

# WHY YOU STILL MATTER

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Sustainable Service in a Culture of Caring

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# AGENDA

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Overview of today's  
discussion topics

01

## Let's talk about purpose.

Starting with your "Why"

02

## Heavy, not busy.

What our work *feels* like and why

03

## Reconnect to purpose through action.

Our path forward

04

## Great...now what?

Improving your personal wellness and your organization's

# 01

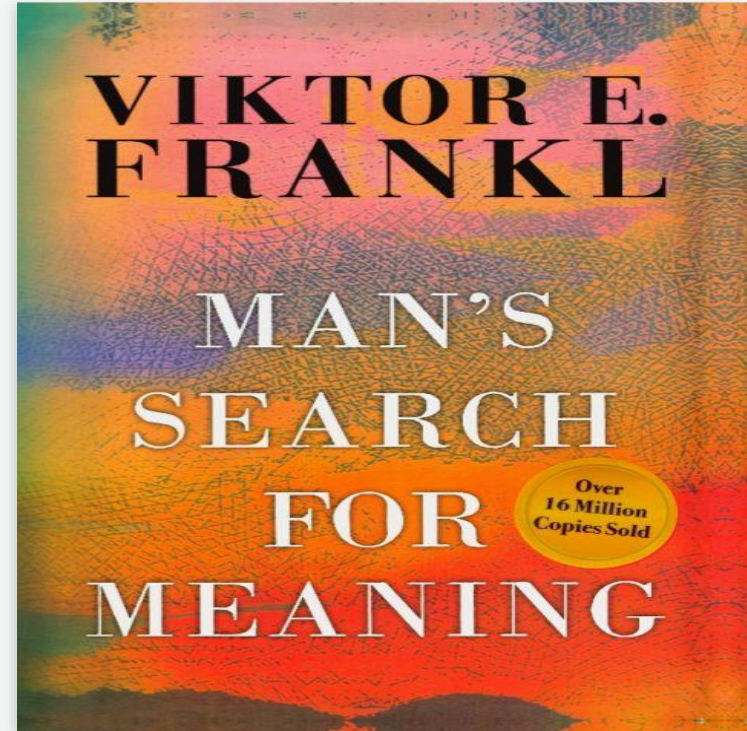
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## Let's talk about purpose

Before we can talk about “Why you matter” we should talk about purpose

# How important is *purpose*

- A medical doctor at 25
- A POW at 37
- An inmate at Auschwitz at 39
- His father, mother, brother, and wife died in concentration camps



# Frankl on Purpose



## Core Concepts

- Meaning is not predicated on comfort, success, or justice
- Meaning is motivation
- Freedom to choose your response



## Origins of meaning

- Purposeful action
- Purposeful experience
- Purposeful attitudes

# When we disconnect from our purpose

- Loss of meaning as an “existential vacuum”
- Sense of purpose correlated to surviving extreme conditions
- Connecting hope to specific outcomes can be costly (The Stockdale Paradox)
- Sense of human dignity may be lost

# An example of finding *purpose*

- Brian Wayne Jones
- Husband, Father, Son, Brother, Officer
- Killed in the line of duty on May 31, 2014
- Then, the fallout...



