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Session: Work-Life Balance
Presenter: Julie Whitelaw
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Molly: We are at the top of the hour so at this time I would like to introduce our speaker. Speaking first, we have Dr. Julie Whitelaw. She is a clinical psychologist and the Director of the Women’s Mental Health and Aging Corps of the Sierra Pacific MIRECC, Director Emeritus of the VSIN 21 MIRECC’s post-doctoral fellowship program in clinical psychology, and a core investigator at the Sierra Pacific MIRECC and the Center for Implementation to Innovation at VA PA Healthcare system. She is also Clinical Associate Professor Affiliate of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine. Her clinical interests and program of research focuses upon the impact of interpersonal violence on women’s physical and mental health and to this end, she directs the WISH, Women’s Interpersonal Violence Sexual Assault and Health Laboratory at VA PA HCS.

Joining her today is Dr. Mark Hager. He is a member of the faculty at Menlo College in the Psychology Department. He has served as a content consultant and expert on postgraduate mentoring with the Sierra Pacific MIRECC Advanced Fellowship and Training Program in Psychology and Psychiatry for more than a decade and has worked with the CDA program evaluation effort and CDA enhancement initiative since 2010.

Julie and Mark, I do want to apologize if I made any errors in those introduction, but nonetheless, Dr. Whitelaw, if you are ready, I would like to turn things over to you.

Julie Whitelaw: Thank you, Molly, that was great. Okay, so can you see my screen?

Molly: Not yet. Have you clicked “Show my screen”? There we go, perfect.

Julie Whitelaw: Wonderful, okay, so as Molly mentioned, the talk today is titled, “What Does the Science Say about Passion, Harmony, and Satisfaction at Work and Empirical Pressure to Work by Balance for Physician’s Academics, and Other Clinical Researchers?” Basically, we wanted to create a different type of talk. We felt like everyone has heard the talks about work-life balance that have told us that we need to understand and prioritize our multiple roles, make time for our families, outsource unnecessary tasks. We have all heard about how exercise and hobbies and social support are necessary for promoting satisfaction at work and the value that has been placed on time away from work or vacation. We have also probably heard some of the research findings, the gender research findings, suggesting that women are less likely to perceive work-life balance or to see work-life integration as possible or easily obtainable relative to man. We are all aware that the reality is that the workplace environment can dictate a lot of our experiences and our perceptions of work-life balance. But what we have hoped to do today was to go a bit deeper into this topic. We assume that everyone has already taken to heart those notions that relaxation, recreation, outside sport, etc., boundary are important for work-life balance. What we wanted to bring up is there is actually a gap in the literature that I think we all ought to ponder, which is that the literature actually will tell you that if you pick two people who are in a similar job in a similar work environment with similar responsibilities, we don’t have an answer necessarily for why one person perceives their life to be balance and is satisfied, whereas the other person is dissatisfied and perceives poor balance. We wanted to dig a little bit deeper today and talk about what are some of the factors within us actually that helps us fit within our work environment and determine whether or not we have struck a good balance.

Specifically on that path, our talk today is going to focus around three central questions. One is is work-life balance a problematic concept or a red herring that actually keeps us away from optimal satisfaction in the workplace? Two, how is work-life balance actually associated with satisfaction at work or is it associated with satisfaction at work? Three, what are the key factors and essential ingredients from the empirical literature that are associated with job satisfaction particularly among early career clinical scientists like those that are on the call to the PDA community because we know that job satisfaction and positive perceptions of work-life balance actually are linked. Okay, and within that, we are focusing on three of the key factors: mentorship and developmental networks, what role did those play? Is gender a factor and if so how, when, and why? What are the benefits for intentional or creation of intentional scholarly communities to enhance our work-life experience?

Okay, so to the first point, the first question, is work-life balance a problematic concept or a red herring? Well, we think it may be. In fact, many of us have probably gone to a work-life balance talk where we have looked at a picture just like this of scales and have sort of been told to focus on how much time is going into work and how much time is going into home and how do we parse and separate the boundaries? All that actually can accomplish for some of us is yet another way to fail because now we are preoccupied with how balanced the scales are and have we kept the minutes or the hours or the energy allocation to both work and home life “balanced” as if that is possible always and as if that is necessary.

We also think that this encourages as an overly dualistic perspective that work and life actually don’t go together, but they are two separate things that must be kept separate. That is a probably a problematic concept that keeps us from maximizing our satisfaction. The biggest problem with this concept is that it actually allows us to incorporate our work life into our larger identity or vice versa. For those of you that read the article, you can see the point the author is making that in an area where we are, we are a luxury work force, if you will. We all have the academic credentials to choose a life in clinical research. This pathway for the most part was selected for all of us. There probably is something that brought us into the field that is part of our bigger identity that gets focused on and honed at work, our work identity, but that doesn’t get left behind when we leave work and go home. We are emergency room doctors, clinical psychologists, teachers, advocators, mentors, researchers throughout the whole 24-hour day, not just while we are at work. I think the artificial concept of leaving the work identity at work and not taking any of that with us into our home life, not taking any of our home life identity into the workplace is very difficult for people to reconcile with.

