



Northeast and Caribbean (HHS Region 2)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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Flourishing at Work: A Plan for Helping Professionals Podcast Series

Transcript – Building Your Flourishing Plan

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Michelle: Hi there. My name is Michelle and I'm faculty at Rutgers, University School of Health Professions, Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions. And I'm back with Dr. Tony Zippel a psychologist with years of building effective organizations and teams. Hey, Tony!

Tony: Hi Michelle! Good to be with you again.

Michelle: We're the hosts for Flourishing at Work, A Plan for Helping Professionals, A Podcast Series. Today is the last episode in our podcast series. We want to talk about building a flourishing plan and using your strengths to keep it going every day at work. So, we talked a lot in this podcast series about different ideas, things like prioritizing yourself, remembering your purpose, letting go when you need to, keeping a healthy positivity going, thinking outside of the box for flourishing and more. You probably have some good ideas of the areas that help you flourish too. So, Tony, is there anything that I missed in all those topics that we've been talking about over these six sessions?

Tony: No, I think what's been wonderful about this series is that we've covered a lot of different tools that people can use. People have a lot of tools in their box that they can pull out. The big question always is which tool are you going to use? And are you going to use it the way that you need to often enough to really get benefit from it?

Michelle: Well, yeah, I mean, that's a great way to think about it, as a tool kit or a tool belt, or maybe it's several pretty pens or however you think about these ideas for yourself. I think today we really wanted to talk about the idea of a plan. What do you want to do? How can you really make flourishing an urgent priority for yourself, and so much that you actually take action every day? So, what do you think about that, Tony?

Tony: I think that's always the challenge. A lot of us grew up with mothers who were good at giving us advice about eating better and getting enough sleep and why don't you play with some nice friends. It was all good advice, but that didn't mean we actually did it.

And so, the challenge is how do we take the things that we know really help us to do well and flourish and actually do them routinely enough. I think there are good strategies for doing that, but we need to pay attention to executing, not just knowing what it is that we should do.

Michelle: What you're saying really reminds me of the idea of practice. My mom always says, practice makes better instead of practice makes perfect. You must practice if you're going to play the violin, you have to practice if you're going to learn how to ride a bike.

And I was almost sort of thinking about a flourishing muscle or the flourishing skill takes practice to grow and develop. If I just say I want to do something to flourish every single day without the specifics, I might just be sort of making stuff up in my head.

Tony: No one ever learned how to ride a bicycle by reading a book about bicycles.

Michelle: Yes. That's right.

Tony: So, I think there are parts of this that are universal and useful. It starts with having clarity about the change that you want to make. We touched a little bit on smart goals, making them specific and measurable.

You want to be really clear about what it is that you want to do. If you're clear about that, it's easier to be clear then about the benefit you expect to get from it. For example, "I want to develop a habit of walking for a half hour every morning, before I get my day started". Specific, measurable, observable, and relevant, time-bound and all that good stuff. And, now I want to be clear about what the benefit is, why I know that if I walk every morning, it's good exercise and it'll help me with my blood pressure, and I enjoy it, and it's fun to watch the sun come up and all that other stuff. So, what are the benefits that you get from that? If you're clear about what you want to do and what the benefit is, you put you in a position to build a plan. What are the things you need to have in your life that really support you in doing it?

Michelle: I know we've talked about this in some of our other podcasts, about how hard change is and why we have to make flourishing a priority and how does one go about that? We are talking about a very concrete plan, like a smart goal situation, or just being very clear about maybe two or three things, every day that leads to your flourishing. I'm reminded a little bit of that exercise called three good things where you think about three good things that have happened in your day. And I'm almost wondering if you could think about three ways to flourish in the morning where you set yourself up for success in a way. For example, I'm going to have a good cup of tea or coffee when I get to the office and I'm going to go for that walk outside, or I'm going to sing loudly in my car on the drive home.

Tony: I think that's a wonderful idea. The challenge is not in whether it's a good idea or not. The challenge is in doing it. So, you're going to think every morning about three things you are going to make sure you do during the day that takes good care of you. These are things that might be connected to your signature strengths that have to do with one or more areas that are particularly important to your wellbeing.

So, you know what those are. But stuff happens during the day. I want to sleep this morning. I didn't get them written down. I'll do it tomorrow. It was just too much trouble. I was too busy. So, how do you actually execute is the challenge. It's a wonderful idea, but it only works if you do it.

Michelle: Yeah. Well, that makes me think of this idea of goal intentions, where you have an intention to start something new and then actually doing the thing that you talked about, right? It's kind of like two different things. You mentioned your strengths and I wonder, could you say a little bit more about how your strengths can support any kind of plan or goals that you have around flourishing?