# 02

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## Heavy, not busy

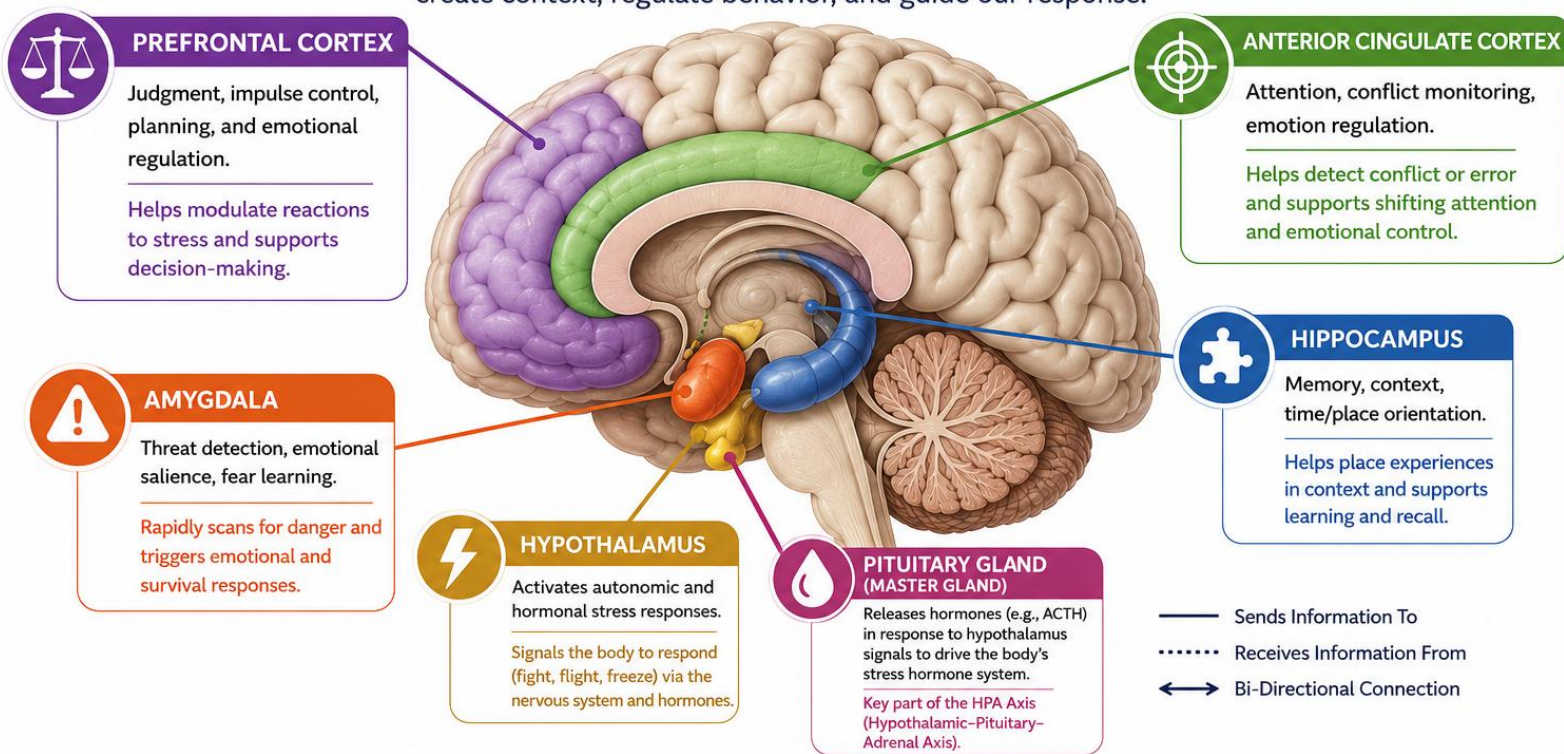
The work you do just hits different

# Why is this work so *heavy*

- Unlike some professions, ours comes with the added benefit of brain dysregulation
- Acute Trauma impact versus Chronic Stress impact
- The impact of prolonged exposure and immersion in the details of our work shifts us from short-term survival to chronic load (aka: *Allostatic Load*)

# Key Brain Structures in Stress & Trauma Response

These interconnected regions work together to detect threat, process emotion, create context, regulate behavior, and guide our response.



## Research shows these regions are central to traumatic stress responses.

The amygdala, hippocampus, and medial prefrontal cortex (including the prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex) are key targets of trauma and chronic stress.



AMYGDALA



HIPPOCAMPUS



MEDIAL PREFRONTAL CORTEX  
(Prefrontal Cortex + Anterior Cingulate Cortex)

## IMPORTANT:

The pituitary gland works closely with the hypothalamus as part of the body's main stress response system.

# Examples of the differences



## This is Larry

- **Bio:** Male – 8 years of age – identifies as black with white stripes
- **Address:** wherever the grass is
- **Stressors:** Lions who want to eat him

# What allostatic load *looks* like

## Physical

Tiredness  
Headaches  
GI problems  
High BP  
Immune system

## Cognitive

Memory issues  
Poor concentration  
Impulse control  
Increased mistakes  
Poor decisions

## Emotional

Anger  
Low empathy  
Cynicism  
Numbness  
*Loss of meaning*

03

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# Reconnect to purpose through action

Sustainability requires purpose

“

*Helping professionals preserve identity,  
meaning, and humanity while working  
inside chronically stressed systems...*

# Where do we start?

- *If* the systems are chronically stressed, ***and*** we only have minimal influence over the system, ***then*** stop focusing on the system and start focusing on what you *can control*
- Moral injury can be a significant barrier
- Start small – recognize the value in the little things
- This is where leadership becomes essential in modeling expectations

# Key Features



## Meaning/Purpose

Purpose is sustained when professionals can see the human impact of their work – even in small ways



## Human Connection

Helping professionals remain connected to purpose when they feel valued, feel trusted, and are part of something larger than themselves



## Identity & Values

Protecting one's identity and values and preventing erosion of them through intentional actions that preserve their connection to the work.

