

CHAPTER 4

Fostering Well-Being

Well-being: “The state of being happy, healthy, and prosperous” (Merriam-Webster).

IN LEADERSHIP AND life alike, very little is done in isolation. For every action, there is a reaction. Mentoring, sponsorship, and coaching demonstrate this interconnectivity. We live, work, and play within communities. In every sphere, we collaborate with others. And leadership is a “people” business—*relational*, not *transactional*. Furthermore, the consequences of such relationships build upon each other, with one benefit begetting another. As we’ll explore, the well-being that is supported by MSC begets numerous other positives, from an unshakeable sense of self and purpose to good physical health—having the energy and stamina to lead the fullest, richest life possible.

Because of its connection with an abundance of work opportunities that allow leaders to focus on their personal strengths and with the decline in active disengagement across workforces, this concept could lend itself to its own book. In fact, Gallup developed a proprietary well-being index in conjunction with the digital health and wellness company Healthways (which was acquired by Sharecare in 2016).

Since it was launched in 2008, the well-being index has surveyed more than 4 million US adults at a rate of 10,000 respondents, aged 18 and older, on a monthly basis. This index is a great complement to the work that internal and external researchers have completed in relation to the links among awareness of one's own strengths, the ability to practice and refine those strengths on a consistent basis, one's overall happiness on the job, capacity to motivate and inspire others, and productivity. Of course, the satisfaction that one feels at the workplace also strongly influences the satisfaction that one feels in all spheres of one's life.

The index has its finger on the pulse of five “essential elements” to well-being and the important characteristic of resiliency:

1. **Purpose**—You really love what you do. You feel motivated to achieve your goals.
2. **Social**—You have a support system, healthy relationships, and loved ones.
3. **Financial**—Economic “management” promotes reduced stress and increased security.
4. **Community**—You feel safe and love where you live, and have a strong sense of pride in the neighborhoods that surround you.
5. **Physical**—You have the health and energy to get things done and to lead life to the fullest.

According to Sharecare's most recent Well-Being Index reporting from 2021, the “purpose” category of the index actually improved from 2019 measurements, up to 64.7 from 59.0. The importance of a sense of purpose is significant, as it is directly related to performance and motivation. When we like what we do or find meaning and gratification in our work, we're much more likely to achieve excellence and overcome hardships or challenges that are inherent in the workplace. Furthermore, this report shows that purpose is directly linked to greater emotional resilience and a decreased likelihood

of developing chronic health conditions. In states where residents experience higher levels of purpose well-being, they also experience 1.4 times lower rates of clinical depression, 1.5 times lower rates of heart attacks, 1.6 times lower rates of coronary artery disease, nearly 2 times lower rates of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and 2.1 times lower rates of chronic kidney disease.

You'll recall that professionals who are empowered to use their strengths were noted in the workforce engagement data to be far less likely to be disengaged and hostile in their work environments. The Sharecare well-being index further substantiates these findings and the role that truly satisfying, strengths-based, supportive work plays in workplace health and overall societal health; it reports that individuals who are thriving in four of the five elements are also engaged at work.

The connection continues between well-being categories and another matter of high importance to organizations: employee retention. According to Sharecare, there is an inverse relationship between well-being and resignation rates. States that reported lower financial and community well-being ratings reported higher rates of employee resignations. For leaders and organizations, the message is clear. Prioritize and invest in well-being, and lead by example in bolstering it.

Businesses with sincere aims and smart investments designed to heighten their talent's development, engagement, health, and well-being are furthermore less likely to grapple with

- costly, frequent, and regressive **turnover**,
- frequent or severe **accidents on the job**,
- **costs** associated with workers' compensation insurance and return-to-work initiatives following injuries,
- frequent and costly **thefts** of workplace and worker property, and
- **quality incidents** that erode customer trust and satisfaction.

It follows that workgroups who are thriving on the job and outside the workplace also have considerably higher *customer* engagement, as well as comparatively favorable productivity and profitability.

Historically, there has been a tendency to underestimate the power and worth of “soft skills” within the workplace. Skills such as the ability to communicate clearly with others or to negotiate and empathize with colleagues have been minimized in favor of a hard-nosed, “just the facts, ma’am” style of leadership.

However, the mere presence of well-being indices and research demonstrates that the tides are turning. And the facts provide a groundswell of quantifiable insights into the effect that acknowledging these so-called “soft skills” in our leaders—and further developing and refining them through mentors and other forms of support—has on the bottom line.

