Why Did Gen Z Quit?: Reorienting Toward Long Term Employment in Social Justice

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Advisor: Julia King Pool

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Abstract

Our current orientation toward work is failing members of Generation Z (GenZ) working to decrease suffering in their communities (i.e. social workers, housing case managers, and nurses). GenZ was born between 1997-2012 (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). GenZ adults who completed four years of college are just beginning to enter the workforce, yet they are already burning out. The current orientations of GenZ focus on drawing meaning from career only, workism and grind culture, negative emotions, cognitive distortions, and place an over emphasis on the individual. This paper offers a reorientation using the science of well-being, positive psychology. I suggest that this reorientation needs to widen sources of meaning, re-engage Generation Z employees to seek positive emotions, redefine success and achievement, and prioritize relationships. This reorientation will allow GenZ employees working to decrease suffering in their communities to avoid burnout and to stay in their chosen fields for longer. This is good not only for the employees but for their organizations and the communities they serve.

Keywords: positive psychology, burnout, relationships, meaning, reorientation, engagement, positive emotions, achievement

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To Those Fighting Their Own Burnout: While preparing to write this paper I spoke to many friends and colleagues. Upon mentioning burnout or struggles between work life balance many people would say, "Oh, you should write your paper about me!" These interactions are far from empirical data; however, the pain many of the people around me have experienced in their transition from school to the workforce is not lost on me. This paper was written with our experience in mind. May these words reorient you, decrease your suffering, shine a light in the depths of injustice, and allow you to keep fighting for better days.

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Preface

My baby boomer parents were delighted to send me to a small liberal arts university. As a member of Generation Z (GenZ) born in 1997, I rationalized tens of thousands of dollars of debt in exchange for a bachelor's degree at an American university.

While there, I heard repeatedly about the importance of *finding a calling - a job with a mission larger than myself*. The goal was to get good grades, make good friends, and make good on the promise to change the world. Dressed in my cap and gown, I sat between my fellow classmates - the proudest of whom were newly employed to work toward social justice. No matter that the jobs we all sought paid only slightly more than our upcoming monthly student loan payments.

I was one of them. My first day as a St. Stephen's Human Services employee was six weeks away and my first student loan repayment would shortly follow. In my mind, I was right on track. My dream has always been to help others. This is my vocation. After graduation I started my new job as a case manager with a sense of optimism. Case managers are typically assigned 25 people, who are arguably the most vulnerable in our communities - the homeless and the marginalized. My clients were individuals who had experienced long term homelessness. My job was to find them a placement in a rental property and to help them stay by finding gainful employment, submitting the appropriate paperwork and/or establishing healthy routines. Since I am oriented toward helping others, I expected this new role to be the perfect fit.

This feeling dwindled quickly. After a few months of work, I became more aware and cynical about the overwhelming nature of the homelessness issue. There were days that I would cry over lunch or on my way home because I felt like I was letting my clients down. I felt exhausted more often than energized. I was giving up hobbies and friendships because I did not

feel like I had the energy or mental capacity to fit any more in on top of work. I was experiencing a feeling of exhaustion, cynicism, and a sense of lack of accomplishment - what I now know is burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). And I was only 21.

Ironically, in the midst of my desperation to find homes for my clients, I found one for myself. Up until that point, my preparation for the job market had focused on deficit-based models. I found the piece I had been missing. I found MAPP. MAPP is the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania. In sharp contrast to the deficit-based lens I used on the job in Minnesota, in the classroom in Philadelphia I reoriented toward a more asset-based approach. We studied the science of well-being. The lectures, connections, and bonds I created became a mountain top experience for me. I felt so engaged and energized about not only the academic work but also the prospects for a personal and professional reorientation. I became aware that my definition of work and its purpose was narrow and negative. I wanted my lens toward my job to shift away from measuring injustice and to move towards measuring well-being - in myself and in my clients. The contrast between these two worlds highlighted a great tension within me. How could I make a difference in the world if I myself felt so disoriented?

After 10 months trying to reduce homelessness, I quit. This is a reality of my generation. Sixty percent of Generation Z reports that they want a job that has an impact on the world (Sparks & Honey, 2015). I am a part of this group. I want the work I do to make a difference in the lives of others. I am also a part of this group of employees experiencing burnout. In fact, a majority of human resource professionals report that burnout is sabotaging their workforce (Kronos Incorporated, 2017). In May of 2019, the World Health Organization officially classified burnout as an *occupational phenomenon* (WHO, 2019). GenZ is the first generation entering the workforce where burnout is a diagnosis. This suggests that the burnout problem is

prevalent and has a large impact. Again, I have experienced burnout. Using my perspective both as a member of GenZ and as someone who has experienced burnout, I am now in search of a better way to orient my generation away from the false idea that we are no more than our ability to produce.

Intended Audience

This paper is for my peers - college educated, student-debt-bearing, social justice-oriented members of Generation Z (GenZ). We were born between 1997-2012 (American Psychological Association [APA], 2018). Specifically, this paper and the recommendations made herein are with GenZ employees in their first year of working in fields aimed at decreasing suffering – for example – case managers, social workers, and mental health professionals. I will speak to the research, to my experience, and to the experience of my peers. My hope is that it will resonate and reorient my generation. I have spent my first year out of college and in the workforce listening to similar stories and am grateful to share what I have learned.

Current Climate

GenZ came of age in the years following the Great Recession of 2008. Since then the world has been one of growing inequities. Wage stagnation, the rise of the one percent and the skyrocketing cost of housing impact not only the type of work GenZ is interested in but also their understanding of the world and its systems. While wages have grown over the past 40 years, most increases have not kept up with inflation. Since 2013 wages have grown on average two to three percent each year, compared to seven to eight percent increases in the 1970s (Desilver, 2018). The individuals who are seeing increases in their wages often are a part of the one percent, the wealthiest members of our society. While the average American saw modest increases in their weekly wages (three to four percent since 2000) the wealthiest Americans

continued to get wealthier, experiencing a 15.7% increase in their weekly wages (Desilver,

2018). Widening income inequality is a result of this skewed wage growth. Despite wage

stagnation and the increase in wealth only for the top one percent, housing costs have risen.

Households which are rent burdened spend more than 30% of their monthly income on housing.

In 2015, 38% of renters were rent burdened, compared to only 19% in 2001 (Currier et al.,

2018). This increase in rent burden disproportionately affects households of color. African

American renters were rent burden 46% compared to the 34% white renters (Currier et al., 2018).