## WHY THESE WINS STAY INVISIBLE

-  Helping professionals often never see final outcomes.
-  Many victories are quiet and leave no trace.
-  Systems rarely celebrate prevention.
-  Emotional labor goes unseen.
-  The work still matters even when results are delayed or invisible.

# INVISIBLE WINS

THE QUIET VICTORIES THAT CHANGE LIVES










HELPING PROFESSIONALS

"SMALL MOMENTS. BIG IMPACT. LASTING CHANGE."

LISTEN  
SUPPORT  
CARE  
DIGNITY

## EXAMPLES OF INVISIBLE WINS

-  The suicide that never happened
-  The escalation that de-escalated quietly
-  The child who felt safe for one hour
-  The patient who finally trusted someone
-  The coworker who stayed because you listened
-  The family that stabilized
-  The person who came back because you treated them with dignity

## BACKED BY RESEARCH & THEORY



### INVISIBLE LABOR RESEARCH

Recognizes the unseen work that holds systems and people together.



### COMPASSION SATISFACTION

Meaning and fulfillment come from making a difference—big or small.



### MEANING-MAKING THEORY

We find purpose in knowing our work contributes to something bigger.



### "SMALL WINS" RESEARCH

Small, meaningful wins build motivation, resilience, and hope.



### RELATIONAL-CULTURAL THEORY

Connection, empathy, and relationships create change that lasts.

THESE VICTORIES AREN'T ALWAYS SEEN, BUT THEY ARE ALWAYS REAL.

WHAT WE DON'T SEE CAN STILL CHANGE EVERYTHING.



TO EVERY HELPING PROFESSIONAL: YOUR WORK IS NOT INVISIBLE

TO THE PEOPLE WHOSE LIVES YOU TOUCH.

- ♥ Keep showing up.
- ♥ Keep caring.
- ♥ Keep making invisible wins.
- ♥ The world is better because of YOU.

“ HELPING PROFESSIONS OFTEN FAIL TO MEASURE THEIR MOST IMPORTANT OUTCOMES BECAUSE THE GREATEST SUCCESSES ARE FREQUENTLY THE CRISES THAT NEVER OCCUR. ”

# ≡ THE VALUE OF HEALTHY GROUPS ≡

RELATIONAL CONNECTION  
BUILDS AND SUSTAINS PURPOSE



PEER SUPPORT



MENTORING



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



SHARED MISSION



AUTHENTIC RECOGNITION



TEAM COHESION



STORYTELLING



SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

People stay connected to purpose through relationships.

PURPOSE DETERIORATES  
IN ISOLATION.



HUMAN CONNECTION  
IS NOT SEPARATE  
FROM RESILIENCE.  
HUMAN CONNECTION  
IS RESILIENCE.

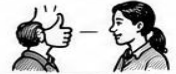
PROFESSIONALS REMAIN CONNECTED  
TO PURPOSE WHEN THEY FEEL:



SEEN



VALUED



TRUSTED



EMOTIONALLY SAFE



PART OF SOMETHING  
LARGER THAN THEMSELVES



THE CHALLENGE: WHY CONNECTION MATTERS



Helping professions are often emotionally exhausting because:

- Workers absorb emotional labor
- Systems normalize sacrifice
- Many professionals feel psychologically alone

WHAT PUSHES AGAINST ISOLATION



SHARED  
HUMANITY



ACKNOWLEDGMENT



REFLECTIVE  
CONVERSATION



EMOTIONALLY  
HONEST  
LEADERSHIP

BACKED BY RESEARCH AND THEORY

- ✓ Self-Determination Theory (Relatedness)
- ✓ Relational-Cultural Theory
- ✓ Psychological Safety Research
- ✓ Social Connectedness Literature



Connection gives us strength. Belonging gives us purpose. Together, we thrive.



# IDENTITY PRESERVATION:

PURPOSE SURVIVES WHEN PEOPLE REMAIN CONNECTED TO WHO THEY ARE.

