

Transforming Compassion Fatigue:

The Joy of Being (Good) Enough

Read this special report and learn how to transform the stress and exhaustion of compassion fatigue into positive energy by accepting and appreciating the person you really are.



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Transforming Compassion Fatigue: The Joy of Being (Good) Enough

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Introduction

Transforming Compassion Fatigue: The Joy of Being: Good Enough, is a special report written for Singapore care givers; the social workers who work at family service centres on the front line with clients who are experiencing financial, social and family hardship, the counsellors working with voluntary welfare organizations providing care and guidance to thousands of people struggling with the emotional challenges of a rapidly changing society, the doctors and nurses in an expanding and demanding healthcare profession and the many others who work in education, corrections, and other public and private organizations.

This is also a book written from personal experience; as a social worker who learned to transform compassion fatigue, burnout and depression into increasingly

positive and vibrant energy and as a trainer and consultant who has worked with over 35,000 care givers on three continents for the last 17 years.

I am especially indebted to the social workers and counsellors who have participated in the Thriving! at Work seminars, trainings and consultations over the past couple of years sponsored by the National Council of Social Services. I will be drawing upon their voice, their experiences, and their words.

The essence of Transforming Compassion Fatigue: The Joy of Being: Good Enough, is about developing and sustaining a shift of perception in how we see ourselves as care givers that will positively impact how we feel about our work, our clients, our work culture and our relationships with co-workers. This basic and essential change is a transformation in our self-perception from “enoughLESS” to “enoughNESS.”

Enoughless is the physical, emotional, mental and even spiritual exhaustion and sense of defeat many care givers experience as the result of giving the very best of who they are every day and feeling like their best is rarely good enough. It is the continual depletion of their energy and an erosion of their empathy working with complex and sometimes difficult clients in a profession that can be very demanding. It can result in their asking

what went wrong and questioning why they are doing this work.

As one social worker from a recent seminar puts it:

“I was so enthusiastic and optimistic when I first started working with clients. I would come to work early and leave late because it’s what I wanted to do. Now, I have to drag myself to work and can’t wait to leave.”

Another says:

“I know I’ve changed as a result of my work. I no longer talk about what I do. I’ve withdrawn from friends and even family. Nobody seems to understand what it does to a person to hear such heartache and see the injustice that my clients go through. And then to get criticized by your co-worker because you had to leave early one day...It doesn’t make sense anymore.”

Enoughness is knowing in your heart, beyond any doubt, that no matter what happens in your work, with your clients or in your organization, who you are as a person is always, always good enough. It is the knowledge that as a person, as an individual, as a human being, your acceptance and evaluation of yourself is up to you and is based upon who you are, not

just your professional identity or the evaluation of others.

Feeling good enough about who you are begins with understanding the nature of compassion fatigue and learning how vulnerable care givers are to unconsciously mirroring and internalizing the painful emotions of their clients as “energy residue.” And how, over time, the accumulation of this un-discharged, emotion or **energy in motion** can lead to stress, anxiety, frustration, exhaustion and the activation of limiting, even maladaptive core beliefs.

By applying principles of transformation such as self-honesty, personal responsibility and self-expression, you can begin to uncover and take ownership of the subconscious thoughts, beliefs, feelings and expectations that you often hold yourself to and judge yourself with that are not always reasonable or reachable.

You will also discover how these self-expectations can activate and intensify the need to please others; clients, co-workers and supervisors that may leave you vulnerable to emotional injury when they are not met.

As you learn to identify, soothe and transform unrealistic self-expectations and negative core beliefs

you will begin to discover your “positive core” self and focus your energy and awareness on supporting your genuine strengths and positive emotions. Learning to replace the criticizing self-talk and persistent negativity with positive self-affirmation and realistic optimism your “positivity ratio” will increase, propelling you from languishing to thriving!

As one social work stated at the end of the Thriving! at Work consultations:

“To be good enough now means to do my very best at work, in the best way that I know. I do not need to fulfil the expectations of others. I just need to do my best, enjoy my work and learn about self-care. It is when I am in my best condition that I am able to benefit my clients, colleagues and the organization.”

This special report is an introduction to the topic of compassion fatigue and one of the central themes that emerges again and again as I provide workshops and consultations to professional care providers in Singapore; how to transform enoughless into enoughness. For more information on my workshops, consultations, webinars and support groups, visit: www.compassionstrengths.com.