Daniel Goleman’s seminal article “What Makes a Leader?” offers supporting research for the Carnegie Institute of Technology’s assertion that technical knowledge accounts for only 15 percent of one’s financial success. As for the remaining balance (85 percent) of that success? It comes down to the characteristics dismissed through the decades by workplaces: personality, communication, negotiation, and leadership. Taken together, we may call these characteristics “emotional intelligence.” In his book *Emotional Intelligence*, Goleman puts it like this:

Effective leaders are alike in one crucial way: They all have a high degree of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence. It’s not that IQ and technical skills are irrelevant. They do matter, but mainly as threshold capabilities; that is, they are entry-level requirements for executive positions. But my research, along with other recent studies, clearly shows that emotional intelligence is the *sine qua non* of leadership.

Sine qua non. The essential condition. The absolute must or necessity. And guess what? The carving out or refining of this “must-have”

ultimately comes down to the organization and its approach to developing these skills. Technical aptitude, as noted, is the baseline. To move from good to great involves other skill sets. This is also the difference that is made by enlisting new forms of support, such as coaching, as one matures or evolves in his or her career to take performance to the next level.

Purpose is fundamental to both engagement and well-being. In fact, that sense of “why you do what you do” has been characterized as one of the most important predictors of well-being by Dr. Richard J. Davidson, a neuroscientist and founder/director of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

“People with a strong sense of purpose . . . tend to have better physical health, more quality relationships and even improved brain function,” Davidson remarks via the center’s article “Four Ways to Cultivate Purpose.” In one study highlighted by the center, older people with a low sense of purpose were more than twice as likely to die in the next five years as people with a strong sense of purpose. The center highlights “purpose” as “among the most robust psychological predictors of mortality.”

The center also takes a big swipe at the illusion that high income equates to happiness. It points to research among almost 100,000 people across 94 countries, which examined the links between satisfaction with life and satisfaction with income. The results indicated that “people with a stronger sense of purpose were less likely to judge their lives based on how much money they made, and were also more satisfied with how much money they already had.”

This type of research informed actionable items designed to make the notion of purpose in life a “personal and lived reality.” Many of these action items align well with discourse on intentional programs and cultural development around strengths-based mentoring and guidance.

As mentors, we can guide others from putting motivating forces and values “in writing” to reflecting on and reframing how day-to-day situations (especially challenges) can be resolved, addressed, or overcome through the lens of purpose and what we hold dearest to us.

Rather than getting caught up in solving all of the world's problems, we find that simple shifts in perspective, gleaned *from* mentors or even *as* mentors, can be invaluable when leading by example. Opening our eyes and ears to expanded circles around us can spur actions that are driven by purpose and that further reinforce the connections between one's values and higher purpose. As Davidson puts it, one is always in control of one's perspective: "Even the most challenging situations in life can become deeply meaningful."

Purpose was certainly identified right off the top as an essential element of Sharecare's Community Well-Being Index. The dots have been connected among a strong sense of purpose, satisfaction with one's overall life, better physical health, improved relationships, keen cognitive function, and overall longevity—again, many of the essentials as measured by the index.

WEAVING WORK AND EVERYDAY LIFE TOGETHER

The average worker will spend 90,000 hours of their life at work. Put another way, that's one-third of an individual's lifespan! It is small wonder, then, that work has such an impact on the rest of our lives. Our happiness, or our disdain, for the nature of our work and/or our workplaces can easily spill over into our personal, familial, and social realms. This is even more the case for those in the healthcare field, whose hours clocked in a lifetime will no doubt far exceed the average noted by Gettysburg College in an article about industrial-organizational scientists at the RAND Corporation, who evaluated individuals' lifetime investment in work.

Increasingly, work "spillover" into the rest of our lives has been facilitated by those pesky devices that allow us to always be "on" and connected. Another absolute: we must be motivated with a strong, positive purpose and ensure that we as leaders and organizations provide the opportunities and meaningful connections for people to rise in the positions that are best suited to them. In doing so, we also lift those who are most affected by the properly

mentored, sponsored, and coached leader—be it the leader’s direct reports, customers, and patients or their family members, friends, and peers.

We and the organizations that employ and surround us must focus on advancing the notion of purpose, acknowledging its importance, and clarifying what that purpose means to each individual. This resolution requires some intentionality and care, taking time for us to step back, pause, and reflect. So much flows from purpose and other essential ingredients behind thriving well-being; how we act on this purpose can either enhance or hinder the quality of our talent, our workforce performance, and the reputation of our brand to would-be talent, leaders, and our target constituencies and stakeholders.

