



THE  
PERMAH  
WORKPLACE  
SURVEY  
FOR ORGANIZATIONS

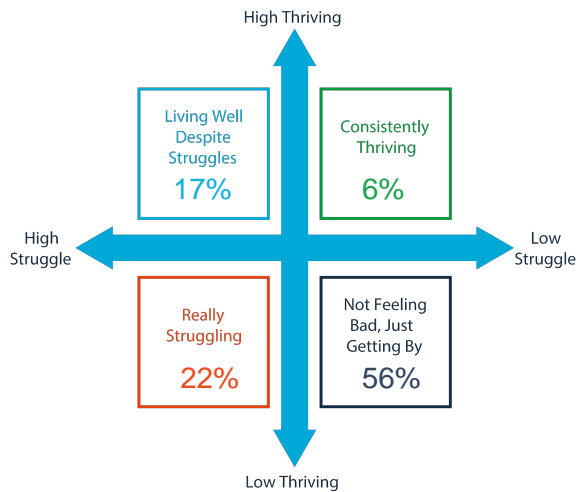
---

WELLBEING REPORT  
KHDA - PRIMUS PRIVATE SCHOOL LLC

---

THEWELLBEINGLAB  
A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

# YOUR WELLBEING RESULTS



Feb 2020

N = 17



WELLBEING CONFIDENCE



77



WELLBEING MOTIVATION



72



Positive Emotion



Engagement



Relationships



Meaning



Accomplishment



Health

Individual



Team



Organization



Resources



Performance



Physical safety



Psychological safety



Autonomy



Competence

Individual



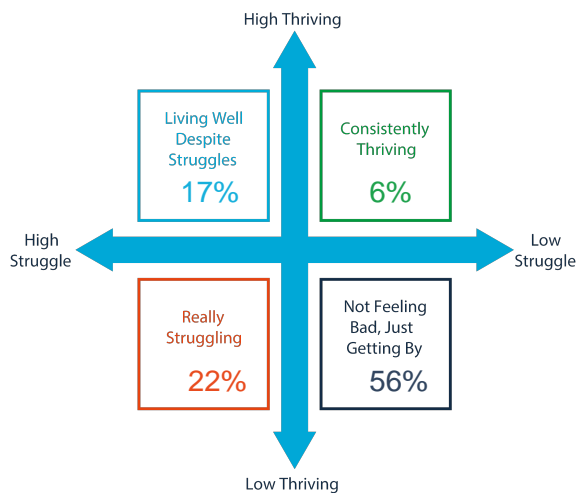
Team



Organization



# YOUR OVERALL WELLBEING



Our studies have found that people's levels of wellbeing are best measured on two related but distinct dimensions: high or low levels of thriving (i.e. feeling good and functioning effectively) and high or low levels of struggle (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, cognitive, or any other struggle they may be experiencing). It is possible to thrive despite struggles, and it is possible to not experience wellbeing even in the absence of struggles.

For example, workers who are *consistently thriving* and those who are *living well despite struggles* are both more likely to report that they are performing well at work and significantly more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction, than workers who report they are *not feeling bad, but just getting by* or those who are *really struggling*.

Clearly, it is not enough to simply measure and talk about workers' levels of thriving when it comes to improving people's wellbeing at work. In fact, given the growing need for resilience in workplaces, measuring and talking about struggle may be one of the most important aspects of wellbeing we need to accept and normalize.

## TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT HOW YOUR WORKERS REPORTED THEIR OVERALL LEVELS OF WELLBEING.

How many of your workers are really *consistently thriving*? How many are demonstrating exceptional levels of resilience as they *live well despite some struggles*? What can you learn from these workers that might help others?

How many of your workers are *not feeling bad, but just getting by*? What might this suggest in terms of the untapped human potential in your workplace? What might this suggest in terms of the number of workers who are lacking the necessary wellbeing, knowledge, tools and support to truly thrive or feel safe enough to struggle as they embrace opportunities for learning and growth?

How many of your workers are *really struggling*? Is struggling acceptable in your workplace or are you unintentionally adding to their struggle? How are you supporting these people?

# YOUR SATISFACTION INSIGHTS

Satisfaction provides an overall indicator of how people are going. It doesn't tell why workers might be satisfied or not but rather gives an easy way to check in on how your workers feel about their jobs, their teams and your organization as a whole.

## SO HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU FEELING AT WORK RIGHT NOW?

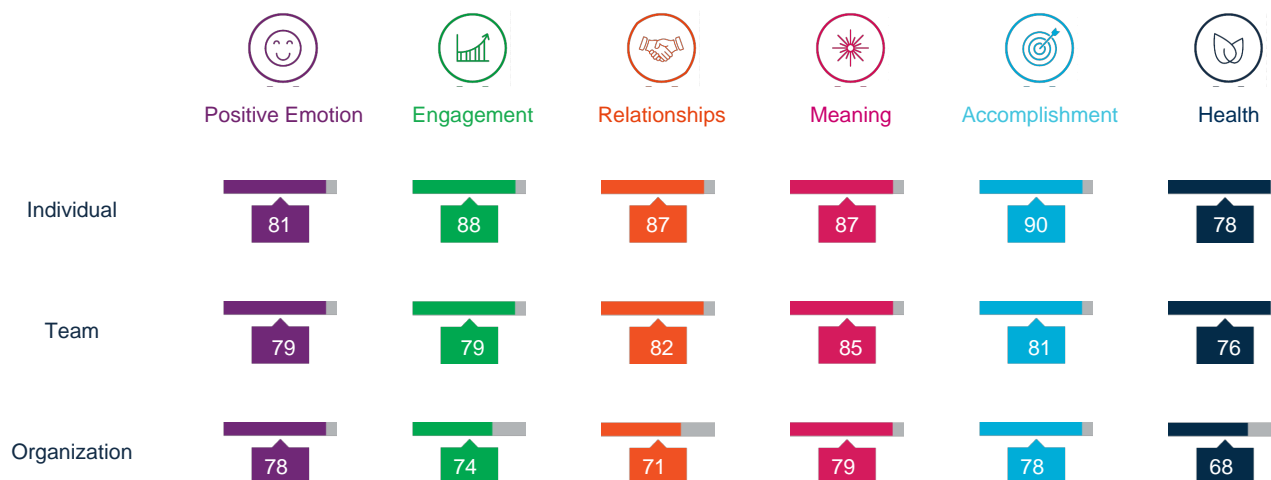


The graphs show how satisfied your employees felt about their job, their team, and the organization as a whole - higher values indicate greater satisfaction. Take a moment to think about the scores. Are they higher or lower than you imagined they would be? Are you satisfied with where you want them to be? If so, we'll show you ways to keep satisfaction high. If not, we'll show you how you can improve people's levels of satisfaction at work by helping to improve their wellbeing on the following pages.