It is no surprise that GenZ is aware of this social inequity and are motivated to do

something about it. Because of the internet, it is easier to see it and easier to talk about it. We

grew up watching social justice campaigns like It Gets Better - a campaign where older more

established members of the LGBTQ+ community share their stories in a video format to

encourage young LGBTQ+ individuals that it gets better. We came of age participating and

running movements like #MeToo, a rising opposition to sexual assault and harassment; Black

Lives Matter, a response to police brutality and violence toward unarmed black citizens; and

Fight for Our Lives, a movement led by youth in opposition to mass shootings. Technology and

the rise of the 24-hour news cycle have placed the severity of the seemingly endless inequities at

the fingertips of young people. GenZers have grown up with an understanding of the world

shaped by social media that gives voice to a myriad of issues from more perspectives than ever

before. The media contributes to our current orientation by feeding us fear-based messaging. *If it*

bleeds, it leads is a common phrase when describing the sorts of stories that end up in the news

cycle.

All members of GenZ, both the *haves* and the *have-nots* grew up on this messaging and

in this reality. This paper is geared toward the members of GenZ who are in fact well educated

and arguably a member of the haves. That said, we are struggling none-the-less. While we are

more educated, we have yet to resolve other social pains.

GenZ is on track to be the most educated generation yet. 59% of GenZ adults who have

finished high school were enrolled in college in 2017, compared to 53% of millennials (those in

2002 and only 44% of GenX in 1986 (Fry & Parker, 2018; millennials were born between 1981

and 1996 and the GenXers were born between 1965-1980 [Dimock, 2019]). Yet despite attaining

more education, maintaining safe stable housing is a struggle for 10% of GenZ adults. Even

young adults in college experience homelessness (Morton, Dworsky, & Samuels, 2017). Out of

the 3.5 million young adults experiencing homelessness 29% were enrolled in college or another

education program at the time of the survey (Morton et al., 2017). The intended audience for this

paper, members GenZ working toward social justice, are hyper aware of social inequity in part

because they themselves are impacted by it.

So why does this matter? Why should we care about this? At a societal level we rely on

social programs to keep our country moving forward and to ensure our citizens are treated with

dignity. If we do nothing, our spending on employee turnover will continue to dominate our

costs. The social work turnover rate is as high as 25% in some areas (Keel, 2015), a single

hospital can lose 5.2 - 8.1 million dollars each year from nurse turnover alone (NSI Nursing

Solutions, 2016) and our education system will continue to be preoccupied with turnover costs

instead of improving education quality. Currently only 50% of entry level teachers last more than

five years (Yonezawa, Jones, & Robb Singer, 2011). The costs of burnout impact us all.

At an organizational level, the time spent trying to hire someone new pulls a manager

away from other tasks. This leaves the rest of the team to feel unsupported, all but guaranteeing a

continued cycle of burnout. With trust being an essential component for building strong

relationships, (Dutton, 2003) companies would be better off investing in their workplace culture and sustaining their workforce. This builds trust between the community and the organization. A revolving door of teachers, social workers, and healthcare providers leaves the students, clients and patients unsure of the quality of attention and services they receive.

At an individual level there are costs to continuing on with our current orientation. It leads to burnout and disengagement. Seventy percent of American workers are not engaged or actively disengaged (Gallup Consulting, 2008). Our current orientation leaves many of us feeling like we have no purpose, with worse mental health, and feeling lonely. Rates of depression increased 63% between 2009 - 2017 for young adults between 18-25 (Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Binau, 2019).

Given this bleak outlook, I propose a reorientation. This reorientation will address five learned mindsets or behaviors that are ineffective. Our current orientation is pushing us away from ourselves, away from our organizations, and away from our communities. Trends suggest that my generation, GenZ, is currently:

- oriented away from a larger source of meaning toward career only

- oriented away from multiple sources of well-being toward workism

- oriented away from that which is good toward that which is bad

- oriented away from accurate expectations of achievement toward cognitive distortions

- oriented away from community toward the individual.

The reorientation that I will propose is designed using the science of well-being, positive psychology, and my own experiences as a housing case manager. This paper was written with GenZ case managers and social workers in mind; however, the suggested reorientation may be

useful outside of this group. While I have noted the societal and organizational issues, this paper

will focus on the individual level.

Positive Psychology, a Reorientation

       I propose that preventing our own burnout starts with reorienting ourselves. This paper is

a reorientation away from the current deficit-based model used by GenZ employees. It will

follow the components of well-being outlined by the burgeoning field of positive psychology. It

is time that we reorient to see the fuller picture that includes meaning, engagement, positive

emotions, achievement, and relationships.

       Traditional psychology is oriented toward weakness and disorder. In 1998, Martin

Seligman the then President of the American Psychological Association, proposed a reorientation

toward the science of human strengths claiming that psychology had shifted too far away from

its original roots (Seligman, 1999). This initiative transformed into the field of positive

psychology. This shift can be viewed as a reorientation toward the positive (Pawelski, 2016).

This reorientation highlights what the field of psychology has often forgotten about; positive

emotions, a sense of meaning, and healthy relationships to name a few.

       Positive psychology assumes that we all have skills and abilities that we bring to the

table. Once these skills and abilities are identified positive psychology then seeks to build on

these preexisting strengths. In his book *Flourish,* Martin Seligman (2011) outlines various

components of well-being using his PERMA model. PERMA consists of five elements – positive

emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. Each of these elements

will be discussed in more detail throughout the paper. It is important to note that the road toward

well-being is not straight and narrow, rather it can be as different and unique as each individual

that seeks it. However, the PERMA model highlights elements that are used to build the road.

There are a number of models for well-being that are used within the field. I chose to use PERMA, less for the specific aspects that it includes but rather to highlight that well-being is not built off a single component.

Finally, when thinking about the well-being of individuals working in fields aimed at decreasing suffering it is not lost on me that these are people who have dedicated their lives to improve the well-being of others. Many in GenZ are choosing to dedicate their lives to the noble cause of helping others - but at what cost? Cynicism? Emotional exhaustion? Feeling unaccomplished? Burnout? The question is - how do we set ourselves up to sustain ourselves in this work?

Meaning

Current Orientation

This paper is exploring the unique characteristics of GenZ. One unique factor that consistently describes this group is that their search for meaning is shifting. People are orienting more and more toward work to find their sense of meaning. Data suggests that this includes an orientation away from religion.

GenZ adults are 17% less likely to belong to a religious group compared to older adults (Pew Research Center, 2018). By orienting away from religion, GenZ adults risk losing a sense of shared practices, dogma, and community. This includes a loss of shared frameworks for making sense of the world. In orienting away from meaning frameworks within religion, young adults from this generation often seek another way to make sense of the world. Often through work.

Whether consciously or not, it appears that many of GenZers turn toward work to help them understand their position within the world. This is compounded by trends of workism and

grind culture that are evidence that GenZ has turned towards work to find meaning.

Our current orientation toward meaning is narrow. Growing up many of GenZers were asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" and now that we are adults, we answer questions such as, "So, what do you do?" These are questions we typically ask to help us better get to know someone. However, the person asking these questions is generally looking for a response that indicates how we make money, or how we might want to make money. They aren't often expecting a response that indicates desire to be a father or one's efforts to be an engaged community member. Whether we go to these questions out of habit or because work is a *safe* topic to talk to a stranger about, it plays a role in narrowing our understanding of meaning.