Chapter 1: A Crisis in Care Giving

“A great and growing crisis exists in care giving. Caregiving professionals from nurses to social workers counsellors to corrections officers are experiencing more stress and burnout than ever before.”

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: *Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow*

Singapore is experiencing a crisis in care giving. With rapid growth and expansion comes additional stress and strain; rising costs, crowded roads and MRT, more stress at work, financial pressures, aging parents...and the list goes on. With these increasing social and emotional stresses Singapore’s care givers are faced with larger caseloads of complex clients and limited resources.

One of the recurring themes I hear providing consultation for a number of the family service centres that help financially and socially challenged individuals and families is, how much larger their caseload is now and how much more help their clients seem to need than even a few years ago.

As one experienced social worker states:

“Sometimes I can’t believe how much social work has changed over the past few years. My caseload is nearly double what it used to be and my clients are much more complex with multiple problems like financial, domestic violence, school problems and mental health issues. I’m going so fast sometimes I wonder if I’m doing anybody any good, including myself.”

One of the results of this kind of increasing care provider stress is compassion fatigue, which, if left unidentified and untreated can lead to burnout and depression.

Compassion fatigue has been defined as: *“The reduced capacity or interest in being empathic or ‘bearing the suffering of clients’ and is ‘the natural consequent behaviours and emotions arising from knowing about traumatizing events.’”*¹

Compassion fatigue is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion from empathic engagement with

¹ Compassion Fatigue Following the September 11 Terrorist Attacks: A Study of Secondary Trauma among New York City Social Workers: International Journal of Emergency Mental Health, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2004

people who are suffering. ***It is both tired from caring and even tired of caring.*** It is the “*natural consequent emotions and behaviours*”² that often result from the work we do.

It is not abnormal or pathological. It is not wrong for care givers to sometimes feel worn out, frustrated, even helpless and angry at the people they work with and or, the system they work in. It can manifest individually, in groups between workers, in supervision and within the culture of the agency.

For more information on compassion fatigue or to take the compassion fatigue self-test go to:

http://www.compassionstrengths.com/Compassion_Fatigue.html



² Ibid

Compassion fatigue presents a “Crisis in Care Giving” because like the Chinese character for crisis indicates, it signifies both danger and opportunity.

The danger is clear and present. With increasing caseloads and diminishing resources, care providers are required to “multi-task.” Translated into caregiver experience this often means more time and energy being spent on crisis stabilization, documentation and resource allocation and less on education and long-term management—resulting in risk management rather than health management.

For care providers this is likely to be frustrating as well as exhausting. It also renders us more susceptible to feeling enoughless; no matter how hard we try or how much we do it is (we are) never (good) enough.

The opportunity is less clear although very present.

Compassion fatigue can be transformed into the positive energy and engagement that are the hallmarks of enoughness. The key to developing a sense of (good) enoughness is to be able to honestly look inside ourselves and accept who we are as we are and learning to care for ourselves at least as much as we care for our clients.

Chapter 2: The Care Giving Personality

“Care providers are unique people. Our ability to emotionally join with our clients that allow us a near first hand experience of their inner world is perhaps our greatest gift; it is also our greatest challenge.”

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: *Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow*

One of the things that can begin to happen when we get so busy with our clients and their multiple problems is we forget to take care of ourselves.

It’s really interesting and I think a part of our caregiver personality; that the professional care providers I’ve worked with as a whole – dozens of different nationalities and cultures on three different continents – share one thing in common; they are much more focused on the care and health of their clients than their own self-care. There is a tendency to put the client first even when it means ignoring their own needs to the point that it can be detrimental to their physical and emotional well-being. And, I am no exception.

I started my social work career working for a very busy inner-city emergency room providing crisis counselling for clients who were depressed, suicidal, with family problems, alcohol and substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, marital crises and any other acute mental health problem that would walk-in to the ER or call for help. Within a couple of years I began to change.

When I first started working in the ER I was a zealot; full of energy and enthusiasm. I would come in early and gladly leave late. I would volunteer to be on call! I would read anything I could get my hands on to help me more fully understand my clients and their problems. My motto was: "I'll do that!"

I don't really remember exactly when the change began to happen. It came on slow and I didn't even notice it. Part of the change was from observing the more experienced social workers and nurses and beginning to model my behaviour after them.

I noticed they were not nearly as enthusiastic as I was and even seemed a little amused when I volunteered to take difficult cases or late night shifts. I also noticed they seemed a little aloof in their relationships and at times did not speak very highly of their clients.