Tony: That's a great question. And I think it happens in two ways. I mean, one is you want to pick goals that really connect to your strengths. As part of that, let me write my own mission statement as a person. That mission statement is often triggered by your strengths. When I write mine, it has to do with learning new things and sharing them with other people to make the world a better place because I tend to lead with my head. Other people lead with their hearts and, and their version of it might start more with meeting and connecting with people and listening to what people have to say, all that kind of social connection.

You, have goals that connect to your signature strengths and then the things that support you in doing them, your strengths are going to support. So, if I was going to do this, I'm going to write three things down and, and do them during the day. I'd want to think about things that have to do with learning, sharing, teaching, and connecting with other people at that level and the things I might do that would support me with that would be I'm going to organize something in the morning. I've got a chart that I use for keeping this, and I'm going to track these three things every day and I'm going to review it at the end of each week and see what the themes are and blah, blah, blah, cause that's kind of what feels good to me.

So, the strategies you use to support doing things can also leverage signature strengths.

Michelle: Oh, that's helpful Tony to think about who we are and what might make sense as you were talking about putting together a table. I was like, oh my, because that is not my signature strength.

That would really be challenging for me and feels like work. But if I named the flourishing strategies and put them in some kind of creative form, like, okay, I have to sing a song that's a related strategy that I would like, yes, absolutely if I had to put a star next to my calendar, that would be motivating.

Tony: Well, or maybe for some people who are, you know, I tend to be a little bit of an introvert. Maybe I want to find a flourishing buddy. And then every morning we're going to have a five-minute phone call, and we're going to talk with each other about the things are that we're going to do today that are going to support flourishing, or at the end of the day, we're going to have a flourishing check-in. And we're going to talk for five minutes about how we did with our goals as a way of increasing accountability and leveraging my strength around social connection, warmth and empathy.

Michelle: Wow, oh, I love it. My wheels are turning in my head. Like I think that's such a great example. And we've tried to give some different ideas about a flourishing plan.

I know we're putting together some stuff on the MHTTC website that will have a plan based on some of the questions that we've asked here and through the webinars on the MHTTC website, but I wonder, can you suggest a very practical framework that we can use to get this flourishing plan started.

Tony: Yeah. Well, well you and I, in the past have talked about WOOP as a structure for making change and, in life you want to be clear about what your wishes are. What is it that you want to do? You want to have a good picture of what the outcome would be if you accomplish this?

So, I understand what my world would be like and how much better things would be if I did this, that's not enough though. You also need to think about what the obstacles are and be really specific about the obstacles you anticipate. And it's not so much an exercise of identifying every possible obstacle that comes up, but what are one or two or three things that are really going to get your way and derail your good intentions. And when you understand what those are you're in a position to build a little plan, to deal with those obstacles. So, you know, I'm going to write down every day, three things I'm going to do during the day and an obstacle that I have is that I just have trouble getting going in the morning and thinking in the morning doesn't work for me very well.

So maybe my plan with this is I'm going to do a 15-minute walk and I'm going to write these down while I'm having my second cup of coffee. Now I'm awake and I'm alert. I can really think about this, that's how I overcome that obstacle of not being at my best for thinking first thing in the morning.

So, what are the specific things you're going to do to crack those obstacles? And then you experiment with it. Your plan may work wonderfully, or you may discover that there's an obstacle you hadn't anticipated. Add another plan, or you may discover I've dealt with all of those and they are working really well. Maybe that you want another wish, so don't be afraid to experiment with this and evolve it.

Michelle: Those are very, very helpful. And I think you, you brought up a couple words that I just want to highlight when thinking about the plan. And I think what we're talking about planning, we're not talking like, you know, mastermind plan to take over the world, you know, or something like that. We're talking about the way you plan for yourself to thrive, survive, be resilient and flourish. And you mentioned the word accountability, which, I mean over and over, I've seen that in the literature that it's like, really, you need a partner in this, You can partner with yourself if you're an introvert. You can use lists to keep track of your goals. You can partner with other people such as a spouse. You can even tell your favorite pet all of these things. And the other thing that we talked about earlier, which I wonder if you want to spend a minute talking about is environmental cues.

Tony: We'd like to think that we make decisions about everything we do, but the truth is, there's a lot of research on this, about half the things that we do during the day we don't think about, we just do them, and they're triggered by external environments. So, we think about driving and, and how many things you do in the course of driving five or seven miles to work that you're really not thinking about. You are triggered by cues, you do things. That's how so much of life happens. And so, we can use that to nudge ourselves in particular directions.