Another example of how our understanding of meaning has further narrowed in on a job is the example of vocation. Another framework that describes one's source of meaning is the idea of *having a vocation*. Merriam-Webster defines vocation (2019) as "the work in which a person is employed" or "the persons engaged in a particular occupation." This secular definition of vocation has shifted away from a religious understanding of the word. Another definition of vocation (2019) from Merriam-Webster is "a summons or strong inclination to a particular state or course of action – especially a divine call to the religious life." This shift helps us to understand the narrowing of where we find meaning.

Specific Example

My experience mirrored the macro trends of a decrease in religious participation, loss of a meaning framework, and a narrow understanding of vocation. I grew up in a conservative Lutheran church and eventually left because I did not see my personal values reflected in the church. I remember feeling guilty that I left because I knew my mother and grandmother wanted me to stay. I remember giving up a sense of community. Even though I did not always agree with

the views of other people in the church it was nice to have a place where lots of people knew

who I was and who wanted to see me do well.

For many years I held on to the belief that if I could find someone to tell me what to do -

to orient me - I would no longer question my path. I could stop worrying about where I should go

to school, or what jobs to apply to, or how I would be the most effective in decreasing the

injustice I saw in my community. In high school, I was told that if I wanted to get into a good

college and have a decent job that I, at 14, needed to act as if every decision I was going to make

from that moment on would impact my later success. I was told that I needed to make my resume

sparkle. When asked as an undergraduate, what my major was or what I wanted to do after I

finished school, I was notorious for having a different answer each time. I was so fearful of

making a *wrong* choice that I was paralyzed by every option I was given. My only way to make

sense of the world around me was through my career. My inability to break away from the

pressures of making my resume sparkle further led me to adopt my work as my identity. It was if

I was putting on a new coat to show off.

Once employed with my first job, in my day to day, this meant that when I had a

frustrating phone call at work, it quickly ruined my day, even after my shift ended. I believe this

putting on of my job made it difficult for me to separate who I was from what I did for work. I

had invested a large portion of the way I understood my sense of meaning and purpose in the

world in my role as a housing case manager.

I could not see it at the time, but I now understand that because I had allowed my job to

fulfill such a large portion of my meaning in life I was slowly burning out. When I had a bad

phone call at work it turned into an internal dialogue of self-doubt, the call becomes not only

about the single interaction but about my effectiveness in my role, and the meaning of my

life. Like many in my generation, I needed a reorientation.

Reorientation Toward Meaning

To outline a reorientation for Gen Z, I will provide an analysis of the literature on meaning and how we may widen our sources of meaning beyond work. Then I will suggest how we could use the framework of vocation to explore possibilities for meaning outside of work. Finally, I will reframe the question, "So, what do you do?"

The field of positive psychology has long been interested in the study of meaning, albeit a challenging term to define. On the whole, a life of meaning is one that adds benefit not just to the individual but the to the larger community (Damon, Menon, & Bonk, 2003). I will offer a few different definitions of meaning. Viktor Frankl was a psychologist and a survivor of the Holocaust. He understood that there must be meaning even within suffering. He quotes Nietzsche in saying, "He who has a way to live for can bear with almost any how" (1963, p. 76). Frankl observed that when a man lost his inner sense of moral and spiritual self, he fell victim to the circumstances of the concentration camps. But, when a man maintained his sense of meaning, he was able to continue toward a pursuit of living toward values, even in the face of suffering. This, he observed is the ability to give meaning.

Frankl's definition relates to GenZ working toward the alleviation of suffering. Using the example of those who were able to find meaning in one of our history's most dire circumstances, GenZers can work to find meaning even in the face of extreme injustice. Working to decrease the suffering of other people is difficult, however, it certainly provides the opportunity to find meaning. When accompanying others through their own suffering, it can create an uneasiness within ourselves.

As such, GenZ employees can reorient around their values as a way to find greater

coherence and purpose while working to address difficult situations at the macro and micro level. For example, reorienting toward an opportunity to use kindness with a client who has lost housing and reorienting toward fairness in a city marred with systemic issues.

Another definition suggests that there are three criteria to meaning - coherence, purpose and significance (Martela & Steger, 2016). Coherence is the ability to make sense of one's life (Martela & Steger, 2016). For example, developing a redemptive narrative arc after recovering from a heroin addiction and using that suffering as a tool while working in a treatment center for struggling addicts. Purpose is having a core set of goals or larger aims (Martela & Steger, 2016). Using the previous example, a purpose for this individual might be to decrease the overall usage and the supply of heroin in their community. Lastly, significance is feeling a sense of inherent value (Martela & Steger, 2016). For this individual they may find significance in knowing that they have something unique to offer to their community, such as sharing their redemptive narrative with others who are hungry for a sign that recovery is possible. Such as, sitting side by side with a client in active addiction and sharing their story, in the right time and in the right way, that resonates beautifully with the client.

For GenZ employees working to decrease suffering, the hope for a meaningful impact is constant but the ability to see it can be challenging (Kronos Incorporated, 2017). A reorientation toward being able to make sense of their lives (i.e., coherence), having a larger aim (i.e., purpose) and inherent value (i.e., significance) will serve as a stabilizing force in work that is full of volatility.

Meaning has been studied as early as the ancient Greeks. Aristotle referred to a life of meaning as eudaimonia. Eudaimonia often refers to a life of virtue or the process of living a good life. This is in contrast, hedonia which refers to a life of pleasure or happiness which narrowly

focuses on increases of positive affect and decreases of negative affect (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Eudaimonia is more than pleasure. Researchers have traced four motivations for living a life of eudaimonia, pursuing intrinsic goals or values, being autonomous, being mindful or fulfilling basic psychological needs (Ryan et al., 2008).

As GenZ employees working to decrease suffering in our communities, understanding the difference between living a life in the pursuit of eudaimonia versus hedonia helps to outline that work can be about more than just the sum of our positive and negative affect. This might be a dramatic reorientation for some. Taking a step back from the day to day of client interactions, working toward social justice can be a path to eudaimonia. A housing case manager experiences hedonic lows, but he can also reorient to notice for example: building relationships that lead to increased trust with clients (i.e., pursuing value), making an income that supports his own well-being (i.e., being autonomous), paying attention to the small improvements in his understanding of the paperwork (i.e., mindfulness) recognizing the moments that affirm that he belongs within his group of coworkers (i.e., fulfilling basic psychological needs).

Meaning is also defined through a religious lens. Vocation, through the Lutheran lens, is the use of God given skills and talents in the ways the world needs (Neafsey, 2006). This differs from the secular definition of vocation, which can sometimes refer to as the work that one is paid to do. Applying the Lutheran lens of vocation as a way to expand our understanding can serve to open the possibilities of how we might define our own meaning.