The struggles that are inherent within the healthcare universe are unquestionable and have only been underscored to others outside of our world as global crises have presented themselves. The following words from author Jon Gordon (*The Seed: Finding Purpose and Happiness in Life and Work*) will no doubt resonate with many of you: **“We don’t get burned out because of what we do. We get burned out because we forget why we do it.”**

Research clearly and regularly substantiates the positive role that other people have on our well-being. Things (personal possessions) play a far inferior role in the five essential areas of holistic wellness, despite their increasingly ready availability to us in day-to-day life.

The late, great Jim Rohn (a grandfather of motivational speaking who mentored the likes of Tony Robbins and Jack “Chicken Soup for the Soul” Canfield), is also widely recognized for coining the “Rule of Five” theory, which harkens back to the importance of scrutinizing the company that one keeps. It is an extension of the law of averages whereby Rohn theorized that if one does something often enough, a ratio results and this ratio is perpetuated. One may think about this in terms of reaching out to 10 different representatives or organizations to build strategic community alliances with an affiliated institution. If only one of those organizations decides to join forces with you, precedent for this ratio has been set and

will likely continue unabated. The 1:10 ratio will be sustained as the long-term average.

Acknowledging that this is a small sample size, even seemingly statistically insignificant scenarios are quite telling and establish a basic Rohn-ism: One should become accustomed to patterns once they have been set. There is something to be said for the power of “practice makes perfect,” but once these averages or ratios are established, they take on a life of their own and are hard to shake because of the hold they have on our overall mindset. The strategic leader is always mindful of the company they keep, the impact that company has, and the path upon which it places them.

The law’s implication for a “people practice” (mentoring) is substantive. Rohn is widely credited with saying, “You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with.” This “Rule of Five,” also widely attributed to Rohn, suggests that each element of well-being is influenced and shaped by the five individuals closest to us. These personal or professional figures have a significant impact on our behaviors, habits, and patterns as well as the performance and trajectories of our careers and our family and social lives. We tend to become like these individuals. There is as much potential for our “Five” to elevate us, to perpetuate a plateau, or to bring us down with them. It very much depends on the mindsets, tendencies, trajectories, and behaviors of those who then support and sustain any personal changes, as this shortlist of close relationships casts an oversized shadow on your todays and tomorrows.

Consider the high school graduate who leaves their “nest” for the first significant amount of time. In college, they are sharing close quarters with a range of individuals who are potentially from far-off communities and who may have completely different cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, and socioeconomic circumstances that also shape their personality attributes and proclivities.

The changes in these college-aged students are marked and occur in a matter of weeks or months. By the time they return home for the holidays, their families may think they are reuniting with a new person. The high school student they knew is no more. That individual

now has new dietary preferences and sleep habits, speaks and behaves in markedly different ways, and exhibits notably changed interests.

This same tendency to absorb others' energies and inclinations continues as we mature beyond college, well into our adult lives. There are certainly times when it can be life altering or even lifesaving to step back and reflect on our "Five": Do the individuals whom we surround ourselves with the most play it fast and loose with their health, safety, and overall well-being? Or are they conscientious about doing the right things when it comes to respecting their bodies—as well as their emotional, mental, and spiritual selves—by consistently nurturing those spheres with exercise, a nutritious diet, and mentally stimulating activities? Do we find ourselves always engaging with folks who tend to "live in the moment" and impulsively indulge in extravagancies all under the "instant gratification" banner? Or do we gravitate toward the investors, savers, and practical types who are mindful of the future when spending and consuming in the present?

Your parents were right—who you "hang with" matters. The implications and stakes only grow higher as we age and have more responsibilities and people who count on us—be it our families, friends who are "like family," or cherished workmates and workplace teams. With so much on the line, we must distinguish between those who enrich our lives with their inherent differences in lifestyles, values, and goals and those whose differences are potentially damaging, can set our careers and overall wellness back, or lull us into a pattern of stagnation or mediocrity.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching all contribute directly to well-being outcomes in both individuals and organizations.
- Overall well-being comprises different categories or elements: purpose, social, financial, community, and physical.

- Well-being drives performance and engagement in the workplace and overall societal health, and it reduces negative outcomes such as turnover, accidents on the job, theft, and quality incidents.
- Emotional intelligence is essential to leadership excellence.
- Purpose is fundamental to both engagement and well-being and is confirmed to contribute to better physical health, higher-quality relationships, and even improved brain function.
- Clarity of purpose is often honed and refined in relationship with mentors and coaches, leading to valuable outcomes in life and in leadership.
- The company that you keep will have an impact on the person you become. Curate your circle intentionally.

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