As I began to gain experience and “matured” I also found myself losing the spring in my step. I stopped coming in early or volunteering for difficult cases or being on call. I found myself getting protective of my time off.

I also found that I didn’t want to connect with clients as much as I used to. I chalked it up to “maintaining boundaries” but I was actually beginning to withdraw emotionally. I became more isolated, began to shut out family and friends, and found it more difficult to do the things I enjoyed.

As time went on some of my clients actually seemed irritating and began to blur together. I became impatient with hearing “the same sad story” over and over again and started talking about my clients in an unfair way to co-workers.

I got easily frustrated, at times overwhelmed and began to experience physical and emotional fatigue. It was harder to come to work and I was eager to leave. Weekends and vacations could not renew my energy. I stopped my regular exercise and meditation. All I wanted to do was sleep.

Finally, I began to experience a sense of hopelessness. I felt trapped in my job but didn’t want or have the

energy to leave. I developed a secret disdain for clients and even began to question my co-workers if they disagreed with me.

I felt isolated, alone and could not share my pain with anyone else. I made mistakes at work and had problems with my marriage at home. I developed depression and finally quit the profession I loved so much.

This is the progression of compassion fatigue and eventually burnout. My story is very common and I've heard it repeated many times from professional care givers that I work with. Compassion fatigue is the result of empathic engagement with people who are suffering and not paying attention to our own self-care.

What I learned from my struggle with compassion fatigue is that I have very strong beliefs about what and how a care giver is "supposed to be." My core belief was that I should always be available to my clients all the time and I should never need help or support for myself.

My caregiving personality traits of perfectionism and invulnerability restricted me from admitting to myself how this work was affecting me and that I was actually sinking into state of enoughness. For more on the care giving personality visit:

http://www.compassionstrengths.com/Article_1.html

Chapter 3: EnoughLESS

“It may be as simple as; “consciously or unconsciously, with intent or with inertia, we bring who we are to what we do and who we do it with.”

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: Breath of Relief:
Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow

Our sense of personal identity is often intertwined with our identity as a helper. While this has some distinct advantages, including being able to empathize with our clients, it can lead to unrealistic self-expectations then self-devaluation when we begin to feel we are not good enough threatening our self-image, and self-esteem.

As our sense of professional worthiness erodes under the continual demands and pressures of the job, our personal sense of enoughness is also threatened. The less worthy I feel, the less enough I experience myself to be. As my sense of enoughness erodes, the very foundation of my sense of identity is shaken; no matter how hard I try to DO enough I never seem to be able to BE enough.

This shift creates a condition in which I must try to meet my personal enoughness through my professional identity at work.

This shift is often silent and invisible. We may truly not have a clue that our perception has shifted. From our perspective, it is the job, the clients, or co-workers that have changed.

We feel victimized, unwittingly create or fall into situations in which we are victimized, and/or victimize others. We fall into a state of enoughless. As one social worker recently described:

“I couldn’t see it at the time but all the stress at work was causing me to feel bad about myself. The worse I felt, the more I tried to do to make up for it. It became a vicious cycle. I began to see my co-workers as lazy and not doing their part. I was angry all the time and started to hate my work.”

The experience of enoughless is core to understanding how to transform compassion fatigue. The accumulation of stress and vicarious trauma can silently change your perception of yourself, your clients, your co-workers, the agency and the profession.

The experience of repeatedly feeling powerless to DO (good) enough can trigger beliefs that you ARE not good enough.

In every workshop and consultation I've provided, the issue of enoughness appears to be key for almost care provider who is experiencing compassion fatigue.

From hundreds of personal coaching sessions with healthcare professionals one of the themes that emerges over and over again is a hidden inner belief that our personal value as a care giver and even as a human being is based to a great extent to how successful we believe we are with our clients and how, we ourselves should NEVER have any problems.

The problem with this hidden inner belief of course is, we can NEVER always be completely successful with every client all the time, and we ourselves very often have problems of our own.

It is the nature of our profession, and our clients to have more challenges in front of us – and them – than we can ever completely and successfully accomplish. As another social worker in a consultation remarked:

"I didn't realize until now how harshly I judged myself. Without even being aware of it, I expected to be

completely successful with every client. And, I felt this is what my co-workers and supervisor expected of me.”

The main “mechanism” that develops and sustains enoughness is our self-expectations. Because many of us come to this profession with a strong desire to help others that is sometimes developed from our personal experience of trauma, neglect or even abuse, we often expect more from ourselves than we are capable of delivering.