---

*Please note: The PERMAH Workplace Survey is providing information as an educational resource, and takes no responsibility for its use, misuse or any psychological or physical outcomes. See terms of use.*

# YOUR PERMAH WELLBEING SCORES



You can think of improving wellbeing in your organization like looking after a car. When the car runs well, you have few concerns. But when you get a sense that something is off, you (or a mechanic) need to look under the hood to identify what's not working. You check different gauges to figure out what's wrong and what's working well - the oil, tire gauge and engine temperature. By finding the root cause, you can apply the right solution and get the car running well again.

Similarly, there are different gauges or "domains" of wellbeing. Professor Martin Seligman, one of the world's thought leaders on human flourishing, suggests five specific areas that contribute to wellbeing: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. **This framework is often referred to as 'PERMA'.**

Other researchers - ourselves included - also believe that the cultivation of people's Health by eating well, moving regularly, and sleeping deeply is one of the hygiene factors for wellbeing. Everything just gets easier when this is present. **So, in this tool we've added Health to Martin's framework, making it 'PERMAH'.**

# YOUR PERMAH WELLBEING SCORES

Note that the goal is not to be 100% on everything - scores above 70 generally indicate good functioning. Also, it depends on what domains really matter to you and the organization. Still, there might be there are some warning lights - one or more areas where your people, teams or organization might be struggling and in need of help.

**Take a few minutes to think about the different gauges. Where are your employees doing well, and where are they struggling? Understanding how these PERMAH gauges of wellbeing look at a team and organizational level is essential if you want people to be able to consistently flourish.**

# YOUR CHANGE READINESS INSIGHTS



There is a lot that each person can do to look after their own wellbeing. Based on what matters most to each of your workers, we have provided them with evidence-based, busy-proof practices to help them in their personal reports. The more you can encourage them to share what they are trying, support each other and celebrate what's working, the more likely they will be to continue investing in these practices. Social support is one of the key factors that researchers have found enables behavior change to stick.

Feeling good and functioning effectively will ebb and flow for your people, depending on what's happening at work and in their lives. Rather than setting the goal of flourishing all the time, we've found that the real prize is in helping your people to become informed, confident, and active participants in shaping their own wellbeing, so they can wholeheartedly show up and be fully engaged in work and life - whatever it throws at them.

This means it's not enough to simply measure your workers' wellbeing, you also need to be aware of how confident and motivated your people are feeling about improving their wellbeing. As your workers and leaders learn more about their wellbeing and the small actions they can take to positively impact their likelihood of flourishing, it is these scores that should continue steadily improving over time.

## **So how confident and motivated are your people to improve their wellbeing?**

People's level of wellbeing knowledge and resources affect their confidence. Do your workers know how to manage their wellbeing? The evidenced-based tools and activities provided in their individual reports will make it easier for them to build their levels of wellbeing confidence.

Still, you may want to consider also providing team and organizational tools like workshops, small groups coaching programs, online training and podcasts and visual reminders in your environment to also help them. Even when a car is well maintained it can still encounter challenges - other drivers and the condition of the roads on which it is travelling - that will make it easier or harder for the car to consistently perform well. For example, if there are unavoidable potholes all over the road even the most resilient car will eventually breakdown. In the same way the people we spend time with at work and our organizational environment can make it easier or harder for your workers to maintain their wellbeing. In fact, researchers have found that wellbeing habits, attitudes and actions spread through a complicated web of social connections around us.

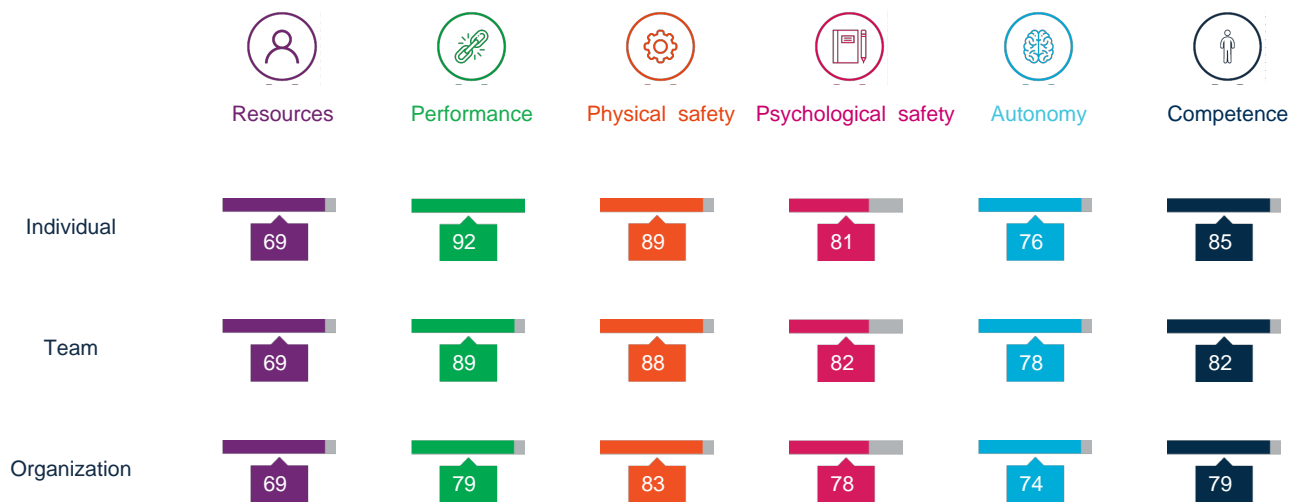
# YOUR CHANGE READINESS INSIGHTS

And then there's motivation. There's no quick fix, silver bullet or magic pill when it comes to improving people's wellbeing. The truth is that just like eating one piece of broccoli won't suddenly make a person healthy or going for one run won't suddenly make them fit, doing a simple wellbeing exercise is not going to make a person well. Maintaining a high level of wellbeing requires finding small actions that people are willing to consistently practice - positive habits.