GenZ narrowly assumes that our meaning is equal to our job descriptions or their paid contribution. For example, a GenZ case manager looking to expand their sense of meaning may engage more deeply with friends or family, with community groups, or teach their neighbors about a talent of theirs. Another way GenZers working to decrease the suffering in their

communities might use their talents is through volunteering in a community other than their work-based community. Research has shown that individuals who volunteer regularly are most altruistic compared to individuals who sometimes or rarely (Cnaan, Smith, Holmes, Haski-Leventhal, & Handy, 2010). A reorientation toward a broader understanding of meaning would help GenZ orient away from an overemphasis on their job.

To support a broadening definition of meaning, the next time you are at a party or a social event and you meet a member of GenZ you might avoid asking them what they do for work. Rather you might ask about what's important to them, what do they spend their time doing, or ask them about the last trip they took. It is up to all of us to shift how we think about sources of meaning and how the questions we ask can impact the way others think about their meaning.

Engagement

Current Orientation

This paper is exploring the unique characteristics of Generation Z. As previously mentioned, this generation is oriented toward work as a source of meaning. Another unique factor that consistently describes this group is the rise in participation of grind culture. Grind culture or hustle culture describes putting in endless hours and making sure that others know how hard you are working (Griffith, 2019). While GenZ may be orienting away from religious institutions, it seems that many have bought into a dogma of work. Workism seeks to describe this.

Workism is defined as the belief that work is not only necessary for financial means but that work also serves as the means to one's identity and purpose (Thompson, 2019). This trend is present when looking at today's GenZ employees working in entry level jobs aiming to decrease suffering. In a context where so many people start to see their work as a means to identity that

they have a hard time seeing past the limits of their roles. An inability to see beyond the limits of our roles leads to tunnel vision.

As such, one characteristic of grind culture described by Aiden Harper in an interview with Erin Griffith of *The New York Times* (2019) is that "it creates the assumption that the only value we have as human beings is our productivity capability – our ability to work rather than our humanity" (p. 9). This culture has been criticized because when work is a means to identity, we put ourselves at risk for burnout. This is because what we do can easily be mistaken for who we are. This is the argument of Ayala Pines, a researcher of the existential viewpoint of burnout. Pines (1993, p. 33) notes that "the root cause of burnout lies in our need to believe that our lives are meaningful, that the things we do – and consequently we ourselves – are useful and important."

Feeling ineffective in one's role leads to feelings of frustration, disappointment, or sadness - each characteristics of burnout. This is compounded by work that aims to decrease injustice. Work such as decreasing homelessness, closing the achievement gap, or minimizing the abuse of opioids in communities is inherently complex. The fact that GenZ wants so badly to see meaningful change and yet struggles to see meaningful change on these large issues should come as no surprise.

Despite the high number of hours spent working, surveys suggest that actual engagement in the work is limited. Gallup (2008) reports that 70% of American workers are not engaged or actively disengaged. For GenZ, this sense of disengagement doesn't stay at the office. It can seep into homelife as employees continue to ruminate on their work and what could have been done better. This rumination prevents employees from engagement at home and the ability to be present in the rest of their lives and relationships.

In the next section, I will discuss how over engagement in work contributes to high burnout rates in GenZ employees.

Specific Example

GenZ adults spend roughly a quarter of their time at work. Yet many of us, myself included, allow our work to define more than 25% of who we are. In my role as a housing case manager I willingly took on an orientation that it was my job to end homelessness, that if I did my job well there would be no need for housing case managers. While this was an effective mindset in some regards, I also felt a sense of pressure to solve an inherently complex problem. This meant that even if I was not at work I was thinking, processing, and reading about how I could do my job more effectively, how I could work toward ending homelessness in my community.

While my participation in grind culture did not go as far as to include social media posts boasting about my excessive work hours, I never the less opted to work an additional 20 hours past my contracted amount. Within weeks of beginning my role, my new job consumed the majority of my time, thoughts, and energy.

Reorientation toward Engagement

Engagement is operationalized as the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity (Seligman, 2011). Engagement is an essential part of well-being based on the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). But engagement is not exclusive to work. A reorientation toward the complexity and wholeness of employees will allow individuals to re-engage by disengaging from a narrow-minded grind culture. This will allow individuals to re-engage with numerous domains of life including interpersonal relationships, a sense of community, physical well-being, psychological well-being and economic well-being, the I COPPE model (Prilleltensky et al.,

2015). In this section I will propose a reorientation for a broader engagement using the I COPPE model as outlined by Isaac Prilleltensky and colleagues.

The current orientation toward productivity, a disregard for high turnover rates, and a focus on the bottom line all contribute to grind culture. Grind culture orients GenZ to believe that worth and productivity are synonymous. Science suggests otherwise.

The first two domains of the I COPPE model are address the need to belong. "Human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Whether we satisfy our need for belonging through the relationships we hold with other individuals or through the communities we belong to we may feel a drive toward motivated engagement in life (Martin & Dowson, 2009). For GenZers working to decrease suffering in their communities, fulfilling their need to belong can result in an increased sense of engagement.

As previously mentioned, occupational well-being encompasses more than just the work we get paid to do (Prilleltensky et al., 2015); and requires that we expand our definition of occupation. For example, to include the time spent volunteering or fulfilling other roles such as being an uncle or parent.

Physical well-being is satisfaction with overall health and wellness (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). Engaging in physical activity allows for greater presence, patience and serves as a mood booster (Ratey & Loehr, 2011). Physical activity can be a 30-minute bike ride three times a week, even that is enough to change how our brains function (Ratey & Loehr, 2011). Physical activity improves cognitive processes including planning, scheduling, inhibition, and working memory (Ratey & Loehr, 2011). This reorientation toward engaging in physical health is especially important for GenZ given that Gen Z, experiences more loneliness and reported worse

health compared to previous generations (Cigna, 2018). Grind culture falsely orients people toward work only, blinding them of the comprehensive benefits of engaging in physical wellbeing.

Psychological well-being describes emotional wellness (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). Practicing meditation for GenZ college students was found to decrease symptoms of anxiety and increase sleep quality (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Caldwell, Harrison, Adams, Quin, & Greeson, 2010). Lower levels of anxiety and getting enough sleep, more than six hours, is tied to a decreased risk for burnout (Turnipseed, 1998; Soderstrom, Jeding, Ekstedt, Perski, & Akerstedt, 2012). Strategies to increase psychological wellbeing have been studied and included things such as meditation practices and gratitude practices. For example, meditation practices may include focused attention - pay attention to a chosen object, like the breath or an open monitoring format - non-reactive monitoring of one's experience (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008). An early study on gratitude found that practicing daily by writing down three good things can lead to increased positive affect (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). These are just two examples for how GenZ can reorient toward increasing their psychological well-being by engaging in activities outside of work that actually support their engagement with work.