Enoughness can manifest in many ways. It is most often apparent in our self-judgment as negative self talk.

It is estimated that people have an average of 70,000 thoughts per day of which 80% are negative³ .

When we begin to honestly look at the thoughts we have going through our minds and how often they are harsh and critical toward ourselves (and at times others) it is no wonder we feel exhausted, frustrated and worn down.

Another way enoughness makes itself known is in how we feel, our emotions.

³ Laboratory of neuro-imaging, University of California at Los Angeles

When we carry very high expectations about how we are to perform, or how we expect our clients to respond to us and our efforts to provide care for them, we often carry a considerable amount of stress, tension and sometimes anxiety.

This continual sense of being on edge can cause us to become easily frustrated, angered, sometimes even blaming others for our unhappiness. It's easy to lose sight that our emotions come from us, that they are a result of our own perception, beliefs and expectations.

One of the most common ways of experiencing this stress is to unconsciously act our sense of enmeshment out in our relationships with clients, this is the basis of counter-transference.

“Our definition of countertransference includes two components: (1) the affective, ideational, and physical response a therapist has to her client, his clinical material, transference, and reenactments, and (2) the therapist’s conscious and unconscious defenses against the affects, intrapsychic conflicts, and associations aroused by the former”

- Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) “Trauma and the Therapist”

Countertransference includes the thoughts, feelings and physical sensations a care giver has towards their client that are activated within the counselling relationship, and, the counsellors response – their conscious and unconscious defences towards their reactions.

When we sit and listen to our clients we are receiving energy as well as information. It is inevitable. We can, will, and do absorb the emotions of our clients.

Becoming more intra-personally aware makes you more sensitive to your own internal movement of energy, sensations, affects, various tension levels, and—most importantly—of your breathing.

You are more able to identify which physical and emotional sensations are responding to what your client is describing to you. This understanding allows you to separate the client-caused reactions from those arising from your own personal history.

In addition to the physical/emotional response to countertransference, there is also the ideational and information processing response.

“Ideational” refers to the content of information being processed. This content can present itself as thoughts or ideas, sounds, visual images, and memory fragments.

Anxiety is the emotion most often associated with such content. This gives most ideational content the power to intrude upon the screen of our conscious mind or be projected unconsciously onto others.

What is our immediate, conscious physical and emotional response to another person with whom we have an empathic connection that is experiencing fear and pain – especially if our own body-mind is attuned to that particular kind of pain and/or fear?

Generally we freeze up as well; even if it is something as subtle as holding or restricting your breath throughout the session. How many times have you come out of an intensive interview with a client gasping for air? The first physical response to the experience of anxiety—yours or that of your client—is to hold your breath.

In addition to holding your breath, you'll also feel a frozen-like acute or chronic muscle tension—usually in the neck, shoulders, and back. This hardened tension results from constantly squeezing your shoulders up and in. This is the body's frozen-in-fear-like-a-statue stance. For more information on our “freeze response” go to: http://www.compassionstrengths.com/Article_7.html.

Chapter 4: Principles for Transformation

“Surrendering is the Warrior’s art. To surrender is to give in, not give up. Giving in is accepting the reality of the situation as it is without meeting my ego’s demand to be right.”

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow

In my seminars on: “Transforming Compassion Fatigue Into Flow and Peak Performance,” I share three basic governing principles of the Healer-Warrior philosophy. These principles have provided the foundation for transformation for myself personally and for thousands of participants on three continents for over 18 years. They are: Self-honesty, personal responsibility, and self-expression.

Self-honesty is the key. It is the primary, essential process that allows a depth of access into parts of your personal self that cannot be attained any other way. In this context, self-honesty means self-transparency—the ability to look inward to cultivate “in-sight.”

We all think we see the world as it is.

We're wrong.

We never see the world as it is.

We always see the world as we are.

- Srikumar.S. Rao, Ph.D.: Happiness at Work

What is most essential to developing self-honesty is a courageous willingness to suspend judgment, to halt the automatic response of immediately categorizing a concept or idea according to an already existing belief of what may be right or wrong, good or bad, possible or impossible.

It's not an easy thing to do; it requires courageous willingness. Questioning your belief systems can cause you to feel uneasy, even lost. This is because most people rely on their unquestioned beliefs to try to make sense out of a world that is often unpredictable and traumatic.

Unquestioned beliefs have remarkable powers to shape our perception. What we attend to physically, mentally, and emotionally is selected and shaped to a great extent by what we unconsciously expect to experience.

