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HeartBeat

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Soapbox: The Astonishing Impact of "Three Good Things"

*By Jill Golde, Senior Vice President
Language of Caring, A Branch of Planetree International*



I was in California recently conducting a story-sharing workshop for an impressive group of patient quality and safety leaders. I wanted them to experience how writing and sharing personal stories can refresh our caring mission and help us reinforce and celebrate times our caring made a significant, gratifying difference in the lives of patients, families or colleagues. I hoped to demonstrate how this kind of story sharing enhances our learning and our resilience.

While there, I had the privilege of staying to hear Bryan Sexton, Ph.D. speak about burnout and resilience. Bryan Sexton is Director of the Duke Center for Healthcare Safety and Quality for the Duke University Health System. After presenting facts and figures about burnout in health care and describing its dynamics, Dr. Sexton challenged us to embrace and implement one utterly simple, quick technique, "Three Good Things" that has been proven effective in strengthening sorely needed resilience among healthcare professionals. In fact, this technique has been shown to improve mental health more effectively and quickly than mood-altering medications, like Prozac.

I was wowed, and I want to share some of Dr. Sexton's wisdom and the Three Good Things Technique with you!

Burnout in Health Care: A Bleak Picture

According to Dr. Sexton, "Burnout is widespread and contagious, and can affect the most determined, excellent and loving caregivers in an organization." One in three nurses and physicians are burnt out. Among critical care nurses, half are emotionally exhausted; two-thirds have difficulty sleeping; a quarter are considered clinically depressed. Burnout is associated with lower patient satisfaction, more infections and medication errors, higher standardized mortality ratios, shorter lifespan, lower quality of personal relationships, decreased immune system function, personal injury, traffic accidents, depression and suicide. On top of all this, physician burnout alone costs \$4.6 billion annually. The bottom line? If we don't find solutions to rampant burnout, patients, professionals and the entire healthcare system will continue to face dire consequences.

The Dynamics of Burnout

According to Dr. Sexton, “Burnout, at its core, is the impaired ability to experience positive emotion.” Burnout trains the brain to look for the dark or the negative vs. the light or the positive. Burnout is what happens when negative thoughts and experiences get in the way of feeling happy. Expert on Positive Psychology Barbara Frederickson describes the challenge:



When we focus on the negative, it strongly influences our perceptions and how we feel. Sexton proceeded to identify ten positive emotions, claiming that the only way to recharge is to feel one or more of these emotions. By changing our focus from negative to positive views, we can form habits that help us fight burnout every day. And we can accomplish this with a quick and simple technique with giant impact.

The Powerful “Three Good Things” Technique

The “Three Good Things” Technique originated with Martin Seligman, regarded as the founder of Positive Psychology. Seligman is a leading authority on resilience, learned helplessness, depression, optimism and pessimism, as well as interventions that build strength and well-being. Here is the technique:



Thanks to MidMichigan Health for graphic

Keys:

- You have to do this daily for two weeks to reap the benefits. Many people slacken off around weekends and that weakens their results. Be relentless.
- After that, you’ll feel the benefits and hopefully continue to do it for a profound lifelong impact.

Making “Three Good Things” an Organization-Wide Initiative

Sexton explains how burnout—and resilience are contagious. Given that, by influencing the entire healthcare TEAM to focus on the positive, we can create a contagion of resilience in your organization and this will fuel the effectiveness of your entire human-centered care strategies.

“By changing our focus from negative to positive views, we can form habits that help us fight burnout every day.”



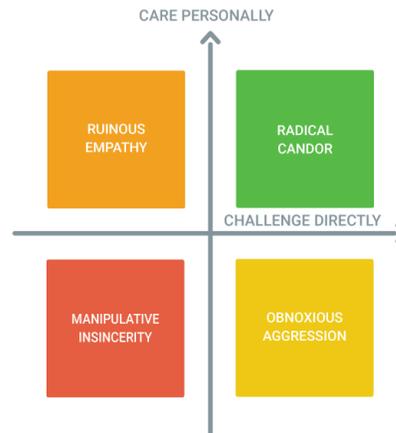
Who said, “There’s no such thing as a free lunch?” There is! Online, you can find tools available to you to make a Three Good Things intervention easy and free to implement.

- MidMichigan Health has generously shared the tools that they used during their Three Good Things Initiative which include a poster, the powerpoint used to introduce the initiative to their team, a YouTube video that explains the technique, and more. [Click here](#) to access!
- Try the Three Good Things technique yourself! [Click here](#) for a log that you can print to help you engage with it every day for two weeks.
- And don’t miss this! [Terrific Resilience Tools](#) on the Duke University Health System website.



Russ Laraway, [Embracing Radical Candor: How to Build a Culture of Giving Great Feedback](#)

According to Laraway, by building a culture of Radical Candor, you can help teams build strong relationships, be more productive, and ultimately, encourage everyone to do the best work of their careers. He shows a powerful 2 x 2 framework for types of feedback.



He then describes 3 steps for building a culture of feedback in your organization.



“Professionally and personally, be generous. And don’t think you’re doing the world a favor. The person receiving the favor is you.”

Donn Sorensen



Food for Thought

Should doctors be activists?

Dr. Pooja Yerramilli is a Resident Physician in the Global Medicine Program at Mass General. She eloquently disagrees with Dr. Stanley Goldfarb who, in his recent essay in the Wall Street Journal, suggested that medical education is focusing too much on social justice issues “rather than treating illness.” Says, Dr. Yerramilli, “in seeing patients, physicians grapple with unemployment, housing instability, and food access; systemic racism, sexism, and LGBTQ rights; immigration reform, climate change, and violence. All of these issues profoundly — not tangentially — affect our patients’ health. She asserts the critical importance of medical schools addressing social justice and social determinants of health in their curricula, so that physicians can be more effective with their diverse patients and also activists for gun control, climate change, and social equity in the world community.

P Yerramilli, [***A dangerous view: Why it’s a mistake for medical schools to ignore social justice.***](#)

STAFF MEETING IDEAS

Results through Teamwork

Have your team create a picture together and then discuss what the process suggests about teamwork.

How It Works:

1. Choose a picture or poster you like, perhaps with a meaningful quotation on it about teamwork. It can be in color or black-and-white.
2. On the back, draw a matrix of squares and number the squares.

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20

3. Then, cut out the squares and give everyone on the team a square (or two, depending on the number of people you have). Also, give them each a sheet of 8½ × 11 paper and markers or a pen.
4. Ask them to draw onto their bigger sheet of paper exactly what they see on their little square so that their drawing fills the entire sheet.
5. Afterward, have everyone tape together their bigger sheets in the right order, so that a LARGE picture results.
6. After people admire their joint effort, engage them in discussion:
 - How is this a metaphor?
 - What messages from the process inform our teamwork?



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