Lastly, economic well-being is satisfaction with financial standing (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). This is an important consideration for individuals early in their careers. For example, housing case managers make an average of $35,915 each year (Pay Scale, 2019). Adding in the burden of student loans and skyrocketing rents (Friedman, 2019; Currier et al., 2018), those serving as similar roles may be less satisfied with their economic well-being. Given that this paper is focused on reorienting individuals in their first year, GenZ employees may decide to work a second job to boost their economic well-being. Although this is, of course, an unfair

burden to GenZ employees working to decrease injustice as evident by wage stagnation (Desilver, 2018). Alternatively, for GenZers struggling to meet their financial obligations, they may choose to focus their energies on finding engagement in other domains.

The I COPPE model (Prilleltensky et al., 2015) provides examples of where we might reorient toward broader engagement in our lives, albeit an incomplete list. The intended he take away from this section is that that well-being consists of multiple domains and I COPPE can provide Gen Z with examples of where to reengage.

Emotion

Current Orientation

This paper is exploring the unique characteristics of Generation Z. As previously mentioned, this generation is oriented toward work as a source of meaning and as a constant and narrow source of engagement. One unique factor that consistently describes this group is the rise in depression, anxiety, and self-harming behavior that has been reported as a trend over the years (Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Bianu, 2019). When looking specifically at today's GenZ employees working in entry level jobs focused on decreasing suffering, this trend is especially noticeable. It makes sense that in a context where the goal is to alleviate pain and decrease illbeing, this hyper focus on the negative will be apparent and exacerbated. For example, teachers in urban school experience high levels of daily stress (Gallup, 2014), 17% of nurses will leave their jobs within their first year (Blegen, Spector, Lynn, Barnsteiner, & Ulrich, 2017) and 37% of GenZ reports that they have or are currently receiving mental health services (APA, 2018). Each of these is an indicator that new GenZ employees are suffering as are the communities that they intend to serve.

The current orientation toward the negative is connected to the prevalence of burnout in

GenZ employees. As a reminder, burnout is defined as exhaustion, cynicism, and the sense of lack of accomplishment in regard to work (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Negative emotions such as sadness, anger, and irritability are used to describe the very symptoms of burnout.

Specific Example

My experience mirrored the macro trend of a rise in inequity, depression, and rapid job dissatisfaction. As a GenZ senior in college, I noticed that my peers were struggling with mental illness. This problem did not disappear at graduation. We carried it with us to our first jobs out of academia. Even while in the comfort of a university, we struggled. It is not surprising that upon landing in my first, low paying, high stakes, high needs position – I carried this struggle with me alongside my search for meaning and my resignation to participate in grind culture.

As a case manager, I know full well the daily experience of responding to and looking for negative emotions. Within the agency I was working for, my job was to predict which one of my clients would be the most likely to lose housing. We had a scale for this. The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) attempts to measure someone's risk for returning to homelessness (OrgCode Consulting, 2015). During my orientation, I learned that the measure caused discomfort for both the case manager and the client. In fact, the SPDAT is supposed to be issued every six months and because of the stress and dis-ease that it would cause, my co-workers would often delay it or avoid doing it at all.

The focus on negativity is also evident on a large scale. The Point in Time (PIT) count, which is a federally mandated count of everyone experiencing homelessness across the country on a single night in January (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012), seeks to count the sheer number of people who are without a place to stay. It is required nationally once a year. In

our county, we completed the count four times a year. I volunteered for the overnight count twice and upon returning home at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. I would lay restless from the deluge of negative emotions. It was difficult for me to digest as a new case manager. And, it was difficult for my managers to digest despite their years of experience.

The issue of homelessness is our communities rightfully induces negative emotions for anyone who is confronted with the PIT data. Learning how to digest this reality without burning out requires a reorientation.

Reorientation toward Positive Emotion

The orientation toward the negative has long been identified in psychology. This is termed the negativity bias. The negativity bias is the way our brains respond to the negative more strongly, exponentially, and more persistently than equally positive events (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). On top of this, Americans tend to be more skilled in the negative differentiation of negative emotions compared to positive emotions (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). For example, if we feel good, we may say that we are happy. However, if we are feeling negatively, we might say that we are tired, sad, angry, frustrated, or irritated to name a few. When we focus on the negative it becomes easier to ruminate and amplify the things that are going wrong (Rozin & Royzman, 2001).

In order to reorient, GenZ must learn to also notice the positive. At the end of the day someone who focused on the things that went wrong may lay awake in bed thinking about how a client missed their intake appointment for the fourth time and if they miss again, they will have to be discharged from the program. However, when choosing to focus on the good things this individual may realize that they are finally caught up on client paperwork for the first time this month! These are vastly different orientations and we react very differently to them. In the first

scenario, we are more likely to lose hope or become more cynical in regard to the chances that the client has to succeed. In the second scenario, when we are able to identify small progress, it is easier to remain hopeful and engaged with our clients in the presence of the inevitable negative.

This example for why GenZ needs a reorientation toward the positive has been studied and can be done. Positive emotions include joy, love, pride and can be increased (Fredrickson, 2001) Her Broaden and Build Theory states that when we experience a positive emotion, like awe or joy, it signals to our bodies that we are safe and because we experience safety, we are more likely to trust others and engage in the environment around us. This sets us up to experience more positive emotions continuing the broaden and build cycle (Fredrickson, 2001).

It is a mistake to assume that challenging work in marginalized communities is void of positive emotion. With a reorientation toward the positive, GenZ employees can learn to celebrate successes, recognize their strengths and integrate the practice of gratitude (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). What follows are three evidence-based strategies that have been studied and used to increase well-being including celebrating success with active constructive responding (ACR), strength spotting with VIA character strengths, and gratitude journals through interventions such as hunt the good stuff or three blessings (Gable, Conzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Waters & Sun, 2017).

When something good happens, especially when working in case management, it is too easy to skip over it because there are other things that seem like they *need* our attention more immediately. However, research suggests that we can slow down and celebrate the good things, even if they are small wins. Celebrating wins is related to higher relationship quality (Gable, et al., 2006). One technique for celebrating wins is Active Constructive Responding (ACR), which

describes an engaged response with a person sharing good news. This sounds like, "Who was there when you found out?" "How did it feel to get the thing you have been working so hard for?" ACR is considered both an active and a constructive response.

Too often, we see an orientation away from good news. In contrast to ACR there are three other types of responses. First, active – deconstructive, this is when we say things like, "Wow, do you think you're ready for a position like that?" or "How much is that going to cost?" Responses like these often degrade relationships and make it less likely that the person will share good news with you in the future. Passive constructive responses sound like, "Nice." or "Good job!" They have a relatively neutral effect on relationships. The last type of response is passive deconstructive, "What do you want for dinner?" This type of response is when the good news is completely ignored. This also places additional tension on the relationship.