To become aware of and suspend these beliefs is to invite you to look clearly and intently inside yourself

with as much courageous transparency as possible. Resist the temptation to immediately judge and classify ideas before you have the chance to “try them on.”

Personal responsibility is the continual willingness to take ownership of my personal experience. The problem I usually run into with personal responsibility is my willingness to surrender the need to be right.

The need to be right is one of our strongest and most strongly defended intentions. This is because the need to be right is often associated with our need to be loved. As a result of the conditional love, praise and acceptance most of us received as children when we did the “right thing” or gave the “right” answer, we came to value being right over most everything else, including being happy, at peace and content with who we are.

Personal responsibility is the degree of my willingness to take ownership for my perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and behaviours; my communication with self and others; all my relationships; and the conditions of my life that I am now experiencing.

This is not self-blame. To blame myself I must split myself into both the part of me that is doing the blaming and the part of me that is getting blamed. This

splitting of my self into opposing parts weakens my sense of self and distorts my perception of others.

The action of personal responsibility is looking, listening, and letting go. This is the art of surrendering.

Surrendering is the Warrior's art. To surrender is to give in, not give up. Giving in is accepting the reality of the situation as it is without meeting my ego's demand to be right. To surrender means, to bring my ego-perception more into alignment with my here and now, in the moment— in my body experience.

Self-expression is the vehicle for transformation. Honest, responsible self-expression is being who I am and showing you who I am, verbally and non-verbally openly and spontaneously with confidence. It is an alignment of who I am with what I am saying. It is courageous, authentic, communication.

Courageous self-expression IS the process of transformation. Every time I am able to express who I am with honesty and take ownership of my feelings, the message I am giving to myself and others is; "I am good enough to show you who I am." Each time I can show myself and others who I truly am, the stronger my sense of self.

Chapter 5: Enoughless Core Beliefs

“As a care provider, it is my experience that most of us are drawn to the profession. We are often drawn in by the need to understand how and why people can think, feel and behave the way that they have and do.”

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow

Identifying enoughless core beliefs is not an easy task. It requires a great deal of courageous self-honesty and the desire to discover the truth about how we feel more than defending our ego or the perception of ourselves we want to see and show to others.

For me it meant sinking so low into compassion fatigue and depression that I nearly completed suicide rather than look at the person I secretly feared I was. And, this is what is important to remember; *the person you secretly fear you are is not the person you really are.*

Enoughless core beliefs are usually formed early in childhood when our parents, usually out of a desire to make us more successful people, would withhold their

love, praise or acceptance for us until we performed the way they felt was “good enough.”

For many of us this was a rare occasion! More often than steady encouragement was at times harsh criticism and comparison with others with whom we never seemed to match up. For some of us the cost of not doing “good enough” could be fairly hurtful and discouraging.

In some cases, enoughless core beliefs can also be formed around traumatic experiences. Sudden losses, unexpected death, severe illness, physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect where one experiences a sense of blame and helplessness can form strong beliefs and emotions.

These experiences, beliefs and emotions can lay dormant for years until we re-experience them vicariously by emotionally engaging with a client who is experiencing or describing a similar experience.

All of a sudden we are feeling powerful emotions, a sudden shift of perception, thinking and behaving, not understanding why this is happening.

Enoughless core beliefs are usually at work when we are feeling trapped, defeated and helpless to change

ourselves or the situation we are in. It is when our perception of and reaction to a person or persons, a relationship, an event or series of events is out of balance and out of context.

They are often triggered by a sense of hurt, shame or challenge to our ego – self-image, our need to be right. We often feel a strong urge to defend ourselves and lash out at those who we believe have hurt us, or, turn the anger in on ourselves.

Learning to identify enoughless core beliefs begins with self-honesty. It begins with making a conscious agreement with yourself that what you want more than being right is to be happy and at peace.

There is a wonderful little verse by Peter Russell in his book “Waking up in Time,” that goes:

“If being right is your goal,
you will find error in the world, and seek to correct it.
But do not expect peace of mind.
If peace of mind is your goal,
look for the errors in your beliefs and expectations.
Seek to change them, not the world.
And be always prepared to be wrong.”

Looking for errors in our beliefs and expectations is a very difficult thing to do, especially when we are feeling trapped, defeated and helpless.

When powerful negative emotions are engaged, our minds are less open to new ideas or a different way of perceiving ourselves, our situation or others. It is usually best to identify our enoughless core beliefs when we are feeling calm and more secure.