We've provided your workers with busy-proof, joyful ways to create wellbeing habits they are more likely to stick with, but people will always feel more motivated when they have social support from others around them and when they believe their leaders and organization are actively trying to nourish, rather than undermine, their wellbeing. Social support is one of the key factors that researchers have found enables behavior change to stick.



# YOUR SYSTEM SUPPORTS



Beyond understanding how your people feel and function and providing opportunities for employees to feel willing and able to take care of their own wellbeing, your work environment also matters.

You can make it easier for your workers to feel more confident and motivated to improve their wellbeing by creating a work environment that nourishes, rather than depletes, their efforts. While researchers are still learning the best approaches for systemically supporting wellbeing, studies to date suggest that environments that enable people to fulfill basic psychological needs of autonomy (having a sense of freedom of choice in one or more ways), competence (able to do one's work, learn, and grow), relatedness (connecting deeply with others); provide the resources needed to do one's work and providing a sense of safety (physical and psychological) can make it easier for people to flourish.

Professors Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's extensive and renowned body of research finds that when people feel a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they feel more motivated, energized and willing to act and to flourish in process. But they caution that all three needs must be consistently met. Employers and supervisors play an important role in supporting or undermining these needs.

The need to do more with less has become a common challenge for many workers, but in order to successfully complete their tasks and achieve the workplace goals they have been set, workers need adequate resources. Resources can be physical (e.g. having office supplies available) or less concrete (e.g. sufficient time to accomplish a task or leadership support). While a consistent lack of resources can create feelings of scarcity and stress, workers who believe they have adequate resources report higher levels of wellbeing and performance. Of course, some tension between workers' expectations and your organization's ability to provide all the resources they need may be unavoidable, but significant differences should be quickly discussed, and actions taken to more closely align resources and requirements.

# YOUR SYSTEM SUPPORTS

In addition, as workplaces have become increasingly complex, dynamic and diverse and the pace of change has escalated, a growing body of research also suggests that the ability for people to feel safe at work - able to ask questions, seek help, take risks, and learn from mistakes - also impacts their performance and wellbeing. For example, a large-scale two year study at Google found that their best performing teams were able to flourish because people felt psychologically safe.

## **So how well is your organization supporting people's ability to improve their wellbeing?**

Are you providing opportunities for people to meet their psychological needs by being autonomy supportive (rather than demanding and controlling), competence enhancing (rather than overly challenging, inconsistent or otherwise discouraging) and relationally nurturing (versus impersonal, judgmental or rejecting)? Do people feel physically safe in your work environment? Do people feel psychologically safe in your workplace rather than feeling tied up in knots about the way they talk and work together? What can you do practically to improve the systemic support that your workplace provides for people's wellbeing?

Start by  
selecting just the  
one intervention that  
*appeals*  
most to you in each  
wellbeing area



# DIGGING DEEPER - WHAT DOES MY SCORE MEAN?

Being an effective steward of your organization's wellbeing is a skill that can be learned and mastered, and ultimately this is what will consistently shape your wellbeing over time. So how can you better support your people to improve their wellbeing?

## 1. REFLECT ON YOUR WELLBEING INSIGHTS

You don't need to worry about your organization's actual PERMAH score. Higher scores are generally better, but the goal is not to be a 100% on everything. Instead it can be more important to reflect on how your organization feels about the results and the impact this is having on your people and their ability to support your strategic priorities.

Consider these questions:

- What does your organization's overall profile look like?
- Are there some areas that are higher or lower?
- How do your people score on the pillars that are most important to you?
- How do your teams score on the pillars that are most important to you?
- How does your organization score on the pillars that are most important to you?
- Are there areas in which you'd like to see improvement in order to support your strategic priorities?
- Which PERMAH pillars does this suggest you should prioritize?
- How confident and motivated are your people to improve their wellbeing?
- Is your organization supporting people's needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness and safety to help them flourish?

Note your observations below.



## 2. PRIORITIZE YOUR WELLBEING HOPES

Creating change across an organization can be challenging-no matter how motivated you are to do so. Having good intentions and a clear plan is not sufficient for creating change. Fortunately, research can tell us a lot about trying to change people's behavior across a system.

Rather than trying to change your whole organizational wellbeing profile at once, it's helpful to pick one or two PERMAH pillars at a time. If you could invest your organizational energy into just one or two of the PERMAH pillars right now, which ones would you most like improve? We recommend that you select the pillars you really "want to" improve, rather than the ones you feel you "should do" or "have to" to ensure you gain commitment and not just compliance.

We also know that because your workplace is already busy Setting small, short-term, manageable goals is more likely to move you towards success than big, long-term goals. You might have a vision of where you want to be in the future, but without specific pathways to get there, it will remain a distant dream. You might try to improve your organization's wellbeing, but have little indication of success, which can be frustrating and demotivating.

By focusing on small, achievable goals, you can see change occur and build confidence and momentum along the way. So, as you think about your plan, we recommend focusing on a four, eight, or twelve-week time period. Then, check-in on the progress you've made or re-measure your organization's wellbeing at the end of this period and use this as a feedback loop to set your next goal.

Finally, what are the small changes that can be incorporated into the way your organization already works at its best that might improve the wellbeing pillars you've prioritized? Small, actionable steps that can be incorporated into your existing ways of meeting, communicating, sharing, connecting and working - like starting each meeting with a quick wellbeing moment to share a favorite tip or practice - are more likely to stick when it comes to changing people's behavior. These wellbeing "nudges" make it easier for people to help each other incorporate the desired changes into their busy days.

Remember that finding the wellbeing nudges that serve your organization best requires getting inspired by the research and be willing to experiment and reflect on what works best in your workplace. If this idea makes you nervous, one way to lower the risk of experimentation is to pilot the nudge with a few teams first and ask for their help to improve it before rolling it out to everybody.

Set your wellbeing hopes below.

### HOPE 1

PERMAH Pillar:

Small, short-term goal:


Wellbeing Nudge Selected:

### HOPE 2

PERMAH Pillar:

Small, short-term goal:

Wellbeing Nudge Selected:

A pair of hands, palms up, holding a bright red heart. The hands are positioned over a dark, textured wooden surface. A white circular graphic is centered over the hands, containing text.