A second intervention that could reorient GenZ toward the positive is strength spotting. Strength spotting is a positive intervention studied by the VIA Institute on Character (Waters & Sun, 2017). Researcher Chris Peterson, along with Martin Seligman worked to create an index of human strengths. The list of strengths is composed of 24 strengths; creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness, perspective, authenticity, bravery, persistence, zest, kindness, love, social intelligence, fairness, leadership, teamwork, forgiveness, humility, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, spirituality (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The activity of strength spotting is as simple as it sounds, spotting these (and other strengths) in another person. Strength spotting interventions can help increase self-efficacy, or our belief in our ability to effect change, and increase positive emotions (Waters & Sun, 2017).

One way to dive into learning about strengths is to take the VIA Character Strengths Survey for yourself. It is free to take at www.viacharacter.org. Through a series of questions, you will learn what your signature strengths or your top strengths are. Sometimes signature strengths can be surprising but often times they are intuitive for us. Learning about your own strengths can increase your well-being and decrease negative emotions up to three months after a strengths intervention (Bu & Duan, 2018). After learning about our own strengths, it can become easier to see them in another person. Research shows that using our strengths can increase happiness and life satisfaction, while also decrease depression (Schutte & Malouff, 2019).

Take for example Liam. Liam was a middle-aged man that was already housed when I started working with him. He was in school pursuing a degree in art. I would stop by his home for our monthly check-ins, he was always excited to show off any new art he had made at school. Here I see the strengths of creativity, curiosity and love of learning. I could also talk to him about the courage or bravery it takes to show another person his art and how I felt grateful that he would let me in to see his art. Spotting these strengths help me to see the other person as a full person, not just a checklist. When work got busy and stressful, I felt like I was running out of time to complete all of my tasks, the people I was working with quickly became a list of "to do's" and if they need more than what was on my to do list it would sometimes begin to feel unmanageable. Strength spotting is quick and it's an effective tool to humanize the people we are working with.

Strength spotting can be used in any relationship we have with others, however, in the work context we will want to also strength spot our co-workers. Strength spotting is another way to celebrate little things especially when the work can feel overwhelming. The team I worked on was humorous, kind, and sought out both creative and fair solutions when addressing problems. I

noticed that at first when I started strength spotting out loud to others it felt awkward and unnatural, but I have also found that it helps me to slow down and pay attention to the other persons words and actions.

One specific example that illustrates the benefits of strength-spotting is my co-workers use of bravery. I had just put my two weeks' notice in, and she had been encouraging me to speak with the executive director before I left. She grabbed me at the end of the day and brought me over to his office so that we could talk. I am incredibly grateful for her and her use of both bravery and love to encourage me to use my voice. Many of us may have co-workers or bosses that annoy us for one reason or another, but I have found in my own personal use of strength spotting, I am also reminded that even the people that drive us up a wall brings something to the team or organization.

While using character strengths can build relationships and helps us be more appreciative of the people we work with, character strengths can also be overused. In one study, character strengths of forgiveness, honesty, and self-regulation predicted burnout (Allan, Owens, Douglass, 2019). While forgiveness, honesty, and self-regulation are all useful we can also take these or any of the other 21 strengths to the extremes. For example, honesty can become harmful if we use it carelessly.

The last intervention for cultivating a gratitude practice can come in a variety of forms. The first was mentioned earlier. A gratitude journal, sometimes referred to as hunt the good stuff or the three blessings exercise asks the individual to make a list of three good things that happened that day (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). Different research has studied using the gratitude journal for varying lengths. Benefits of gratitude interventions have been shown to

be wide reaching including improvements for both physical well-being and improved mood (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Another gratitude intervention prompts the individual to write a letter to someone they haven't yet properly thanked. This might be a mentor, a family member or an old friend. After writing the letter the individual is encouraged to read the letter to whom they wrote it for. This has been shown to increase participants happiness and life satisfaction, and decrease depressive symptoms (Toepfer, Cichy, & Peters, 2011; Toephfer, & Walker, 2009; Rash, Matsuba, & Prkachin, 2011). Gratitude interventions could be completed as an individual practice or with a team of colleagues or even with clients.

Achievement

Current Orientation

This paper is exploring the unique characteristics of GenZ. As previously mentioned, GenZ is oriented toward work as a source of meaning, as a source of constant engagement, and toward an increased experience of depression and anxiety compared to other generations. Another unique factor that describes GenZ are that rates of perfectionism continue to increase.

Perfectionism is a personality trait that encompasses both unrealistic standards and harsh self-criticism (Curran & Hill, 2019). This suggests that GenZ adults believe that other people expect more of them and they expect more of themselves compared to earlier generations (Curran & Hill, 2019). Further, there are three dimensions of perfectionism.

The first is self-oriented perfectionism, this is directed at the self, hold unrealistic expectations and are over critical of themselves (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The second type of perfectionism comes from others, socially prescribed perfectionism - where the individual believes that their social context is demanding and they are being judged (Hewitt & Flett, 1991).

Other-orientated perfectionism is when the individual projects unrealistic standards unto others (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). GenZ shows higher levels of perfectionism across all three domains compared to older generations (Curran & Hill, 2019).

When looking at GenZ employees working to decrease suffering, the trend of perfectionism is present. It makes sense that in a context that is often high stakes, the individuals who care deeply about their work and the people they serve strive for perfection. For example, housing case managers aiming to house clients quickly, social workers getting individuals connected with the right support services, and teachers getting their entire class up to grade level.

The current orientation toward perfectionism is connected to the prevalence of burnout among GenZ employees. With the rising expectations that GenZ has for themselves and others around them it is no surprise that they may sense a lack of accomplishment. When we expect perfection but fall short, which we almost always will, are we not setting ourselves up for failure?

A sense of lack of accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) is a symptom of burnout. A sense of a lack of accomplishment is about how you feel about your work, not about the strict facts. For example, an overwhelmed GenZ housing case manager oriented toward perfectionism, may have successfully housed four of their clients. However, the case manager is more likely to focus on the one that they have yet to house, without thinking about the four that they have already housed. This might lead this case manager to doubt their ability, self-worth, and whether or not they should even be in their current position as a housing case manager.

In order for GenZ employees to continue to work toward achieving progress they must reorient away from a narrow definition of achievement.

Specific Example

Entering the social services workforce, I believed that I could help people. I was jumping into the deep end of a system that defines success very narrowly. At no point during my undergraduate education or training for my first position did someone sit me down and tell me that the measures of success that we use do not work for everyone. As a result, any interaction or relationship with a client that ended without stable housing was talked about as a failure. This thought is an example of all or nothing thinking (Reivich & Shatte, 2002) – either I get everyone housed and I am a success, or if there is even one person without housing then I am a failure.