Mark Hager: If you look at the research, the research will back that up and it really shows that in more contemporary conceptualizations of work and life harmony, we are finding that dualistic approach really promotes an unnecessary challenge or \_\_\_\_\_ [00:07:41] between the two, work and home, and really lays out the question of how these elements of our professional identity are often groomed and developed in our personal life and vice versa, how our home lives and how our histories inform our professional identity. Think for a moment about the reasons that you entered into the arena of medicine, clinical work, psychology, or the clinical sciences. That question will come up a few times today. We ask that you ponder it each time. Chances are, there was a very human interest that first sparked your interest in your professional pathway. Then consider the other side of this here, which is really how much of your ego, your esteem, and your identity are wrapped up in your academic or clinical title or achievements. How are successes and failures at work, how do they actually inform our broader identity? Is this necessarily a bad thing or perhaps a bad thing always? In the end, this model, as Julie said, encourages us to watch the clock and become unhappy when one element takes away or removes from the import of another. This, of course, as we see looking at this literature that really indicates work life balance I not alone in accurate source of job satisfaction.

Julie Whitelaw: Right, and what that really means is that work-life balance in terms of balancing hours, minutes, or efforts, is not associated with job satisfaction or perception of work-life balance. It’s not about is everything equal.

Mark Hager: Where we then take this and the question that we really wanted to add to this conversation is to remove ourselves from the duality and really ask what does it mean to have a harmoniously integrated concept of our work and life identity. To promote a really healthy identity of integration of the work and home and vice versa. This may offer especially for those of us in the clinical sciences, a much more fitting alternative explanation and especially if one aligns this concept with the notion of passion, joy, and pleasure. These are bigger than our work identity because when our work is aligned with our passion, the work doesn’t feel like work. It doesn’t feel as if it is pulling away from the energies of our day-to-day life. It is in flow with our day-to-day life so that both the accomplishment and challenges feed our passion and enliven our identity. It also allows us to think perhaps more of a complexity of our identity and the value we place in those other areas of our lives.

Productive use of time and parsing of time becomes less about a calculus of this is taking away from something in a disaggregated fashion and actually is contributing to a much more whole person or a whole vision of that time we spend at work and the time we spend within our homes. Again, here is that question, do you remember what brought you into the field? This question will recur for us today. Again, it prompts us to think about the personal and professional ownership of our ideas, our issues, the problems that we want to solve that really brought us into our clinical practices and into our research. We created priorities. We took responsibility. We made choices for these areas of our lives and now when we attempt to balance these two sets with again the dualistic model, we run into the conflict of which am I prioritizing? Which am I? Which gets satisfied in me? Which as Julie said a moment ago, it is not a really very rich or, indeed, complex way of interpreting this balance.

Julie Whitelaw: One of the things that I think that Mark picked up on and was very nicely reflected in the article that we sent around, was that part of the taking this down to the what do I do about this, the healthy integration of one’s work identity and one’s home life and vice versa is a very individualistic process. That you see him in that article really grapple with what it means to be an emergency room physician and what that means in terms of time commitment and what that means in terms of flexibility or lack of thereof and how that may interact with some of his home life activities. At the conclusion of the article, he said, “But I love what I do and this is what I want to do. I need to sort of build my life around it. I don’t lament emergency medicine because the hours are long. I love emergency medicine and I built my life around it. I don’t try to make it bend to me.”

Mark Hager: He really does a good job of introducing the passion he brings into his field and shows how the two complement one another. Again, thinking about what he is doing, his identity as an emergency room physician is much greater than just a stat of or the typo that is inherent in any given portion of that work. When you think that about the passion and how life and work balance are associated with satisfaction at work, yes there are some areas where it does occur. We know that satisfaction helps you to think “Hey, my life is going pretty well.” It’s a general factor associated there, as you can see, personal control, that choice element that we just discussed. Flexibility either with the work duties or with work time, you remember that from the doctor’s reflection as well. The selection of a particular schedule allowing him to make a contribution from his place of expertise and from his place of passion. That helps to reduce what another clinician might see as a stressful work environment, but for him contributes to the balance. However, that said, there are also other issues associated with satisfaction at work.

Julie Whitelaw: Right, so we know in general, people who have work environments that are built on less autonomy, less flexibility, or higher in stress or more hostile climate, are generally associated with lower levels of satisfaction and negative perception of work-life balance. However, like Mark said, we know that there is variability in that within the same environment. Some people have a more positive and some people have a less positive experience. So these are the ways, these are the things that the literature talks about, how work-life balance is not associated with satisfaction at work, okay. So we know there is variability and the perception of work-life balance among individuals in the same setting in the same field, similar schedule or similar extra work factors like number of children or family related duties. One of the important , but really under recognized role that factors here is the role that intra individual characteristics like passion that play into the fit between you and your work environment. That really, this really is the factor that predicts who is happy at work and who is not. So in answer to the question is work-life balance associated with satisfaction at work, I think we can get to the answer no, maybe yes, or but maybe a yes, but. It is, however, we need to qualify it, okay.