## WHAT CAN ERODE OUR IDENTITY OVER TIME



**BUREAUCRACY**  
Rules over relationships.  
Process over purpose.



**CHRONIC STRESS**  
Constant pressure  
without relief.



**OPERATIONAL FATIGUE**  
The slow drain of  
going too long.



**MORAL INJURY**  
When our values clash  
with what we're asked  
to do—or unable to do.



**EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD**  
Carrying too much  
for too long.



**MISSION DRIFT**  
Losing sight of the  
mission that  
once inspired us.

## THE CHALLENGE: WHAT PULLS US AWAY FROM WHO WE ARE AND WHY WE STARTED

These forces gradually disconnect professionals from the values that originally brought them into the work.



**THE UNDERLYING MECHANISM**  
**BURNOUT IS OFTEN NOT SIMPLY EXHAUSTION.**  
**IT IS IDENTITY EROSION.**

**THE REAL RISK IS NOT WHAT WE DO—BUT FORGETTING WHO WE ARE WHILE DOING IT.**

## THIS THEME SHOWS UP IN MANY CONVERSATIONS



**BURNOUT**



**MORAL INJURY**



**MISSION DRIFT**



**VALUES ALIGNMENT**



**NARRATIVE IDENTITY**



**TRAUMA EXPOSURE**



**ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**



**LEADERSHIP AUTHENTICITY**

## KEY QUESTIONS THAT KEEP US CONNECTED TO WHO WE ARE ?



Why does this matter?



Who am I in this work?



What kind of person do I want to be while doing this?



## WHAT RECONNECTS IDENTITY?



**REMEMBERING "WHY"**  
Return to the purpose that started it all.



**RECONNECTING WITH VALUES**  
Align daily actions with what matters most.



**SERVICE-BASED IDENTITY**  
I am here to serve, make a difference, and uphold dignity.



**DIGNITY-CENTERED LEADERSHIP**  
Lead with respect, integrity, and humanity.



**STORYTELLING**  
Share stories that remind us who we are.



**REFLECTION**  
Make space to think, feel, and realign.



**VALUE CONGRUENCE**  
Live in alignment with your core beliefs.



**PURPOSE-CENTERED LEADERSHIP CULTURE**  
Build cultures that protect meaning and humanity.



**WHEN WE PROTECT OUR IDENTITY, WE PROTECT OUR PURPOSE.**  
**WHEN WE PROTECT OUR PURPOSE, WE CAN KEEP SHOWING UP FOR OTHERS.**



# 04

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## Great...now what?

Improving wellness in your organization and in yourself

“

*Metrics are important, they help guide organizations.*

*However, if you only count the measurable outcomes,  
you will miss many of your most important  
contributions...*

# Purpose can be enhanced through culture

- Helping professionals work in highly stressed systems. We know we cannot control all elements of these systems, but we can choose to act intentionally to improve our environment
- Every element of an organization is responsible for creation, support, and sustainability of culture
- Great culture is how organizations show their support for their people and keep them connected to purpose

# Intentional behaviors for organizations

- Let's discuss a few behaviors that can assist us in building great culture:
  - Clarity over chaos
  - Repair over blame
  - Accountability without humiliation
  - Workload truth
  - Recognition that is timely and specific

# Culture building behaviors



## Clarity over chaos

Clearly defined roles and expectations; Priorities that are easy to understand and repeatable; Reduce complexity to avoid misinterpretation



## Repair over blame

After difficult moments – we debrief and repair; We don't pretend it didn't happen; We address behaviors and we do not attack personally



## Accountability

Standards must be maintained – so must dignity; Specific feedback of behavior tied to the standard; Standards must be equally applied to all

# Culture building behaviors



## Workload truth

Honesty about work capacity, staffing, and constraints; Over-functioning is not a normal way to survive; What breaks first – quality, people, or ethics?



## Recognition

Recognizing specific behavior – not generic praise; Describe its impact; Tie it to an organizational value; This reinforces what you want to see

“

*Protect your purpose the way you protect those you serve. Revisit it often. Reflect on it honestly. Live it intentionally. Because when purpose is preserved, resilience follows...*

# THREE PRACTICES THAT PROTECT PURPOSE

REFLECT TO REMEMBER. CONNECT TO SUSTAIN. ALIGN TO LIVE.

## 1 INTENTIONAL REFLECTION "REMEMBER WHY"

**BEHAVIOR:** Regularly pause to reconnect with the meaning behind your work.

### PRACTICES

- Keep a journal of meaningful moments.
- Reflect on one "Invisible Win" each week.
- Revisit your personal mission statement.
- Ask yourself:
  - Why does this work matter?
  - Who benefited from my efforts?
  - What values did I live today?