During my time as a housing case manager, goals were often too large or were inconsiderate of the needs of the clients. For example, for every client our goal was to get them housed as quickly as possible. This was the expectation. I had to fight against this expectation while working with Sam. While I do not have the licensure to be a mental health professional, it wasn't hard to see that he was struggling with his mental capacities. He would repeat the same stories to me over and over and over with little recognition of what he was doing. When I attempted to gently remind him that he had already shared a certain story with me, Sam would apologize and then usually return to the story before our time was up. He displayed signs of paranoia. The goal of getting him into any housing that would take him seemed like it was against his best interests. We worked with a lot of landlords who attempted to maximize their profits by neglecting the necessary maintenance on their buildings. I was worried that housing Sam might lead to an eviction which would only make his housing process more difficult. By holding out, I was able to help Sam meet with the appropriate mental health professionals that were able to provide him with a diagnosis that resulted in a higher level of care than my program could provide. In contrast to my experience with Sam, I had another client James. When working to house James I followed to protocol, get him housed as quickly as possible. Unfortunately,

getting him housed was only a small battle compared to what followed. The unit was in much worse condition than we were led to believe. When we talked to the landlord, he blamed James. The landlord went as far as trying to intimate him by having someone steal his possessions. Even with the city and the courts involved, James ended losing his place.

These stories have two very different outcomes. In these examples, I outlined how the goal of housing everyone quickly didn't work for either Sam or James. When we don't allow for our goals to be personalized to our clients, they may end up worse off if we continue to push our timelines on them. What's more, when we narrowly define our impacts as a success or as a failure, we risk experiencing an unnecessary symptom of burnout.

Reorientation toward Achievement

Our current orientation toward perfectionism prevents GenZ employees working to decrease suffering from seeing progress that our clients our making. This is why Gen Z employees working to decrease suffering need a reorientation toward a broader definition of achievement. Within this reorientation and thinking about current measures of success, we must consider how these measures of success prevent us from seeing strengths that our clients have and the progress that they make even when they do not achieve their ultimate goals. In this section, I will outline how cognitive distortions and measuring proficiency alone is insufficient. Lastly, I will provide a research-based overview of goal setting.

Thinking traps or cognitive distortions come from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT seeks to help patients pay attention to thinking patterns and identify ineffective thoughts (Beck & Dozios, 2011). Thinking traps refer to the shortcuts we create. However, these shortcuts are not always accurate or helpful, which leads us to misinterpret what's happening around us (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Common thinking traps include jumping to conclusions – without

complete evidence we think we know how things are going to turn out; personalizing – thinking that we are the cause of everything that is going wrong; externalizing – blaming everyone except ourselves for the things that are going wrong; and all or nothing thinking – thinking in extremes often leaving out far more likely outcomes in the middle (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). These thinking traps pop up from time to time for all of us. The most important part is learning how to identify them and combat each of them.

Identifying cognitive distortions is one way that GenZ can build more accurate representations of success. Another way to build more accurate representations of success is to measure progress in addition to proficiency. One exemplar that has figured out how to measure both progress and proficiency is education. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, placed high standards on schools requiring that 95% of students were meeting the standards set by each state. However, there is research to suggest using the mean scores of these tests were not actually measuring individual improvements or overall school effectiveness, rather they were more predictive of a child's background (Kim & Saunderman, 2005; Linn, 2000). It is important to note that the students who are most negatively impacted by tests that are tied to their background are students of color and students without stable housing. What followed was a shift in how the education system measures a child's growth, they started measuring progress. Students test scores were compared against students who had similar backgrounds (Miller, 2017) along with comparing their scores from the year before. So that means they began examining performance changes from year to year and performance in comparison to other students (Miller, 2017). Now imagine being a teacher in a school which was failing to meet expectations prior to making these measurement changes. These changes would allow teachers to spot incremental improvements. Many of your students may have previous struggled to meet grade level expectations but now

you are able to find joy in watching them exceed their predicted growth each year. This shift may help you and your coworkers fight off the looming sense of burnout because it has made it easier to see progress.

What if we could find ways to shift the way we measure success in other social services?

I would argue that we can. Whether it is taking seeking to measure not only proficiency but also progress or using additional strength-based measurements, I believe that is within reach to redefine success. Furthermore, this may also serve as a way to fight off burnout by broadening the definition of success.

As a reminder of one of the three parts of burnout a sense of inefficacy and lack of accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). In Minnesota, my home state, one-way money is distributed to housing agencies is through their ability to help clients meet proficiency, safe and stable housing. However, Minnesota could also choose to measure and distribute funds based on progress toward housing. For Sam, who took nine years to even consider housing, how were the workers that maintained contact with him during that time valued by the state when they were distributing funds? Or once I came into contact with him, I was spending a number of hours with him every week working towards housing by securing benefits, facilitating apartment showings, helping him complete paperwork and get to doctors' appointments but because he was never formally housed through our program, we never received any funding for our work with Sam. If we had received funding for that portion of our work, I believe that it would lead to higher quality interactions because service providers would be more focused and making sure that the individual is receiving the services that they need without feeling pressure from their organizations to turn these interactions into a profit. Recognizing that large scale policy change

would have to happen in order for anything like this to happen, this next section will focus on

goal setting, a skill that could be used at the organizational level or by individual front line staff.

A common framework for goal setting is SMART, specific, measurable, achievable,

realistic and time bound (Sull & Sull, 2018). Using a goal setting framework like SMART helps

to measure both progress and achievement. Viewing goals as dynamic allows for flexibility if

something changes. This flexibility allows us to keep the same higher-level goal while shifting

how we get there if something is not working out (Thompson & McEwen, 1958).

Angela Duckworth (2016) studied high achieving individuals across many fields and

found that high achieving individuals have a single high-level goal that they strive for. This high-

level goal could be to be the best pitcher in the major leagues or to decrease the suffering of

individuals experiencing homelessness. Under each of these high-level goals there would be

mid-level goals and low-level goals. Each tier of goals might take varying amounts of time to

achieve. High level goals are often our life's work whereas low-level goals might be completed

in less than a year (Duckworth, 2016). It is important to note that the lower level goals are in

service of the high-level goal. Using the high-level goal of decreasing the suffering of

individuals experiencing homelessness, this individual may have identified that bringing five

people who have previously experienced homelessness to meet with elected officials to advocate

for additional funding for housing programs as an appropriate mid-level goal. This mid-level

goal is in service to their high-level goal, both part of a goal hierarchy (Duckworth, 2016).

Relationships

Current Orientation

This paper is exploring the unique characteristics of GenZ. As previously mentioned,

GenZ is oriented toward work as a source of meaning and as a source of constant engagement.

GenZ is experiencing increasing rates of both depression and perfectionism. Each of these previous topics provides evidence for how GenZ has shifted away from relationships and toward self-focus. This takes a toll on relationships.

Decreases in religious participation (Pew Research Center, 2018) highlight how GenZers are orienting away from certain communities. Workism and grind culture highlight how GenZers are orienting time away from friends, family, and their hobbies to spend more time at work. GenZ is more likely than older generations to report experiencing loneliness and overall worse health (Cigna, 2018). The increases in perfectionism highlight how GenZers have internalized rising expectations which may lead some GenZers to struggle with questions of self-worth. The effects of these current trends are only amplified through technology.