So when we think about what is passion, passion is the thing that brought you into the field. It’s the topic that sets you on fire. It’s the thing that makes your heart sing. It is characterized by your strong and dedicated engagement in this activity. It’s the hypothesis that wakes you up at night. It’s the patient that you can’t stop thinking about. It’s the love of what you do. However, passion can have two dimensions, right. Obsessive passion or an unhealthy passion, your engagement in the activity is perceived as non-voluntary. So that means if either wasn’t chosen freely by you, someone chose your topic for you and told you you should like it. Or it could have been chosen by you. However, as you started to go down your work path, your perception that is stopping this area of work is not voluntary. Disengagement from this activity is not permissible or autonomously regulated. In fact, this activity or this type of passion is internalized into your identify with contingencies meaning that you say to yourself or think to yourself stopping working, disengagement from this passion is dangerous. It will either threaten the integrity of the passion or one’s identify. So in other words, if I don’t write the next paper, I won’t get the promotion. If I don’t get the promotion, I am no longer a professor, scientist, researcher, success. You can see how this type of unhealthy or more obsessive passion would be linked to poor satisfaction at work because non-voluntary engagement and a diminished sense of autonomy are associated with negative perception and satisfaction and it is going to color your more negative perception of work-life balance.

One of the ways that happens or the mechanisms, if you will, is that there have actually been several studies that have shown the perception that what you are doing is not, was not voluntary or is associated with dangerous contingencies, is that it inhibits your ability to have \_\_\_\_\_ [00:17:09] experiences or flow experiences where you are actually able to get so immersed in your work that you enter the “zone.” Okay, so in this situation where you find yourself so preoccupied with the outcome of what will happen if you do work at work, you see a real inhibition of harmonious integration of work and life because one factor of work is perceived to detract from the other. Disengagement from work will bring punishment and work feels laborious and “like work.”

Mark Hager: What we know then is that you are much less likely to have the experience of being in the zone, to being in flow when you are engaged in those activities that you are not, you have not chosen to do. When you are in the zone, it indicates satisfaction. Whoever, when you are not, and here is our first poll question for participants. If you were to be a self-empiricist, just take a moment to reflect on how you are doing, the poll question is being flashed to you now. How often do you find yourself worrying that not engaging in work when you are away from work is going to come with consequences? They select what?

Julie Whitelaw: This doesn’t mean if there is something that you are supposed to be doing and you just put it off or haven’t done it, it is the sense that stopping work or not being continuously engaged in work is going to detract from your long term satisfaction. Literally, not able to stop thinking about work.

Mark Hager: Perhaps you also worry about how you are perceived at work. So this is the fear of being seen or the slacker because you took time off to take time with your family or child.

Molly: Thank you very much to both of you. We have nearly a perfect bell curve. I have never seen this before. I am going to go ahead and share the results. You all can talk through them real quick.

Mark Hager: We haven’t seen that either.

Julie Whitelaw: So I guess the good news is there is a small minority of either a never obsessively worrying about work and maybe you can give the next lecture and teach us what it is you know that the rest of us don’t know. It looks like the overwhelming majority of people have a little bit of this and some of you have a lot of this. We are going to talk more throughout this talk about what this may mean. This is a little bit of a litmus test for you of how are you doing and are your trading away some satisfaction by being sort of non-autonomously engaged in your work. So just hold that thought. Think about what your answer was and we are going to move forward.

Okay, so moving to the concept of harmonious passion or the other end of the passion spectrum, which is healthier and more positive, again we see the harmonious passion and strong engagement in an activity that you are committed and dedicated to. It is hopefully, what brought you into the field to begin with. But here, engagement is perceived as voluntary autonomously internalized with your identity and free of identity linked contingencies. Thinking about the area that you are working in was freely chosen by you, but also the idea that disengaging from it even temporarily does not degrade the passion. My passion, women’s health, is going to go on whether I am involved with it or not. I need to be able to go in, get in the zone and do my research or my clinical work, pull back out, go through other things in my life, and not feel like I am no longer a women’s health researcher if I take a break, if I take a vacation, if I go on maternity leave, etc. The passion remains intact and I can come in and out of it. This is something where your litmus test for harmonious passion is that disengagement and reengagement are easy. Once you are disengaged, you are not preoccupied about what will happen during the time that you are disengaged. Okay, and you might imagine how this is linked to satisfaction because voluntary engagement and a sense of autonomy are strongly linked with perceptions of satisfaction and perceptions of balance in the workplace irrespective of long work hours and other factors within the work environment.

One of the reasons we think this happens is that activities that you are strongly engaged in that feel voluntary and autonomous are more likely to promote like a joyful whole immersion in the topic. You will experience flow experiences and we know from the literature that the ability to get completely and joyfully immersed in your work is what mediates the relationship between the intensity of the engagement, even if that intensity is very high and satisfaction is exactly what you see reflected in the article that we sent around by the emergency room doctor.

That what is really wonderful about this is that the idea that you can be totally joyfully immersed and then safely pull back from your work and then totally reengage and joyfully reimmerse again. It is associated with a more harmonious model of integration of work and life because this engagement from one or the other is permissible. It doesn’t feel dangerous to you. When you are working, it doesn’t feel like work. It simply is the passion that brought you into the field.

Mark Hager: Also, then with that disengagement comes the opportunity to find greater fulfillment in both sides of your life. One side will enrich the other because you are open to those experiences rather than feeling disintegrated or pulled apart by each of these. They also may in some ways feed one another in the realm of confidence because of successes in one area feeding over to or informing successes in the other.

So now that we are thinking about this harmonious experience, we want to ask the second question. This question has to do with experience and flow. How often do you find that you experience flow, the joyful immersion in your work or experience of being in the zone?

Julie Whitelaw: I don’t know what that at the end of that is.

Mark Hager: Something that it doesn’t feel like work.

Molly: I can probably fill that question in, yes, such that it doesn’t feel like work. Sorry, it got truncated there.

