



Northeast and Caribbean (HHS Region 2)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# Flourishing at Work: A Plan for Helping Professionals Podcast Series

## Transcript – Learning to Let Go

Michelle: Hi there, this is Michelle Zechner I'm faculty at Rutgers University School of Health Professions, Department of Psych Rehab and Counseling Professions and I'm back with Dr. Tony Zippel.

Hey Tony!

Tony: Hi, Michelle great to be with you today.

Michelle: Yeah, Tony is a psychologist with years of building effective organizations and teams, and we're the hosts for [Flourishing at Work, a Plan for Helping Professionals](#), a podcast series. Today we're going to focus on the importance of letting go at work. Oh my goodness this, I feel like all of these topics Tony are really things that I need to do every day or I need to be thinking about. I don't know. I'm glad we're talking about this one as well. So, when we were talking about this, we were thinking, letting go is about the importance of remembering that we have choices.

We have personal choices each day, about what we think about and our own actions. Of course, there's all of these crazy external things that go on like COVID, or, things that happened in our families or what other people are doing. We can't control that, but we really can control ourselves, and it almost seems like we need to take a moment to really be aware of what's going on and conscious. I don't know, what do you think Tony? Do you have any ideas for us and how we can sort of take a moment to be more aware of what's going on in our life?

Tony: I think that you're right about that. You know the the flow of things around us is sometimes so intense that we get we get swept away by it and and we lose that sense of agency that we have. We lose that sense that every single moment, we have a choice, no matter what's going around. We can make a choice about what we think, about what we feel and certainly about what we do next. And there's a wonderful little 30 second kind of thing that you can do that helps you with that called STOP, and I use it a lot in the middle of a flurry and push, when I'm starting to feel like out of control like I'm just being rushed. This 30 second thing I do stands for stop, take a breath, observe how you're feeling and proceed. We can do it right now if you want.

Michelle: Yes, please. I want to start with a STOP

Tony: So when we're feeling pushed. Stop. Let yourself rest for a second. Don't do anything right now.

All right. Now, take a breath, a deep abdominal breath, hold it for a few seconds, let it out slowly, you know, a good practice of deep breathing. You could do a second breath if you want. So stop. Take a breath, and just observe what you're thinking and feeling right now. What's really going on with you? What's the internal pressure you feel? What does your body feel like? What are you thinking? What are the pushes and pulls going on for you right now?

Stop take a breath. Just observe yourself with curiosity. And now proceed. Make a decision about what you want to do next instead of just reacting. Make a choice about what the best use of your time and energy is at this very moment. Stop, take a breath, observe where you are and proceed in a way that really serves you. You could do the whole thing in 30 seconds.

Michelle: Yeah, I feel so much more focused in this moment after sort of taking a stop, taking that breath and observing, which I think is really kind of counterintuitive. I don't know what you think about that, but I think, Wow. So, when I'm feeling stressed and pressured or when we're suggesting that, when our listeners feel sort of that overwhelming feeling of I have so many things to do. I can't stop. I can't get a glass of water. I can't do anything, the best thing to do is really to stop, take a breath, and really notice what's going on. And, maybe it is that linked to letting go, do you think?

Tony: Well, I think it really is linked to letting go. It's making a decision about what we're not going to do. You know, there are so many choices we have in the world today. We have a huge open world in front of us and there are endless ways that we can spend our time and energy. But at the end of it, we still only have 168 hours this week. You know, we can't make more time this week than we've got. And so, part of it is making a choice about what you want to do, but an important part of that is making a conscious decision about what you don't want to do. In strategic planning and organizations, there's always a lot of conversation, not just about what our plan is for going forward, but what are the strategic choices we're going to make about things, that we are going to leave behind and not do. What are the parts of the organization we want to prune so that we've got energy and focus to grow the parts of the organization that are going to serve us better. And I think that's true for us too. What are the parts of the things pulling on our time and focus that we want to prune, so we can be more focused on what makes us whole and effective.

Michelle: Wow. Wow. And that's really being able to resist the distraction. It's sort of all of the opportunities. It could be a good thing or it could be a bad thing when we're talking about letting go. It could be letting go of worry or stress or feeling overwhelmed. It could also be letting go of that idea of perfectionism. That idea of, I have to do more. You know, I have that. I really do struggle with resisting distractions, I will admit. In fact, one of my nicknames a colleague of mine gave me was "attention deficit rainbow sparkle", meaning that anytime I saw a sparkle, I was off. I have that challenge where I just take on too much because I'm really interested in so many things, and that idea of resisting distraction, I can really see where stop would be helpful, because I think by pausing and asking myself, do I have a finite level, like you were just talking about the number of hours in a week, but, I also think about more and more I have a finite level of energy and, sort of, where I want to spend my energy. And more and more it seems like I have to sort of ask myself, if you say yes to this, you know, where are you going to get the energy? Where's that energy? I only have 20 blocks of energy and if I do this wonderful

cool thing that's shiny will I have the energy to do the things that are really close to my heart and part of my personal mission.

Tony: Yeah, all resources are limited, including our own time and energy, and it's about making choices about how we want to spend them and making wise choices that serve us well. You know we talked in past podcasts about sense of purpose, about exercising our signature strengths, so we can be as effective as possible. This is a big part of it. We need to be thinking about where are the places that we want to use our signature strengths to be a strong and effective, and, as much of who we are at our core as possible, to exercise as much of our central sense of purpose and the purpose that we have on the job. And if we're going to stay focused on that sense of mission and who we are and where we are at our best, you know, it means that we can't be and do everything. We've got to say no to some things.