Give yourself  
*permission*  
to try, to fail,  
to learn and to get  
up and try again.



## PRIORITIZING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Germes and colds aren't the only things we spread in the workplace. Our emotions, both positive and negative, are also contagious because we're wired to mimic the facial expressions and moods of the people we come into contact with. In fact, Professor Sigal Barsade at the Wharton School of Business suggests that it takes only one group member out of five to 'infect' the rest of the group with a positive or negative mood (Barsade, 2002). And the more power we have, the faster it appears our mood may spread. Researchers have found that a leader's positive or negative mood can spread in as little as seven minutes and can impact worker's performance. So, does this mean we should always be upbeat?

No. Faking positive emotions is not good for us as it creates additional stress and undermines authenticity and trust. What's important is that we are aware of how mood impacts our own performance and that of our co-workers.

For example, Professor Barbara Fredrickson from the University of North Carolina has repeatedly demonstrated that the experience of heartfelt positive emotions - like joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love - can help to broaden and build the way our brain responds to opportunities and challenges leaving us more optimistic, resilient, open, accepting, and happier and healthier overall (Fredrickson, 2009).

For more on Barb's research [click here](#).

And while it can be tempting to ignore, suppress, or distract ourselves from feelings of apprehension, anger, or sadness, these emotions can also offer important emotional, mental, and social learning opportunities. Rather than trying to avoid the discomfort these emotions can bring, researchers suggest our goal should be to feel robust enough to withstand emotional distress by being able to realize that these emotions are simply signs that something is not going right, to take the required actions, and to let the emotion pass. After all, emotions themselves are neither good nor bad; it's what we do with them that really matters (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014).

For more on the importance of being able to be comfortably uncomfortable [click here](#).



## WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

### DIALING UP POSITIVITY

When we experience more positive than negative emotions, we're likely to be better at problem solving, handling pressure, and carrying out tasks with accuracy and efficiency. So actively creating a positive atmosphere that puts people in a good mood at work, can help generate greater wellbeing, flourishing and performance. We can't create genuine heartfelt positive emotions by just trying to think happy thoughts; instead, studies suggest that the most reliable and effective ways to alter our emotional state is to try and better select or modify our circumstances, or re-framing unpleasant situations in a positive way, even if it's simply "this too shall pass". Try:

- **Making meetings uplifting:** Researchers estimate we spend 37% of our time in meetings at work and that 50% of this time is completely wasted. Aside from practicing basic meeting etiquette try: starting with sizzle and inject some positivity by asking people to share "What's working well?" And as our memories of events are shaped by endings, ensure there's enough time to finish on a positive note.
- **Investing in jolts of joy:** We can put the brakes on a downward spiral of negativity by injecting small jolts of joy into our day. Take the time to create small jolts of joy for your team by sharing funny stories or video clips, taking time for morning tea together, or running playful competitions or challenges you can get involved in together.
- **Prolonging good news:** Research has found that losses are more painful than gains are enjoyable. So if we have good news to share try spreading it out over a day or a week, but if we have bad news aggregate it all at once so that it's not as painful to hear.

## DIALING DOWN NEGATIVITY

Once we've learned from a negative experience, it's important not to let what's unfolded continue to weigh us down. Studies suggest that while ruminating like this might feel like a way of working things out, it can quickly spin out of control and zap our energy, diminish our confidence, and reduce engagement with life. Finding ways to break this cycle of overthinking can make a huge difference to the wellbeing of a workplace. Try:

- **Not fearing discomfort:** Feelings of negativity due to changing circumstances or confrontations can be an important part of our learning and growth. Rather than forcing these emotions away in your team, try to make a conscious effort to be open, curious and compassionate so people are able to respond in a way that still allows them to flourish.
- **Avoiding recycling negativity:** Once we've learned from a negative experience it's important not to let what's unfolded continue to weigh us down. Try not to prolong bad feelings in your team beyond their usefulness for insight and growth.
- **Controlling the controllables:** Often in challenging situations we can feel anxious about things that we actually have no control over. By looking for what your team can take action on, they'll be more likely to constructively respond and process these storms in our life.

## SHORT-CIRCUITING STRESS

Research makes a distinction between a stressor (something that challenges us) and stress (the perception that we are unable to cope with the stressor). We often confuse the two, which leads to the idea that all stress is bad. But studies find that there can also be benefits to stress. For example, stress can increase the risk of health problems - except when people regularly see a benefit in their struggles. Stress can be debilitating - except when it helps us perform.

How can this be? Studies have found that our bodies are wired with multiple stress responses: flight-or-fight response when we believe stress signals something harmful is about to happen and over time can lead to impaired immune function and depression; the challenge response when we believe stress is an opportunity for learning and growth and are able to harness the energy this gives us; and the tend-and-befriend response when we reach out to care for others in moments of stress and in doing so improve our feelings of empathy, trust and connection. To help people reach for the stress mindsets that may serve them best try:

- **Tuning into stress:** Help your team acknowledge feelings of stress and welcome them as their body's way of telling us something that matters is at risk. What is at stake here, and why does it matter? Which part of the stress response is needed most right now - flight-or-fight, challenge, or tend-and-befriend? How can we be intentional about what we'll choose to do next?
- **Challenging stress responses:** Try to make use of the energy stress gives your team, instead of wasting that energy trying to manage our stress. What can we do right now that reflects our workplace's values and goals? What strengths can be drawn on to respond in the way we want?
- **Building stress confidence:** Call to mind a stressful situation where perseverance or growth was demonstrated by your team. Take a few moments to consider what this says about how your workplace copes with adversity. What are the learnings for future challenges you might face together? How can you harness the energy and focus stress can bring to help you learn and grow?
- For more [listen to this podcast from Dr Alia Crum](#) on her research on stress in workplaces.



## ENHANCING ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is the feeling we get when we're fully absorbed in what we're doing. It's that feeling of "being in the zone" or "one with the music" that comes when time seems to stop, and we lose all sense of consciousness. Performing at our best feels absolutely effortless and we're left feeling genuinely proud of what we've been able to accomplish.

Professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi of Claremont Graduate University, describes this state of high engagement as “flow” and suggests that in these moments: we feel more involved in our life, rather than isolated from it; we enjoy activities far more, rather than feeling bored; we have a stronger sense of control, rather than feelings of helplessness that can overwhelm you; we also enjoy a stronger sense of self, have more self-belief, and a higher level of confidence in what we're actually capable of doing. In flow, our skills are fully utilized, stretched to a manageable limit so we're learning, growing, improving, and advancing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

Figuring out what our strengths are - those things we are good at and actually enjoy doing - is often one of the first steps toward creating more moments of flow. Studies have found that when we regularly use our strengths we feel more confident and less stressed, enjoy more energy and are happier, and are more creative, engaged and satisfied at work. Not only is developing our strengths good for our wellbeing and performance, but researchers suggest that workplaces where most workers have a chance to do what they do best each day are more productive and have happier customers and lower turnover.

But the key to consistently feeling engaged in what you're doing isn't simply to use our strengths more - this can be the path to all sorts of unintended negative outcomes. Rather, it is figuring out how to use the right strength, in the right amount, for the right outcomes and how to best navigate and manage our weaknesses.

To learn more about developing our strengths [click here](#)

## WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

### DISCOVERING OUR STRENGTHS

Studies have found that when we have the opportunity to use our strengths we are likely to feel more confident, creative, engaged, and satisfied with our life. The first step is to become aware of what our strengths are, then explore how we use them in different situations, and find ways to apply them more consistently. Try:

- **Mapping team strengths:** Ask your team to take the free 10-minute VIA Survey ([www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)). Have a conversation about each of your results and how your top five strengths in particular play out at work. Where do your strengths get overplayed or underplayed? Do your strengths ever collide with each other? Map the strengths on a chart and place this somewhere it can be seen in the workplace ([click here for a strengths team kit](#)).
- **Holding strength check-ins:** When you catch up one-on-one or as a team ask people these three simple questions to see how their strengths are developing: What lit you up last week? What are you looking forward to this week? What support do you need to continue developing your strengths?
- **Understanding strength collisions:** Our most challenging relationships are usually difficult because our strengths have collided. Encourage your team to be mindful of strength collisions and how they can build a bridge of respect and compassion for strengths that may be different from their own but bring diversity of strengths to your team.

## DEVELOPING OUR STRENGTHS

Research indicates that finding new ways to use our strengths each day has been found to help increase our levels of happiness, confidence and engagement, and lower our stress. However, studies also suggest that it's not enough to just use our strengths more; instead, our goal should be to develop our strengths, so we might understand how different strengths, in different amounts, might serve us best in different situations. Finding the golden mean of our strengths involves sometimes dialing our strengths up or down to fit the context. Try:

- **Encouraging job crafting:** It's not enough to just list out all the tasks we have to complete each day, we also need to consider the strengths we could draw upon to make these tasks more engaging, energizing and enjoyable. Encourage people to add the strengths they will develop next to key tasks and to reflect at the end of the day about how these strengths impacted their ability to complete the task. ([For a job crafting toolbox click here.](#))
- **Giving strengths-based feedback:** Don't just say "Thanks, great job." Instead try to be specific with each other about the strengths you saw in use, why these were valued and how they could continue to be built upon. This type of feedback can be used for strengths that are being used well, as well as those being overplayed or underplayed.
- **Embedding strengths into performance reviews:** Include strengths-development reflections and questions into people's performance reviews. What went well this year and which strengths were they drawing on in these moments? What might be possible next year if they built on these strengths more consistently? What development support would they need for specific strengths to make this a reality? What are they willing to commit to as their first steps? ([For a managing with strengths toolbox click here.](#))

## BEING MINDFUL

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully aware, non-judgmental and curious about each moment - what we are thinking, feeling, and doing in the here-and-now - rather than being 'caught up' in our thoughts. Researchers have found that mindfulness can help improve our self-awareness, acceptance of others and ourselves, and our ability to handle stress. Studies have also found that being in a mindful state enables us to [be more open and engage better](#) with others, and as a result [we are more likely](#) to be seen as trustworthy and charismatic. Try:

- **Embracing uncertainty:** Recognize that the things that we think we may know, we may not know. Try to embrace the uncertainty of not knowing, and that not knowing is just fine as it's what will enable us to ask the questions that help us to be more mindful.
- **Broadening your perspective:** Understanding that other people's behavior always makes sense from their perspective helps us to be less judgmental of others and ourselves. When someone's perspective is different from our own use this as an opportunity to understand and learn from their perspective.
- **Freeing ourselves of evaluations:** We often impose evaluations on our experiences and, in doing so, create our experience of events. Instead of falling down when things don't go to plan, try to fall up by finding ways to be curious, more engaged, and mindful in what we do.



## NURTURING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

A sense of belonging correlates with a range of positive outcomes, including higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, faster recovery from disease, lower levels of stress, less mental illness, and a longer life. In contrast, loneliness, social isolation, and the lack of social support place a person at high risk for psychological distress, physical and mental illness, and early mortality (Esfhani-Smith, 2017).

This human need for connection is not simply due to the fact that our survival depends on others, but also highlights the consistent finding by researchers that one of the primary goals of all human behavior is the feeling of belonging and of being significant or mattering in the eyes of others (Deci & Ryan, 2014). In fact, William James (1920), the father of modern psychology, suggested that the deepest principle in human nature is the need to be appreciated. And other researchers have found that people have a basic need to feel responded to, respected and important to others, and conversely to avoid rejection, insignificance and disconnection, which shapes a great deal of behavior (de Waal, 2009).

In order to satisfy our psychological need for relatedness, however, it is not enough for people to simply behave in ways that they think others would like in order to feel connected with them. Unless people feel that others care for them unconditionally, and that they are accepted for who they genuinely are, then their hunger for belonging will remain unmet and their energy and wellbeing risks being undermined (Deci & Ryan, 2017). For example, when workers report that their immediate boss cares about them, employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity are higher and so is profitability (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003).

To learn more about building psychologically safe relationships [click here](#).



## WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

### CREATING MICRO-MOMENTS OF CONNECTION

Studies suggest that it can just take a micro moment to genuinely connect with another person and create an upward spiral of warmth and trust. Researchers describe this process of connection between people as 'positivity resonance' and have found it results in an upward spiral of warmth and trust. In particular, researchers have found that when we show enthusiasm and take delight in other people's good news they feel understood and cared for, which enhances their feelings of commitment and satisfaction in the relationship.