Julie Whitelaw: That is a fudge word.

Molly: Well, it looks like we have got a pretty responsive audience coming in. These answers are anonymous so feel free to answer as you feel. We have got about a 70 percent response rate and a pretty good trend so I will go ahead and close the poll out at this time and share those results.

Mark Hager: In this case, what is very exciting to see is the majority of people are reporting flow experiences close to 80 percent. As Julie said, those of you who were very successful, having balance away from obsessive passion, we really love to talk to the 80 percent of you who sometimes to always experience flow. For those of you who do not, again, think back to your answers to the first question or perhaps this is also a very good opportunity to think about your network and your colleagues within your organization and within your home life who is experiencing flow and how.

Julie Whitelaw: What is that about? I think that is where this question should take you. If you are not experiencing flow, is that because you are in a research area or clinical area that doesn’t feel like the right fit. Is there something else that you can do to sort of adjust that? I don’t think that anyone has the expectation to have flow experiences all the time. I have a heavy administrative burden with my work and I never had an administrative flow experience. But you know, if I don’t expect it every minute of every day, the more you have, the more of an indication that you have something that you are strongly and willfully engaged in that you really enjoy. The less experiences that you have of flow may tell you there is a little bit of a disconnect between what you are doing and what you would like to be doing. That may be something that you can address.

Mark Hager: One of those \_\_\_\_\_ [00:25:37] keep coming up on your screens is the idea of active cultivation then of your harmonious passion. What is it that you are doing that really reflects your personal priorities? This again gets back to taking that responsibility early on. How did you identify the priorities in your work and life in terms of their integration? What times did you feel perhaps led astray or did you follow a path that may have not been, again, yours and yours chosen. None of us gets to do this all the time. However, as Julie pointed out with the data from our own internal pol, some of us may be feeling that bit of a pull more than others. One way to ask the question yourself here is to ask “Am I surrounding myself with individuals who are well aligned with my priority?” This is will tie into the concept of developmental networks and intentional scholarly communities, both professional and social network that foster the passion in our lives, but do not feel as if they are pulling away from it.

One of the ways we address this, one of the ways we have talked about this in the MIRECC work, is thinking about the roles of mentors and developmental networks. Mentors, we have often heard about as that singular ideal, that one person to whom we look up perhaps as a role model, that one person who sponsors our work. Developmental and professional networks then are that multiplicity of relationships where those opportunities occur and they are no longer situated with one individual because one of the big challenges in the mentoring literature going back many decades is that notion of the scarcity of the perfect mentor. If there is not perfect mentor, therefore there is no mentor for me.

Julie Whitelaw: So exactly, the available literature will absolutely draw a relationship between productive membership and satisfaction, as well as really career success for medical-academic. However, the literature will also say one of the most common complaints in these young research communities is that they can’t find someone. Particularly, they can’t find someone that embodies the word passion and they will work like integration that they would like and that they lament the fact that mentors are very loathe to initiate conversations about work-life harmony.

We know that these these complaints are more prevalent among women. We know that female gender has been associated with greater risk of early career departure and lower job satisfaction in academic medicine. We also know that female gender is associated with greater likelihood of a negative appraisal of work-life balance or the perception that a harmonious integration is not possible.

Mark Hager: Yes, one of the ways we can also help women and men is to consider again the role of the individual mentor versus the role of the developmental network. Because with the developmental network, it can hand you opportunities for multiple opportunities of exposure to differing harmonies, differing balances in life, and different models from which you may take individual pieces that craft your individual especially composed harmony. Now, when one thinks about the gender-based discrepancy, we are well aware of historical discriminatory practices. They continue to play out in the workplace day to day, especially in the idea that some women are still viewed as maintaining certain roles and not others, either in clinical work or administrator’s work. Also, again, the stereotype and sadly the very real data that shows working women are more likely still to maintain greater responsibility for childcare, family responsibilities, and as we are seeing the younger generations now responsible for both older and children ,the sandwich generation.

Julie Whitelaw: Now, while we recognize that it is very clear in the literature that women do face very real world challenges in terms of work-life balance, I think increasingly both men and women face this. Though there is a need to address environmental barriers, for sure there is more work to be done, one thing that is starting to show up repeatedly in the literature—Mark and I have observed it in our own trainees and we have talked a lot about it, is that the internalization of gender roles and expectations for women can become a pathway for obsessive passion. In other words, an accepted preoccupation with being the perfect wife, the perfect mother, and a perfect academic, we are having to do something exactly the way the person in the office next to me is doing it. Or worrying disproportionately about the time that I am away from work because maybe I will be perceived negatively because I am taking care of a child or my assumption is that is what my colleagues are thinking.

Over preoccupation or internalization of this can become a pathway to obsessive passion. We have all had peers, colleagues, trainees, some mentors, that have wanted to downplay taking maternity leave or not say again, “Yes, my child is sick again and I need to be away.” Or this or that and really you see the creation of an unnecessary pathway of rumination about what I should versus what I am doing. We really think this is one pathway that women may be overly encouraged to perceive that it is not okay to disengage from work when sometimes the work environment is actually not communicating that.