Michelle: Yeah, yeah, I think that's really helpful. I wonder if our listeners also struggle with that feeling, sort of pulled and pushed around a little bit by work, and what's going on in their life and and really remembering and going back to what is most important. Another thing that we talked about with this topic which I thought was really fascinating, was this idea that we evolve as people. I don't know if you speak to that a little bit. What do you think? Does our mission evolve? Does it change over time?

Tony: Well I think it does and that has a lot of implications for this business of making choices and it'd be nice, if we could, you know, make a choice and then we didn't ever have to make a choice again right?

Michelle: Yes!

Tony: But things around us change at the speed of light. You know, think about the flow of information and events in our own personal lives and on the job.

The world we're in today looks really different than the world that we were in three months ago or six months ago, and internally you know we're learning and growing and becoming more of who we are, hopefully better and stronger and more insightful people. And, priorities and things in us change, and we have to figure out how we match those, the match between who we are in our external world can get better and it can get tougher over time. And being able to monitor that and make choices about making the best fit and the best use of our time and who we are in the world as it is today, is really important.

Michelle: Yeah, this idea of matching your strengths and your talents with what's going on at work. You know it makes me think of this. We talked briefly about this idea of ikigai, this Japanese term of sort of your work and how it fits with your talents and what the world needs and what you can contribute in your passions, to the world. And those, I guess, do evolve as time goes by. I mean, I certainly know that the last two years have been pretty intense and the last six months I've been pretty intense for me personally. And I imagine that's been true for many of our helping professional listeners out there, but things are evolving. But, by you're suggesting really focusing on our strengths, and using those to guide us along with our values, to really make sure that we're where we want to be in this, in this moment.

Tony: Let's try to think about it in a job situation. I don't know whether you've ever had a situation where you got into a job and it was wonderful. You know, it was like coming home every day. And in two years, three years, four years later, you know, you would change, the job changed, and it didn't feel so much like home anymore. And, the question is, what are you going to do about that? How do you

make a decision to use your time and energy well to fit better, to do the things you need to do to make it work or to stop some parts of it or maybe even if it gets bad enough to stop the job and make a decision about, you know, I need to be someplace else because this just isn't who I am anymore, because I changed, the job has changed, we both changed, and it's just not the right place anymore. Those are all decisions about, you know, what do we do, and just as importantly decisions about what we don't do.

Michelle: Wow. Yeah. So letting go could really mean, letting go of our expectations of ourselves. Could be letting go of our expectations of our job. It could mean also letting go of the job like moving on. And it's really about this idea that we have the choice of holding tightly and or letting go. And of course we're mental health professionals and we always say grow, you know, grow towards how we can change and evolve and use those strengths that we have

Tony: That's right and it doesn't necessarily mean letting go of the job but maybe letting go of some parts of the job that you know have just gotten stuck and are kind of routine and we keep doing them, but things have shifted in a way that your time and energy would be better spent focused on other aspects of the job. Other things you could do to help the company grow, to help the people that you're helping do better, to be a better fit with it. You can't do everything that comes up in a job. How do you make decisions about where you really focus? So it's not always about, you know, letting go of the job completely, but how do you think about shifting your focus in the context of that job, to exercise your strengths and be the best you can. It's choosing to do some things and choosing not to do others.

Michelle: Yeah, those choices, right, yet making sure we don't think about it as kind of an all or nothing kind of element. Oh, Tony. This has been a great conversation about letting go, I feel like I'm leaving with some new tools. The STOP has been so helpful. I want to summarize, if I can, a little bit of what we talked about today is to really remember your choices and think about the choices that you have. We have choices about our actions, our feelings, our thoughts, and expectations of ourselves and of our work, and the ability to choose sort of how we want to think or where we want to go. Also, we really have to consider "letting go" is about resisting distractions. And that could be positive or negative and choosing where you put your time and energy. Also, checking into, to sort of assess where you are right now. I love the STOP to try to do a "stop, take a breath, observe and proceed" to sort of think about where you are in your work, where you want to go and choosing a direction that makes more sense for you to promote and leverage your signature strengths. Tony anything that I missed?

Tony: No, I think that's a good summary, Michelle. It sounds really easy when when we talk about it, but it's really hard to do. We know that so much of our behavior is just triggered by external circumstances. We don't think about it we just react and go and and this whole business of STOP, of mindfulness, of making choices is about, you know, slowing down just a little bit, so that we can exercise our personal agency in the interest of making ourselves whole, productive and complete and also in supporting the organization we work for, and the people we are trying to help.

Michelle: Love it, love it. Well, as always, we have some questions that we invite you to consider. And one of them is, what really counts in your job? What do you want to do more of? What really matters to the people you help and to you? And then, what would you like to let go of, thinking about prioritizing the time and the energy you have for the important things and try to let go of some of the other stuff. And then I would encourage us also lastly to think how might you use your strengths to help you let go when you need to, and whatever is going on.

Well, next time we're going to talk about healthy positivity and making sure we consider opportunities for positivity at work and at home.

Thanks for listening, I'm Michelle Zechner and I'm with Dr. Tony Zipple, and we're grateful for the important work you're doing. Remember to make time for yourself care today, you matter.

Be sure to like and subscribe this podcast series wherever you get your podcasts. This podcast is a production of the Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center at Rutgers University, and made possible by funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

[Coordinating Webinar](#)