So, I was working with doing coaching with a woman who, who always felt better when she did a little exercise. And as we talked about it, she talked about loving swimming. And, you know, when she would talk about swimming she would light up. She would state she was at home in the water and it felt really good to do that. And the rest of the day went better and it's like, well, why don't you do more of it? And as we talked about it, one of the things that we settled on was that she was going to put her gym bag with her suit, towel and goggles hanging on the doorknob to her apartment so she couldn't leave the apartment without looking at it and picking it up. And that always reminded her, oh yes, I've got that. You know, if I take that bag with me, it increases the odds I'm actually going to stop at the gym and swim for half hour, a simple environmental modification that made a big difference.

You know, we know what some of these are. If you want to have better nutrition you get all of the Twinkies out of the house and you put more fruit in instead. So, what are the things you can do that

nudge you in the right direction and increase the odds that you're going to do things even without thinking about. Little nudges make a difference.

Michelle: Yeah. And, and I mean these choice architecture ideas, like that's kind of at a big organizational level, but I think you could even do that at the smaller individual level. Like if you know that music supports your flourishing at work, making sure that you've got the tunes you like and have access to them. Remember your phone charger, remember your password to your favorite streaming service so that you can listen to the music that really supports you and makes you flourish.

Or if you know something that's helped you flourish at work is making sure you go for a walk, making sure you have a good pair of shoes and socks that are at your desk or in your trunk or something like that so those little, tiny things that we could do with our environment to support our flourishing and remind us that we want to flourish.

Tony: I'll remind you that you want to do these things and to make it easy so you don't have to think much about it. The good shoes and socks thing around walking is a cool idea because some people love shopping for shoes. Nothing better than getting a good pair of shoes. And I want to pick ones that are a color and that I enjoy putting on. I want them to match the leggings that I use when I walk, and I've got my special walking outfit and isn't that fun. So, anything you can do that rewards yourself. You know, I feel good when I put my shoes on, you know, having shoes that are like this is a reward that I get for doing this activity.

Michelle: Yeah. And it's so interesting. The things we're talking about today, feel very concrete about health and wellness as well. And yet those things are intrinsically tied to flourishing also, and using your strengths, as you said, like, if you're a shopper, if you're a bargain shopper, you can, every time you put on those shoes, you're going to be like, you know, I really got a great discount and you can remember the joy you had in the hunt for the perfect pair of shoes.

Tony: And I think that the real magic in all of this is to do something right. You know, when in doubt do something and you'll learn from it. Not everything you try is gonna to work or something you'll stick with. Not everything you do is going to really improve your life that much.

So, experiment. Do lots of things. Keep the things that work and dump the things that don't. If something works for a while and then it stops working, do something else. You know, I walked every morning, I've had the same route for six months. I'm getting kind of bored with it and I don't want to do it anymore because it's sort of dull. I'm going to go walk someplace else. I'm going to ride a bicycle. You know, find something that works for you. Keep doing it and keep changing it as you need to, to optimize the odds that you're going to do something that works for you.

Michelle: Well, I think this is kind of a natural place for us to, to wrap it up Tony. I think we really started by reminding everybody of the tools that we've talked about in this series, about how to have a flourishing life at work, how to continue to flourish and how to put all those pieces together and really the emphasis is on doing something. What are those next steps and creating those next steps and using your strengths that you have to do the things that you want to do. Is there anything that you want to make sure we include in our summary?

Tony: Have fun. Yeah. You know, I'm a big fan of Ben and Jerry's and the way the company started and ran for a long time. They used to say about Ben and Jerry's, if it's not fun, why do it? And so, if you really

want to be doing things that take care of you and help you to flourish, you need to find things that really take care of you and help you to flourish.

You've got to find things that you enjoy. So, the last thing I want to say about this. Go have fun. And the more that you're doing things that exercise your signature strengths, that help you flourish that take care of you, that really connect with you, the more fun you're going to have. Go have fun.

Michelle: Yay. Okay. You heard it from Tony's mouth. He said, go have fun. I'm going to make that my mantra today to go have fun. And you will flourish. Flourishing will follow. We would like to leave you with a couple of questions for yourself to think about like:

How might you have fun? So, what are some ways you'd like to practice flourishing or having some fun each day?

And then what strengths do you have that could support those actions? And what is your plan or action plan for flourishing? What might that look like for you? What's your WOOP?

So, this has been the last episode in this flourishing at work podcast. We'd like for you to stay tuned for some new podcasts and other creations we're working on for the future. We really thank you so much for taking this flourishing journey with us. And we hope that you continue to grow flourish and thrive.

Thanks for listening. I'm Michelle Zechner and I'm with Dr. Tony Zippel and we are grateful for the important work you're doing. Remember to make some time for yourself self-care today, you matter. Be sure to like, and subscribe to this podcast series, wherever you get your podcasts. This podcast is a production of the Northeast & Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center at Rutgers University and made possible by funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services.