I think the flip side that several authors have written about this, I think this is something that is very important for young clinical scientists to think about, I think that thinking upward in the training trajectory, so for mentee to mentors, I think that the idea that there is an ideal person that is both going to embody our research passion and live the life, model the life that we want to live for us, is probably unreasonable. Your mentors are living their own life. You need to live your life. I think we have a probably have an unrecognized bias in our field of projecting particularly unreasonable and unfair expectations on female mentors of what they should model.

Mark Hager: Then, if you think about that, again, conceptualizing your professional and persona world as intertwined multiple individuals in a network, introducing multiple women and men into your networks will help ease the expectations on any single mentor or role model. When you take that actively own that particular part of the process, what you are also doing then is saying I am also moving away from that particular style of modeling for myself and for others. What we recommend for this is very clearly is the notion of creating intentional developmental network. When you have these multiple models, you have models of professional practice and also lives outside of academic medicine. These networks are intentional dynamic and if you can see from the image here, there are constellations of individuals. Sometimes an individual takes greater priority. Other times, they will fade just as they do in our personal and professional relationships. But what they really offer the opportunity to do is to craft our own authentic identity to harmonize the multiple aspects of our lives as no one else can or should do. Nor should they be responsible for providing us these pathways.

Julie Whitelaw: So we see this in recommendation after recommendation in the empirical literature. At the end of the slides, you will see the references that we use. There are many, many references about the value of developmental networks in fostering young academics, particularly in health services research and academic medicine, again, moving away from the concept of the wonder mentor, right. Thinking about moving away from the concept of the wonder mentor and taking more responsibility for creating a network that we have selected and chosen really is a mechanism for increasing our own autonomy. Again, the CDA enhancement initiative which is what is sponsoring this webinar is exactly the embodiment of it. This is the mechanism by which we are hoping we will facilitate the development of some of these networks for all of you.

Mark Hager: Recognizing, of course, that as you enter into the CDA enhancement initiative and your other professional areas, these relationships, as we said, are dynamic. They should change and evolve over time. Were you to create that map you just saw today and again in two to five years, ideally, individuals would shift in and out of the picture because as you can see here, you are being more deliberate and intentional to really bring in those individuals who help to foster that identity and participation that feeds your own passion. Sometimes those are more easily identified, similar areas of research, similar areas of expertise. They also may be a little bit more difficult to accept or to frame. That is perhaps the willingness and social and psychological safety of both seeking and providing honest appraisal and telling the truth, getting back to the poll data we just took. Being able to have a conversation with someone about why perhaps at this moment, I am feeling a little bit out of balance or out of sync with the passion that brought me to my field.

Julie Whitelaw: Now, a very, very concrete recommendations that the literature has and we would like to echo here is that you were very, very intentional and deliberate and active in the creation of your own scholarly community so that you have the widest array of mentorship, consultation, and support available to you and that you actively cultivate relationships that offer models of harmonious passion. All of us know someone that was so inspiring to us. We can say we are just so in love with what they did, that they just embodied that aspect in the field. What can you learn from that? Also, people that model healthy integration of work and life in their own context.

Mark Hager: Then on the flip side of that, remembering people may be watching you. Be aware of what lifestyle and life integration you are modeling for them because as Julie mentioned early, the idea of mentoring up perhaps the best model of that lifestyle you wish to lead is coming from your post doc or your clinical associates in a more junior position because they are also wrestling with those questions.

Another side of creating intentional communities is we always have to be aware of the challenges of separation that are both developmental because the relationship needs to evolve or perhaps because of incompatibility with your own needs or goals or those of the person whom you look up to as a mentor or colleague. So you really want to pay attention to where are those congruencies of interests, practices, and passions. How does somebody’s work life integrate with themselves, but also what are they bringing into your world? Then recognizing, too, the difficulty sometimes of disengaging especially in our very much globally networked work environment. Julie has this phrase, “Avoiding the jerk at work.”

Julie Whitelaw: I mean I think one of the things that almost no one talks about, I mean there is quite a literature on this, but you certainly never had a mentor talk about this. In fact, these developmental relationships change to the point where sometimes they need to end or sometimes separation is recommended. Very often, it is dissatisfaction at work. It is a relationship that was once working and was once productive and no longer is for whatever reason. Thinking about intentional disengagement when collaboration or work environments no longer fit where you are or what you are doing. Related to that, I think there has been historically a sense that every work environment, hopefully they only have one, some of them may have two. Every work environment has someone who is brilliant, helpful, well resourced, very, very powerful, but they are a problem. They bring a lot of drama with that. That while engaging with this person may bring some positives, it also really disintegrates your balance because the person has a lot of negatives. So we call that for the purposes of the slides, the jerk at work. But the book that was written about this was called the *No Asshole Rule*. It came out of the business school at Stanford, really talking about how the perception that a brilliant but very difficult person is productive, when in fact it is just the opposite. Do not choose your intentional scholarly communities based on someone’s academic reputation if they are impossible to work with. Really consider how much more balance and satisfaction you may have if you get rid of the jerk at work.

Mark Hager: This also then relates to the dark side of mentoring. Now, part of mentoring relationships that we don’t also want to talk about potentially abusive relationships or exploitive relationships. Times when a mentor is unwilling to open their network. This could be the jerk. I have great contacts, but I am not willing to share them. It may also then be placing people at a low priority. The very person may you have put up on a pedestal puts you down on the ground of the pedestal. Recognizing that this is also a place where both people in the relationships need really to own their power in it, to identify where the challenges are, share those challenges, address them, and perhaps mutually arrive at a departure or a separation.