Checking emails after work? Putting in extra hours on the weekends or after the office closes? GenZers are able to work from practically anywhere, a couch, a coffee shop or even the beach. Technology makes bringing work home almost effortless and there's a real cost to it. Even politicians have begun to recognize the detrimental effects of being *on* and available to work all day every day. Recently, January 2019, the New York City Council introduced a Right to Disconnect bill (726, 2018), which would make it illegal for private employers to require staff to check and respond to electronic communication outside of work hours (Kesslen, 2019).

GenZers inability to detach from work is also related to an increased risk for exhaustion and psychological strain (Sonnentag, 2012). This too impacts relationships. Working as a case manager, especially working with clients who have experienced trauma, is often emotionally demanding, not being able to take a break by always being on leads us closer to not only burnout but also vicarious or secondary trauma (Bell, Kulkarni, & Dalton, 2003). Vicarious trauma is

defined as a switch in the providers thinking after engaging with clients' trauma in an empathic

way. Symptoms of vicarious trauma are similar to those of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Specific Example

        One night after work I went to the gym with my fiancée, Grace, and I had my work phone

with me. I was not intending to check it, but it was in the same pocket as my car keys. So, as I

was leaving the gym, I took out my keys and saw that I had a text message from one of my

client's mom. She was concerned about the mental health of her son, Stephen, because she

hadn't heard from him in quite some time and she was wondering if I could go check on him.

Stephen had been in and out of the hospital for suicidal ideation. Despite being clocked out and

with Grace I felt that I needed to respond. Grace and I were leaving the gym to go hang out with

Jakobe, her cousin's 3-year-old son. Jakobe is one of my best friends and a light in my life yet, I

had a hard time being fully present for the rest of the night because I was worried about Stephen.

Now, this may be an extreme example because it really could have been life or death for Stephen

however, I was clocked out. It was not expected of me that I have my phone on me let alone

respond to it. Yet it pulled me back into work making it hard to detach, relax, and recover.

        I worked hard to leave my phone at work or if I had to bring it home, I would usually turn

it off. The few times I checked my phone outside of work, I felt the draw back into the work. I

would feel like I couldn't put my phone down or that I needed to answer one more text messages

or listen to one more voicemail. In the last few months working as a case manager I was far more

likely to take my phone home compared to when I started the job. I would argue that the burnout

was catching up to me and I was trying really hard to prove to myself that this was the right job

for me.

Reorientation toward Relationships

The current orientation of letting technology get in the way of being fully present has allowed GenZ employees working to decrease suffering to focus on themselves and on their work of the relationships with other people. Research suggests that we need time away from our work to detach and recover, however, with the *always on* mindset we lose our time to detach and recover (Park, Fritz, & Jex, 2011). This always on mindset whether intentionally or not damages our relationships and makes it easier to become self-centered. It is time to reorient GenZ away from this always on mindset and toward relationships.

It is undeniable that the relationships that we hold have a significant impact on our well-being. In a study of undergraduates, it appears that the happiest 10% had significantly stronger relationships than the rest of the participants (Diener & Seligman, 2002). In part, as humans our need to belong is both universal and fundamental. Belonging is defined as frequent positive interactions and that these interactions occur within a relatively stable mutual concern for the other person (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In this section, I will outline some of the research on relationships, including why they are important and how to build better relationships. Within the context of addressing burnout by widening our sources of meaning, relationships matter because as humans we do not operate alone.

Those of us who are frontline staff of social service agencies are in the business of people. We work for people who are often the most vulnerable in our communities. So while building strong relationships may come naturally to someone who has chosen this work, I want to highlight the benefits of strong supportive relationships to help these individuals further understand why building these relationships is so important.

Anecdotally many of us may understand the costs of not having the time to engage in quality relationships. Research shows that lack of social support is linked with an increased chance of death (Berkman & Syme, 1979). Comparatively, social support is linked with better physiological response to stressors (Edens, Larkin, & Abel, 1992; Kamarck, Manuck, & Jennings, 1990). Having strong social support both at work and in life is linked with lower rates of burnout (Russell, Altmaier, & Van Velzen, 1987; Etzion, 1984). This suggests that as young professionals GenZ is better off avoiding the grind culture and the idea that life is defined by our ability to produce. For GenZers, knowledge of this research will help them to reflect on if they are spending enough time with people who would be a part of their social support network. If upon reflection GenZers find that they are not spending as much time as they would like to be this could be an opportunity for a reorientation towards building social support.

Bonding and bridging social capital are about how we build relationships with people who are similar to us compared to those who are different. Bonding social capital refers to the relationships that we nurture with individuals who are similar to us, generally with a shared social identity. Bridging social capitol is about the relationships we engage in with individuals who are different than we are, often times these individuals are of a different race or socioeconomic class (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Linking social capitol is different from bridging social capitol because it aims to break through the vertical power structures (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). Szreter and Woolcock (2004) hypothesis that a lack of linking social capitol has led to a decrease in trust in systems, specifically, within disenfranchised communities. As social workers and case managers when we intervene in the life of someone else, we often times represent the *system* that especially for the most vulnerable in our communities has continued to fail them. This research on bonding, bridging, and linking social capitol is useful for social

workers and case managers to help us understand the privilege and power we bring to the relationships we have with our clients.

One way to increase the quality of our relationships is by focusing on creating more high-quality connection. High-quality connections (HQCs) are defined as short-term, interactions that happen between two people, whether longtime friends or complete strangers, that are often positive in both the subjective experience of the moment as well as the structural features (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). For example, one afternoon, I was with a former client of mine, James, I was taking him to the store so he could pick up some new clothes. I don't remember exactly what we were talking about, but I remember having a deep sense of gratitude for my work, and for him.

HQCs are those moments of profound connection where we see the humanity in another person. HQCs have health benefits, cognitive benefits and can help build trust (Stephens et al., 2011). These connections are important both at work and in our personal lives. Working to identify the HQCs that we have is one way to build our sense of social support.

Conclusions

Throughout this paper, I have outlined how the current orientations contribute to the burnout of Generation Z employees working to decrease suffering. I wrote from my personal experience as a member of GenZ and as a former housing case manager. I used the science of well-being, positive psychology, to suggest how we can reorient away from burnout and our current orientations toward a life of well-being. The reorientations outlined in this paper will allow for GenZ employees working to decrease the suffering of others to find meaning outside of work, feel engaged across various domains including but not limited to work, recognize the positive, build more accurate expectations around achievement and success, and reprioritize

relationships. This reorientation will allow GenZ employees working in social services to stay in

the chosen fields longer and not burnout. Having engaged employees stay in their roles longer

helps to build trust with the community members who they serve. If our end goal is truly to

decrease the suffering in our communities, we need to prioritize the well-being of those

providing services. By prioritizing the well-being of the individuals serving the most vulnerable

in our communities, we will see benefits for organizations and the individuals who are being

served.

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