feel good and function effectively.

To take the free survey or to find out more, visit www.permahsurvey.com

www.TalentTools.com.au | sharon@talenttools.com.au | +61 416 010 70

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YOU MAY ALSO FIND VALUABLE:

YOUR WELLBEING BUNDLE

When you grab “Your Wellbeing Blueprint” and our beautifully designed wellbeing cards, you’ll have the tools you need to help you feel good and function more effectively at work. Based on Martin Seligman’s PERMA theory of wellbeing, these resources have been designed to help individuals, teams, coaches and facilitators more confidently navigate the highs and lows we all experience.

PERMAH PODCAST SERIES

This seven-part podcast series – complete with cheat sheets and real-world challenges for individuals and teams – gives you evidence-based, practical approaches to consistently improve workplace wellbeing and psychological safety using Professor Martin Seligman’s PERMAH wellbeing framework.

TEAMING WITH STRENGTHS TOOLBOX

Want to help your teams to fuse their strengths? The Teaming with Strengths Toolbox will help your team to start identifying each other’s strengths, understand how they can align and compliment each other’s strengths to improve their performance, navigate strength collisions, and give each other regular and effective strengths-feedback.

CULTIVATING GRIT TOOLBOX

Having grit – the passion and perseverance to pursue long-term goals in the face of setback, disappointments, and plateaus – is associated with higher levels of achievement, resilience, and wellbeing. This practical digital toolbox gives you everything you need to start cultivating more grit for yourself and your teams.

BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY TOOLBOX

Studies have found that the highest-performing teams have one thing in common: psychological safety - the belief that you won’t be punished for making a mistake. This digital toolbox gives you everything you need to improve psychological safety within your teams, including exercises for having more honest conversations, navigating failure, and increasing compassion and civility.

www.TalentTools.com.au | sharon@talenttools.com.au | +61 416 010 701