For that then, we really wish to close with a call to action. Our call to action here has been you have heard it throughout the session today. Identifying your passion. Again, what was it that brought you to this field, to this specialty? How do you align that passion with your work? Some days, we all have moments where it just doesn’t fit. Other days, we are in the flow. We want to recognize those times and not be on to the next bullet. Be your own empiricist. Periodically, how am I doing? Where am I with my passion? Am I any longer in my passion or have I let other’s goals and other’s duties take over from those energies? That also then ties to creation of the intentional scholarly community to help foster the passion and to pull away the jerks, pull away the darker side to those relationships.

Julie Whitelaw: So we also talked about this concept of mentoring up, right. Very open, when we are ready for our own autonomy, we come to realize I may be the first person to model something that I really needed to work this way. I really need to do this. You forget that other people including your mentors are watching and can learn from you. Think about what you are modeling in terms of work-life balance, engagement in harmonious passion. Model harmonious engagement in your own passion. Again, others are watching you. It doesn’t matter what career stage you are at.

We talk about paying it forward. Once you have figured out some of this for yourself, share it with other people. Help to guide other people who are challenged in areas where you once were challenged and have figured something out.

Mark Hager: The big question people ask of mentors and role models is why. Well, on the side of paying it forward and mentoring up, it improves academic productivity and personal life to the mentor and the protégé. Answer the individuals who are watching you. When we look at the literature on mentor protégé satisfaction, one of those intangibles that we like to measure is how it feels. Quite often, a mentor will simply state, “It feels good.”

Julie Whitelaw: So I think this has brought us to the conclusion. I will just mention, obviously, one of the best resources that we have available is the CDA enhancement initiative. This is the link to them and the toolkit that is associated with that. This is our contact information, if you would like to followup with more questions. These are the references that we use. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive review, but these were the articles that we read and reviewed to create out slides. You can go back to literature and find some of this that is of use to you as well. Okay, Molly, I think we are done with our presentation. We are ready for questions.

Molly: Thank you so much. Can I ask you to back up to the contact slide? We will just go ahead and leave that up during the Q&A so that people can jot that down if they need to get in touch with you. We do have a couple of good pending questions. For those of you that joined us after the top of the hour, which I know was a large portion of you, to submit your questions or comments, just use the questions section of the GoToWebinar dashboard that is on the right hand side of your screen. Just click the plus sign next to the word questions. That will expand the dialogue box and then you can submit your question or comment and we will get to it in the order that it is received.

So the first question, begin with a comment. The flow question you asked assumes that you have complete control over your work and/or life environment. There are many things in your work culture and work environment that you have no power to change and for whatever reason, you may not be in the position to switch work environments. How do you make the most out of the hand you have been dealt?

Julie Whitelaw: I do understand where this question started. We did try to give a nod to that by saying we know that there are things within a work environment that can produce feelings of dissatisfaction and lower levels of autonomy, limited ability to make your own choices or have some control over the flexibility of your schedule and even the choice of tasks that you do is associated with lower satisfaction for everyone. The thing that I want to encourage people to think about is that among the CDA community, we really shouldn’t. That shouldn’t really fully define our workweek. So are there things that we all have to work with then that are difficult? Yes, but your main area of research which should be the focus of your CDA, actually should be something that sets your heart on fire. That, in fact, research is one of those areas that is so difficult that if you don’t have a real true, I don’t want say passion for it, it’s very difficult to sustain. So what I would encourage someone to think about is what is it about the work that you are doing that you do like? What is it that you have done in prior work settings that did promote flow? Is there anything you can do for the research or the clinical portion of your workday that will sort of increase that level of engagement? Can you make it more of a fit with what you love?

Mark Hager: I would add to that, if we look at the academic trajectories that brought us here, the research on undergraduate education, graduate education, post-doctoral education, and junior faculty lives, also points to the relationship of following a passion. When I do work with other doctoral qualified individuals, the question of passion also has to be balanced. I recognize that the questionnaires comment with day-to-day necessities. One participate spoke with us recently about having to make a decision between what’s funded and what is driving them. Then the conversation becomes how do I find my passion within what is funded and within those external contingencies, which again the comments is very clear we do not always have control over.

Julie Whitelaw: I was going to say one more thing and I don’t know if the question asker is going to find this helpful or not helpful. I think one of the realities I think is so nicely reflected in the emergency room doctor’s commentary that we sent around is that he really had a very honest grappling with the fact that he, in fact, chose medicine. All of us chose to go to graduate school. All of us chose more medical school. All of us chose to do a post doc and all of us chose to pursue research. I think that we need to keep in mind these were choices. If these choices are \_\_\_\_\_ [00:47:17] with what we really want to be doing, the only person who can reconcile that is us. Right, we do have choices. We might need to think long and hard and creatively about how to retool that. But we all need to find a way to engage in what we like. I think I mentioned I am someone that has a lot of administrative duties. I’ve never had a flow experience filling out paperwork. I do have to do it. I never like it. I don’t like it. I have to sort of see that in the whole context of part that allows me to have some freedom to do some research. I think seeing those duties in context is very helpful. Okay.

Molly: Thank you very much, both of you for your responses. Let’s look at pending questions here. The next one, in the VA, there is more rigidity due to the work environment, often less autonomy for instance, tours of duties, face time, etc. Do you have any pointers for creating a harmonious VA HS R&D research career?