### WITH REFLECTION, WE BEGIN TO REMEMBER:

- Impact
- Growth
- Contribution

Purpose rarely disappears. It is often buried beneath the noise of daily demands.

### WHY IT WORKS

Reflection strengthens:

- Meaning-making
- Narrative identity
- Compassion satisfaction
- Purpose awareness

### WITHOUT REFLECTION, WE TEND TO REMEMBER:

- Frustrations
- Paperwork
- Difficult interactions



## 2 INTENTIONAL CONNECTION "DON'T CARRY THE WORK ALONE"

**BEHAVIOR:** Actively invest in relationships that reinforce purpose and resilience.

### PRACTICES

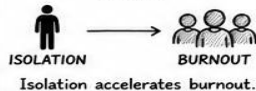
- Participate in peer support.
- Seek mentoring.
- Share stories of meaningful work.
- Check in on colleagues.
- Ask for help before crisis develops.

### WHY IT WORKS

Connection reinforces:

- Belonging
- Psychological safety
- Professional identity
- Emotional resilience

### RESEARCH CONSISTENTLY SHOWS:



The strongest professionals are not the most independent. They are the most connected.

### TOGETHER, THESE PRACTICES:

- ✓ Strengthen purpose
- ✓ Build resilience
- ✓ Protect your identity
- ✓ Sustain compassion

## OVERALL WELLNESS STAYING CONNECTED TO YOUR PURPOSE



## 3 INTENTIONAL ALIGNMENT "LIVE YOUR VALUES"

**BEHAVIOR:** Regularly compare your daily actions to your core values.

### PRACTICES

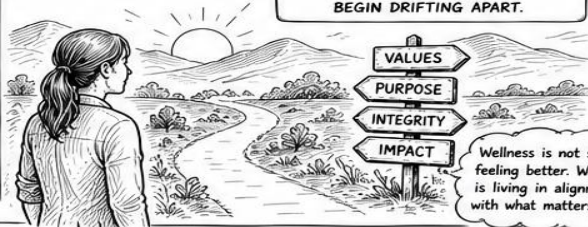
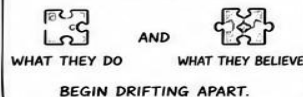
- Identify your top 3 professional values.
- Evaluate decisions against those values.
- Look for opportunities to serve with dignity.
- Correct course when you notice mission drift.
- Focus on being the professional you intended to become.

### WHY IT WORKS

Values alignment strengthens:

- Authenticity
- Integrity
- Motivation
- Identity preservation

### MANY PROFESSIONALS BECOME EXHAUSTED BECAUSE:



### THE RESULT:

- ✓ You show up with greater presence.
- ✓ You serve with greater impact.
- ✓ You experience deeper fulfillment.
- ✓ You make a difference that lasts.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS CONTROL THE WORK.

BUT YOU CAN CHOOSE HOW YOU STAY CONNECTED TO WHY IT MATTERS.

# Intentional reflection

- **Regularly pause to reconnect with the meaning behind your work**
  - *Journaling meaningful moments*
  - *Reflecting on “invisible wins”*
  - *Revisit your personal mission statement*
  - *Ask yourself, “Who is better today because of my work?”*

# Intentional connection

- **Actively invest in relationships that reinforce purpose and resilience**
  - *Participate in peer support*
  - *Seek mentoring*
  - *Share your stories of meaningful work*
  - *Check in on your colleagues*
  - *Ask for help before a crisis develops*

# Intentional alignment

- **Regularly compare your daily actions to your core values**
  - *Identify your top 3 professional values*
  - *Evaluate your decisions based on your values*
  - *Seek opportunities to serve in ways that align with your values*
  - *Focus on becoming the professional you intended to become*

# WHY YOU STILL MATTER



Every day. In visible ways and invisible ones.  
**Your purpose makes a difference.**

## INVISIBLE WINS



You make a difference even when you don't see the outcome.

## HEALTHY GROUPS



You were never meant to carry the work alone.

## IDENTITY PRESERVATION



Protect who you are while doing what you do.

## DAILY PRACTICES



Reflect.  
Connect.  
Align.

## LASTING IMPACT



Your work creates ripples that reach farther than you know.

**WHY YOU STARTED**

**YOU ARE THE BRIDGE  
BETWEEN HOPE AND POSSIBILITY  
FOR OTHERS.**

**THE DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE**

**THE WORK MATTERS. THE PEOPLE MATTER. AND SO DO YOU.**

**Find me here on Linked In!**

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