- **Responding actively and constructively:** When someone shares good news, ask active and constructive questions that help them expand and savor their good fortune.
- **Asking appreciative questions:** Look for the true, the good, and the possible in people by asking appreciative questions. For example: "What's working well at the moment?", "What's been the highlight of the week?", or "What are you looking forward to in the coming months?"
- **Showing appreciation:** Practicing gratitude is a kind of mega strategy to improve wellbeing and relationships. Try to take the time to genuinely thank one co-worker each day and be specific about what was valued about their actions.

## BUILDING A GIVING CULTURE

Studies (Podsakoff, et al., 2009) have found that when employees act like effective givers - who willingly share their time, energy, knowledge, skills, ideas and connections to benefit others - they are more efficient at solving problems, getting their work done and balancing their workloads to ensure consistent performance. They also build teams that are cohesive and coordinated and establish environments in which customers and suppliers feel that their needs are the organization's top priority. As a result, the team and the people in it are more likely to flourish.

However, Professor Adam Grant and his colleagues (Grant & Rebele, 2017) caution that although givers are the most valuable people in a system, they're also at the greatest risk of burnout. They explain that while "selfless givers" have a high concern for others, they suffer from having a low concern for themselves and consequently their acts of generosity leave them exhausted and paradoxically helping others less. In contrast, "self-protective givers" are generous, but they know their limits so instead of saying "yes" to every request, they look for high-impact, low-cost ways of giving and consequently offer the most direct support, take the most initiative, make the best suggestions and the most sustainable contributions in a system. To build a team of effective givers try:

- **Encouraging self-protective giving:** To ensure people can sustain their generosity and flourish as they support others, self-protective givers are thoughtful about: How they help (i.e. proactively aligning their giving with their strengths and passions so that giving renews their energy and provides greater value); when they help (i.e. chunking their giving into dedicated blocks of time to maintain their focus); and whom they help (i.e. prioritizing requests and saying yes when it matters most and referring requests to others when they don't have the time or skills).
- **Investing in five-minute favors:** Encourage people to spend five minutes each day helping someone else in their network. For example, experts often share knowledge, coaches teach skills, mentors give advice and guidance, connectors make introductions, extra-milers show up early, stay late, and volunteer for extra work and helpers provide hands-on task support and emotional support.
- **Screening out 'takers':** One taker - someone who is happy to take from others no matter what the cost - can skew a whole team away from giving. During interviews notice people who use a lot of "I" or "me" language to claim credit for successes, rather than "us" or "we". Ask for references from peers and direct reports knowing that takers tend to charm people with power but show their true colours with their peers or subordinates.
- To learn more about creating giving culture [click here](#).

## NAVIGATING INCIVILITY

Unfortunately, not all our interactions with each other at work are positive, with research suggesting that incivility appears to be on the rise in our workplaces. Associate Professor Christine Porath has found that ninety-eight percent of people report experiencing uncivil and rude behavior at work - from answering calls or emails in the middle of a meeting to public belittling, taking others for granted, to flat out sabotage.

When someone is uncivil to us, we often tend to either outwardly react - resulting in arguments, fights, and escalated conflict - or inwardly recoil - withdrawing, belittling ourselves, and building resentment. Research has found that targets of incivility spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about the incidents, disrupting their ability to pay attention, impairing their creativity, and robbing them of productivity. Left unchecked, these behaviors can damage health, relationships, and leave the person feeling depressed, anxious and burned out. Research suggests considering rude behavior as a virus we need to protect and inoculate our self from, so we don't get sucked into its contagious cycle. Try:

- **Valuing Civility:** Regardless of how well-behaved we think we are, we can all be a little kinder and more considerate. Take Christine's quiz at [www.christineporath.com](http://www.christineporath.com) to gain insight into your own behavior and then master the basics of smiling more, acknowledging people, and listening effectively to make our workplaces more civil.
- **Taking Back Control:** Help bring closure to uncivil behavior by journaling about what has occurred, thinking through the emotions experienced and then choosing to let them go. Then, invest energy in new learning opportunities that boost a sense of self and focus attention on the things that are within our control. For example, find a great mentor or re-craft parts of our job around our strengths.
- **Gaining Clarity:** In every interaction, we have a choice to lift people up or hold them down. To make the most of interactions with co-workers, start each day by getting clear and answering this question: "Who do I want to be?" We have more control than we think-even in the face of the most uncivil behavior.
- To learn more about creating civil cultures [click here](#).



## FINDING MORE MEANING

Most of us long to be more than the sum of the tasks we perform and yet, for many of us, finding meaningful work feels like something we just can't afford. Yet for decades, having a sense of purpose in our work has been ranked above promotions, income, job security, and flexible hours as the thing most desired by employees (Grant, 2014). And a growing body of evidence suggests that when we have a sense of meaning in our work we're happier, more motivated, more committed, and more satisfied, which enables us to perform better (Esfahni-Smith, 2017)

To learn more about finding meaning in our life [click here](#).

Of course, like all the wellbeing tools we're exploring, it's important to use meaning in intelligent ways to improve our wellbeing. For example, Professor Robert Vallerand has found (Vallerand & Houliort, 2003) that our passions can be either harmonious or obsessive. When we feel in control of what we love doing, we have the kind of harmonious passion associated with higher levels of physical health, psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, and life satisfaction.

But when our passion starts taking control of us and making it difficult to engage in other things or with other people, this is a sign that we have developed an obsessive passion. This leads to our self-esteem and self-worth becoming dependent on the outcomes of the passion, which can damage our relationships, undermine our wellbeing, and eventually lead to burnout. The key becomes finding the right balance between being led by and following our passions, and not letting them take control of you.

To learn more about balancing our passions [click here](#).

## WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

### INVESTING IN BELONGING

Researchers explain that we all need to feel understood, recognized, and affirmed by others. We all need to find our tribe. Studies suggest that focusing on others - so our relationships are based on mutual care, love, and a sense of being valued - is the easiest way to build a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Try:

- **Contributing to others:** Look for opportunities to regularly give to others or give back to your community. It might be offering a helping hand to someone in need, volunteering time, or being part of a local community group.
- **Finding our tribe:** Join a group that gives your team the opportunity to use interests or passions, or to learn something completely new.
- **Seeing others:** Show interest in others. Ask questions to learn more about them, and what lights them up. Listen better to people by putting our phones away, parking our judgments, and giving them our full attention.