Julie Whitelaw: Well, I would say that I do think the old environments post some challenges. I would actually encourage people to see that the environment in greater context. In fact, it is quite a luxury to have the research infrastructure that we have, the funding streams that we have. It is simply the architecture that allows us to engage in research. I think we forget that. I think we forget that. Again, just because we love research doesn’t mean—I guess what I wanted to say our research dollars don’t grow on trees, right. This is a luxury field in the sense that we all chose it. We need to have an honest grappling with the fact that it costs money and there is a reality to that infrastructure, but this is in reality this is one of the most advantageous settings that we could be in. I don’t know if people are going to like that or not like that, but I think part of creating a harmonious environment is realizing how good we have got it.

Mark Hager: On that, I think the major threat that we he brought today is this idea of developmental and intentional networks. Having now worked at the VA for about ten years with this nationwide network of scholars and experts, I see many opportunities for people to reach out to others. Perhaps one of the ways to foster that community then is to think about who else is doing what I do in the broader network, but also who else do I know or do my networks know? Again, getting back to that network image, it may be a matter of intentionally finding those people with whom I can share a conversation and still maintain a respect for the system within which we are working. also recognizing that it is not so much flexibility I am asking of us, but the opportunity to connect with others, especially when I talk with perhaps the supervisor or a colleague about who else is doing what I do and where. Does that help?

Molly: Thank you both. They are more than welcome to write in with any further clarification or responses. This, somebody is asking for a citation. I just wanted to check with you and see if it is in the references or if you have it on hand. They ask what is the name of the study from Stanford University.

Julie Whitelaw: Oh, it’s not a study. It’s a book called *The No Asshole Rule* and it was publicized on a blog by *Harvard Business Review*. You can simply get it off of Amazon. It is a Business World book. I didn’t put it in the reference. It’s called *The No Asshole Rule* and it talks about how much it costs us to keep the brilliant but jerk at work person in our network. I recommend it. You can read it in about an hour. Everybody should get it. It is pretty life changing actually. It’s awesome.

Molly: Thank you, the next question, can you comment on the concept of a development network? It is having multiple/different mentors or mentee dyads. Is it having a group of professional peers at various career stages? Is it both? Is it something different?

Mark Hager: Thank you, that’s a very nice question. The answer is both and. The reason we now conceptualize mentoring as more network based is really the recognition of those challenges that we spoke about earlier. Recognizing also the global resources that are available to all of us in the 21st century compared to when mentoring first started back in Ancient Greece. The idea of looking out and reaching to a number of people of individuals, what you might call a focal individual, multiple instantiations of a lot of different careers. We can each look to a colleague who may have a brilliant family life and work life integration, but. Then we might see someone else who has a great research track, but. In both of those cases, the but isn’t a detraction. It is merely it is not the piece or the way I would like to do it. So when we bring these together more purposefully, we start to see how we are able to really again intentionally and responsibly craft our networks and craft our own identity.

Julie Whitelaw: I think it needs to be driven by what your needs are. When I think about when I was a CDA and crafting a network, there was a community of peers that were sort of at the same level that I was. We could share experiences about learning to write and doing grants and getting grant rejections and having conversations and all of, many of us were starting a family at that time, all of those things. It was, of course, my main mentor, but you know my main mentors actually weren’t in the clinical area that I was in. It meant bringing in some very strategic people that every time I write a paper, I am finding this person. Gee, I should probably shake hands with this person and bring them into my network and make an entrée into making their acquaintance.

I also always have someone in my network. I won’t call them the jerk at work, but I have the very honest person in my network that maybe I only can one conversation a year because it is maybe so honest that I only want to hear it once a year, but each—I guess what I am saying is that each person in the network which you can cultivate over time, should offer you something different. Your network should be as big as it needs to be for you given what you are doing. I think for people who are in niche areas where maybe they are the only person in their setting that is doing it, having a national network of people that are doing similar things can make you feel like you have some community that way. I think having some methodologic expertise in your network, having some peer support in your network, it really needs to be driven by what your needs are. It doesn’t need to be like your Facebook page where you just try to collect as many people in your network as possible. They really need to have strategic roles.

Mark Hager: They can also—we have talked a lot about the strategizing. You don’t want to forget to strategically remember to include your personal life in this and your personal networks. In the mentoring literature, you will also see the softer side, the psychological and social support that is so critical. What we are talking about right now, one particular role is that of acceptance and confirmation of life and of identity. When you bring those individuals to your network, whether they are in your personal life strictly, or in your professional realm, they also then help to embody or endorse the idea that you are going after integration. Recognizing that these networks are personal and professional and sometimes that person who can give you the great honest feedback may not be the expert, but be the very intelligent, but uneducated individual on your area who can ask you a hard question that no one else has done before.

Holly: Thank you, both, very much for your replies. The next question, how can we help men and husbands support mothers and women in balance of time spent in family tasks?

Julie Whitelaw: Whoa. Can you read that one more time, Molly? How can we help men and husbands help women?

Molly: Help women and mothers with the family tasks at hand.