## CREATING PURPOSE

Our purpose is the internal compass that motivates us to keep heading in the direction of how we want to live our life. Studies have found it gives us more motivation to accomplish the goals that matter most to us and be resilient in the face of challenges. Finding our purpose means uncovering opportunities to put our passions into action right now. Try:

- **Making the mundane meaningful:** Write down one of the small tasks and draw an arrow to the right and write the purpose of this task. Repeat this until you discover the bigger value of the little tasks you do together.
- **Showing people how their work benefits others:** Try to connect your team with end-users of your services or products so they can experience first-hand the positive impact their work has on others. For example, Facebook invite software developers to hear from users who have found long-lost friends and family members thanks to the site. When was the last time your team actually heard how what they did benefited the people you serve?
- **Developing a deeper understanding of your customers' needs:** Microsoft have found that after meeting end-users face-to-face, developers better empathize with the challenges they face and are more motivated to design software with users in mind. When was the last time your team talked with your customers or end-users and had the opportunity to ask how their work could be of better service?

## KEEPING OUR PASSIONS HARMONIOUS

Harmonious passion occurs when we engage in our work because it brings us intrinsic joy, we feel we have a sense of control and our work is in harmony with other activities in life. We also know when to disengage and are able to turn off the work switch when engagement becomes too risky or we wish to enjoy other activities in our life. As a result harmonious passion is associated with higher levels of physical health, psychological wellbeing, self-esteem, positive emotions, creativity, concentration, and work satisfaction. Try:

- **Scheduling real breaks:** Encourage your team to schedule other activities during the course of the day (like lunch with a friend, or a break to hit the gym) and time after work or on weekends for family, friends, and activities we enjoy.
- **Not bringing work home consistently:** Discourage people from taking work home as a regular habit. Don't expect people to consistently respond to late night or weekend emails or messages or to constantly attend after-hour calls or events.
- **Encouraging other hobbies:** The more additional things outside of work contribute to a positive sense of self, the less space our work performance will take up in our ego, and the smaller our chances of burnout. Encourage your team to have hobbies outside of work to keep their passion harmonious.



## AMPLIFYING ACCOMPLISHMENT

Accomplishment means different things for different people. For some, it means acknowledged achievements-winning an award, outperforming the competition, or being promoted. For others, accomplishment is more subjective in nature-completing a task, feeling able to do what is expected of us each day, a sense of competence or mastery in our work, being proud of the things we do.

Professor Carol Dweck of Stanford University suggests (2006) that when it comes to accomplishing the things that matter most, more important than our abilities is the belief that we can improve. Regardless of our current ability, we can improve, with motivation and effort. In the words of Christopher Robin: *"We're braver than we believe, stronger than we seem, and smarter than we think."*

For more on accomplishing what matters to we most [click here](#).

Dr. Kristin Neff recommends that when it comes to accomplishing the things that matter most to us it's important to approach new challenges with self-compassion, rather than self-criticism. When we treat ourself with the same kindness that a wise and kind coach or mentor would show you, studies have found that we activate our brain's caregiving and self-awareness systems, making it easier to believe that we are capable and worthy, and making us less self-conscious, less likely to compare ourselves to others, and less likely to feel insecure. And far from being self-indulgent or "soft," the deliberate use of self-compassionate talk has been found to be an effective means of enhancing our motivation, our performance, and our resilience.

[For more on self-compassion click here.](#)



## WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

### SETTING GOALS THAT WORK

Goals give us a standard to measure our progress and performance. They can boost our motivation, help prioritize what we do, and are associated with higher levels of achievement. When it comes to improving our wellbeing try to pursue intrinsically-motivated "want-to" goals - rather than "have-to" goals - that focus on opportunities for growth, connection, and helping others. And remember it's rarely the outcomes of a goal that bring us the most joy, but the process of pursuit. Try:

- **Knowing what we want:** Write a list of all the things the team would like to do and circle the ones that are really wanted. Reduce this list by underlining the ones that are really, really wanted. Finally, place a star next to the ones that are really, really, really wanted. These are the goals to focus on.
- **Auditing our time:** At the end of each week, spend 10 minutes noting down how time was spent this week in your team. Are we spending our time on the things that matter most to us? What changes might we need to make next week?
- **Stretching ourselves:** Set want-to goals that are just beyond our grasp and are hard, specific, measurable, and have a tight deadline. Then share the goals with someone who will give accountability and support.

## PRACTICING A GROWTH MINDSET

People with a "growth mindset" believe that while we're born with a certain amount of talent and intelligence, with learning and effort we can always improve-and neuroscience validates this belief. As a result, people who practice a growth mindset have the confidence to take on new challenges, re-frame failure and criticisms as teachable moments, and are able to achieve increasingly higher levels of success as their skills improve as a result of these experiences. Try:

- **Set learning goals:** Each week have at least one learning goal to improve upon. As this goal is tackled try to practice a growth mindset - let go of the outcomes, embrace mistakes, and identify the processes and efforts that can be built upon to keep improving.
- **Get comfortable with failure:** Write down the 3 mistakes you're team has made in the last year. Now, next to each one list the lessons or insights gained from these experiences.
- **Reward effort not just outcomes:** Give feedback and show appreciation for the efforts and learning you can see unfolding in your team, rather than just the outcomes being achieved.

## BEING SELF-COMPASSIONATE

When things go wrong self-criticism is often our first response but the problem with this approach is it leaves our brains feeling threatened, demoralized, and often stuck in a cycle of rumination, procrastination, and self-loathing that put the brakes on us taking action and disengages us from our goals. Tapping into our self-compassion, on the other hand, can help us break our entrenched patterns of self-criticism while still allowing us to be honest about our fears, to remember that no one is perfect, and to enhance our motivation, performance, and resilience. Think of a self-compassionate voice as a wise and supportive mentor who's encouraging we to see things in a more clear and balanced way, and to be kind, understanding, and accountable to ourselves. Try:

- **Being a wise friend:** Next time a mistake is made, failure is faced, or the motivation to get something done is lacking, try talking like a wise and kind friend or mentor would in this moment. What might they ask? What advice might they give? What strengths might they point towards?
- **Watching our language:** We can be so used to self-criticism that we don't even realize we're doing it. Try to pay particular attention to the words people use about themselves when things go wrong, and ask them what they would say to a colleague in this situation.
- **Soothing our pain:** Kind physical gestures have an immediate effect on our bodies. Try putting our hands over our heart or simply placing one hand over the top of the other in a comforting way.