Julie Whitelaw: You know I think that that’s a complicated question, but I will tell you that I think the selection of a partner that fully embraces your career path is really important and that there can be some really unfortunate incompatibility where there is a discrepancy between the two partners in a couple about what they think should happen. I think that in general, being very clear about what the needs are and the expectations for balance and the reasonable expectations for one’s self of what all we can do in both settings. In our household, we had a very difficult conversation a few years ago where I was literally on one side of the family, the only woman that is working. Yet, our house was routinely chosen to be the Christmas gathering place. So then the one person who is working and teaching a fall semester and has a young child, the ridiculousness of me then also hosting eight million for Christmas, we just sort of had to have a big family discussion about like that’s not going to work. In reality, someone else can host that. We were able to make that shift, but I had to be willing to bring it up very clearly that I just simply couldn’t do it. I think some of it from the woman’s perspective or either side, frankly, is being clear about what they need and not being afraid to communicate that and not setting limits and not comparing one’s self to someone who has a different lifestyle. Like yes, mothers that don’t work do a lot of different things that I don’t do.

But I think the other side of it is when Mark was talking about being very intentional about who is in your personal community. I mean, again, that is a negotiation that happens within the context of a marriage of what are the goals and values and you need to be on the same page of that, if your husband or spouse is not an academic. My husband is not an academic. They need to understand what academic life is like. The two of you need to be very clear on that. I think that from there the problem solving will flow.

Mark Hager: I would also add to that that the conversations we have within our work environment can also include the introduction of this kind of integration. I am remembering back to our work earlier on the MIRECC fellowship several years ago. The conversations shifted when we purposefully shifted them to include life-work harmony. The fellows opportunities to have conversations with us perhaps allowed them to have conversations at home. It gave them a place to talk about how will I balance getting married? So and so is pregnant. We are thinking of moving or starting a family or balancing our commutes. It can be instead of a one sided conversation, it can be much more of the dialogue that we have really been promoting here today.

Julie Whitelaw: Right, we want to preserve your attachment to the passion and not lamented your home life or your spouse or your work environment for the lack of fit with the passion, what you want to do together as work.

Holly: Thank you. One of our attendees did write in that there is a great book referencing this exact topic and it’s by Sandburg. It’s called *Lean In*.

Julie Whitelaw: Yeah, so go ahead and take a look at that folks.

Holly: The next question, does harmonious engagement include engaging with your family/home life while at work or only engaging with work while you are at home. The reading disappointed me in that it did not address how to enjoy your job while still having time to spend with your family.

Julie Whitelaw: I think the concept of harmonious engagement is not specific to work, but they use it in the work context because it essentially is saying that your interaction in your work environment feels voluntary and autonomous. In that autonomy, it doesn’t feel threatening to disengage from work when appropriate to be with your family. In other words, you are not thinking about work while you cooking dinner. It’s okay to stop work, switch roles, and go back to the other environment and vice versa. That you are not the person that while you are on maternity leave or at the child’s birthday party is ruminating that you should be working. I don’t think it specifically addresses whether or not you engage with your family at work. It’s different than that. That’s an individual choice driven by the circumstances that you are within.

Molly: Thank you. We do have just one more pending question, but I know we are at the top of the hour. Are you two able to stay on and answer this one question?

Mark Hager: Yes.

Molly: What are your suggestions for maintaining passion or finding flow when funding and therefore job stability is uncertain and competitive? The anxiety over this reality is a challenge to passion and flow.

Mark Hager: I think I would leap in with how we conceptualize the grant writing process. While recognizing it has a very dramatic outcome potentially for us sometimes, when we are in the process of doing the grant writing or the grant proposals or the new calls for proposals, if we can find within them our passion that drives us to do this, rather than see it as something separate that we have to do in order to do our work, it becomes a part and parcel of our work. That is one way of integrating that soft money side of work. But also then not making it the full priority of work, that’s how I would start to conceptualize the grant writing process.

Julie Whitelaw: I agree and to some extent I would say that this concept does not mean that there aren’t real world challenges that are very frustrating. Everyone is frustrated with the funding climate. But the thing that brought us all into the field is probably bigger than research, also. It probably connects with patients. It connects with policy. It connects with all sorts of other avenues. I am thinking about the ways in which your work life can foster that passion or the ways in which you can pick up that passion in other arenas and fight through some of the funding climate. We are not saying that there aren’t real issues that make this hard. What we are really trying to say is if you don’t feel that you chose some core aspect of the primary work area that you are in, you are going to have a hard time feeling satisfied and feeling balanced.

Molly: Thank you both for those responses. Well, that is our final pending question, but I would like to give each of you the opportunity to make any concluding or take away comments if you would like to.

Julie Whitelaw: Well, I hope you enjoyed the session and I hope it was helpful.

Mark Hager: I would echo the hope that it’s helpful and if people take a look at those references, the question about the emergency room doctor perhaps is better addressed in that greater body of literature. I would definitely encourage people to have these conversations both at home and within their work communities.

Molly: Wonderful, well thank you both so much for lending your expertise to the field. We really appreciate it. Of course, thank you to our CDA cyber seminar attendees for joining us today. I am going to close out the session momentarily so please take just a moment to fill out the feedback survey. It is just a few quick questions, but we do look very closely at your responses and it helps us to improve sessions we have already provided as well as gives us ideas of new sessions to support. In case you didn’t see it, I am plugging the new VA polls site, so please check out [www.VApolls.net](http://www.VApolls.net). Thank you so much everyone and this does conclude our session. Thank you, Julie. Thank you, Mark. Of course, thanks to Barbra Foster for helping to coordinate this series. Everybody have a wonderful rest of the day.

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