## HEALTH

Healthy behaviors, including eating well, moving often, restful sleep, and mindfully restoring our energy are foundational to maintaining good physical health. A growing number of studies are finding that these behaviors are critical not only to our physical health, but also support other aspects of our wellbeing, including our mental health, social relationships, and cognitive functioning (Kern, 2016).

Unfortunately, researchers suggest that we tend to be lousy judges of how much looking after our body impacts our performance and our wellbeing (Rath, 2013). For example, one study found that losing ninety minutes of sleep is likely to reduce our daytime alertness by nearly one-third. Unhealthy food options often seem easier and quicker to grab, causing us to think we're saving time without appreciating the impact on our performance thirty minutes later! And frighteningly, researchers have found that inactivity is now killing more people than smoking, with some evidence that sitting for more than six hours a day greatly increases our risk of an early death.

## WHAT CAN YOU TRY?

### SLEEPING WELL

Unfortunately, roughly two-thirds of us report we don't get enough sleep and as a result studies suggest we're damaging our health, our mood, and our cognitive capacity. We assume that one less hour of sleep won't make that much difference, and indeed a bit less sleep once in a while probably has little impact, but the problem is that we do it repeatedly. The effects of this build up cumulatively over time, ultimately affecting our energy levels, mental health, cognitive functioning, work performance, and physical health (McQuaid & Kern, 2017). Try:

- **Sticking to a schedule:** Try to maintain a consistent schedule of sleeping and waking even on weekends. Resist the urge to sleep in until noon and instead grab a short 20 minute nap later in the day if more rest is needed.
- **Creating bedtime routines:** Give ourselves at least twenty minutes to wind down before bed with clear nighttime cues. Dim the lights. Lower the temperature by two to four degrees. Turn off anything with blue LED light (smart phones, iPads, computers, and TVs) as it impacts our sleep hormones, and reduce the temperature in the bedroom.
- **Tossing and turning:** Don't worry about waking in the middle of the night. Rather than lying there anxiously watching the minutes tick by, try some slow breathing or meditation.

## EATING WISELY

Try to start thinking about food not as calories, but as energy. After all, just about everything we eat is converted by our bodies into glucose, which provides the energy we need to stay alert. When we're running low on glucose, we have a tough time staying focused, our attention drifts and our bodies becomes sluggish. However, our bodies don't process all foods at the same rate. For example, foods like pasta, bread, cereal, and soda release their glucose quickly, leading to a burst of energy followed by a slump. Other food, like high-fat meals (think cheeseburgers), can provide more sustained energy, but require our digestive system to work harder, reducing oxygen levels in the brain and making us groggy. Eating well not only bolsters our health in the short and long-term, but it can also improve our mood, keep our energy levels high, and improve productivity (Rath, 2013). Try:


- **Planning our diet:** Think about the meals and snacks workers have access to. Try to have foods on hand that are good for short-term energy and long-term health.
- **Eating small and frequently:** The body's metabolism is meant to process energy on a regular basis. Spikes and drops in blood sugar are bad for our productivity, our brain, and our bodies. Smaller, more frequent meals maintain our glucose at a more consistent level than relying on a midday meal or big evening feast.
- **Tracking and adjusting:** Ask if what we are about to eat is a net gain or a net loss for our energy, based on what is known about all the ingredients. By asking this question, we can make better decisions in the moment and be aware of how we're tracking across the day.

## MOVE REGULARLY

Researchers have found that inactivity is now killing more people than smoking, with more than six hours of sitting a day greatly increasing our risk of an early death. In fact, every hour we spend on our rear ends saps our energy and ruins our health. As soon as our bottoms find a comfortable place to land, the electrical activity in our leg muscles shut down, the number of calories we're burning, the enzymes that help break down fat and our good cholesterol all drop considerably. The key to countering this seems to be increasing our activity as much as possible. Every extra opportunity we have to move counts and the good news is that there are literally hundreds of moments in a day when we can embed extra activity in our routine. The key is to find activities that we enjoy doing and are willing to do on a regular basis. Try:

- **Counting our steps:** Get a Fitbit or phone app to measure the steps taken each day. Start small, and boost the number, by adding 10 minutes of walking per day.
- **Getting up regularly:** Set a timer that goes off every 20 to 30 minutes and take a movement break for at least two minutes to help improve creativity, productivity, and wellbeing.
- **Start early:** Just 20 minutes of moderate activity can significantly improve our moods for the next twelve hours. Begin the day with a brisk walk, a stop at the local gym, or a yoga session at home.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a lit sparkler. The sparkler is in the center, with a bright, intense light at its tip and numerous sparks radiating outwards. The sparks are captured in motion, appearing as streaks of light against a dark, blurred background. The hand holding the sparkler is in the foreground, with fingers visible. The overall mood is celebratory and warm.

Don't short  
change yourself on  
*celebrating*  
what you've done.



# WANT MORE?

Want more resources to help improve our wellbeing?

Visit **[michellemcquaid.com](http://michellemcquaid.com)** to find free ebooks, toolkits, articles and podcasts with the world's leading wellbeing researchers.

For more ideas, be sure to check out our:



Our digital Wellbeing Blueprint Poster is a great daily reminder of all the different evidence-based ways you can improve your wellbeing using Professor Martin Seligman's PERMAH framework. Packed with over 50 small, practical, evidence-based interventions, you can use this wall chart for your school, workplace, or your home office.



These beautifully designed cards can help you more consistently feel good and function effectively at work. Engaging, educational, and practical, the Wellbeing Cards give you tested, practical, busy-proof steps for improving your wellbeing, based on Professor Martin Seligman's PERMA theory of wellbeing.



This book is your evidence-based, step-by-step blueprint for measuring your wellbeing using Professor Martin Seligman's PERMA framework, setting realistic wellbeing goals, and creating a personal wellbeing plan with busy-proof practices that you actually enjoy doing and will stick with! Your Wellbeing Blueprint includes over 100 wellbeing interventions to help you feel good and function more effectively at work.