One of the best ways I know how to begin to have a look inside myself in a more honest and compassionate fashion is to utilize a technique called “Focusing” developed by Dr Eugene Gendlin.

Focusing is described as a: *“Naturally occurring, internal, problem solving process. It happens when an individual stops to ponder at the felt ‘edge’ of what is known, the sense that there is ‘something-that-is-more-than-words.”*⁴”

To start focusing it is necessary first to relax body and mind. Because focusing is intuitive and utilizes the “felt-sense,” the body should be relaxed and the mind quiet and peaceful.

⁴ Focusing: Eugene T. Gendlin, Ph.D. (1978).

Take a couple of seconds to relax your body by taking a long, slow, deep breath from your diaphragm to a count of 4. As you breathe in slowly imagine the oxygen molecules flowing into every cell in your body.

As you slowly exhale to a count of 5 allow your body physically relax and let go of the tightness and tension that is often caught in your neck, shoulders face and stomach. When you are exhaling visualize you are releasing all of the stress, and worry you've been holding onto. Let it all go.

Allow yourself to breathe in this way for three or four breaths. It is sometimes useful to rotate your shoulders up, back and down as you breathe long, slow, deep even breaths in and out as shown on the video at: [http://www.compassionstrengths.com/Somatic Awareness.html](http://www.compassionstrengths.com/Somatic_Awareness.html).

For most people, just paying attention to what is happening inside their body can be quite illuminating. When we are so distracted with all of the business in our lives we very often lose touch with how we are feeling.

And, because feelings are both physical and emotional, it is necessary to bring our attention back inside our bodies to be in touch with our feelings.

Focusing will help you listen intently and deeply to your feelings and intuition to discover what beliefs you may be holding onto about yourself that can result in your experience of enoughness.

Begin focusing after you have relaxed your body and your mind is feeling quiet and receptive. Allow your attention to find a place within your body that feels safe and peaceful. Allow your attention to rest there. Allow yourself to feel relaxed, safe and peaceful and at the same time open, alert and receptive.

Bring to mind an incident at work in which you felt your best effort was not (good) enough. It is best to start with a situation that is not too intense or overwhelming. Very “in-tense” situations are difficult to process the first time because strong emotions or *energy in motion* can be difficult to soothe and manage without practice.

Allow yourself to be open and receptive to how you felt during this incident at work. Bring back the detailed memory of being there, in that situation. Set aside all of your thoughts about the situation, and just try to remember what it felt like to be there...not words but the bodily feel of being there. Give yourself a minute or two for this.

Now, carefully try to find words for what you sensed and how you felt during this situation. Go back and forth between the words and the feel of the whole thing until you find the words. Give yourself a couple of minutes.

Now gently ask yourself: “What am I expecting of myself at work that I cannot do or be at this time?”

Allow yourself to feel the words as well as say them. Let your attention sense and feel your body reactions. Allow the “answer” to come to you in feelings, sensations, words or images.

Next, gently ask yourself: “How do I feel about myself and my work when I believe I am not meeting this expectation?”

Again, allow yourself to feel the words as well as say them. Let your attention sense and feel your body reactions. Allow the “answer” to come to you in feelings, sensations, words or images.

Now ask yourself: “What belief am I holding onto about how I should be at work that causes me to feel this way?”

And again, allow yourself to feel the words as well as say them. Let your attention sense and feel your body

reactions. Allow the “answer” to come to you in feelings, sensations, words or images.

If you get a strong sense/feeling about what your answer is write it down. If you still feel unclear allow yourself to go through the focusing process again. If you find yourself getting tense or your mind filled with thoughts, breathe, relax and allow yourself to find your center inside your body again.

“Your core belief is one that is so basic to the way you orient yourself in your life that you never stop to think about it. You simply take this belief for granted and operate from it automatically. You are so sure that ‘This is just who I am and the way I think’ you never stop to consider that there is a deeply held belief causing you to think the way you do. These beliefs are fundamental to the way you orient your life.”

- David Gershon: *Empowerment: The Art of Creating Your Life As You Want it.*

Compassion fatigue core beliefs are those often hidden beliefs about how we think we should be in our work and especially with clients. Even if we know in our head that they are unreasonable and unrealistic, in our hearts we subconsciously hold onto them; most of the time we are not even aware that we have the belief.

The belief has often been formed in childhood and then applied to our current work situation.

Some very common beliefs that have been expressed by care givers in my workshops include:

- ✓ It's all on my shoulders all the time.
- ✓ No matter how much I do it will never be enough.
- ✓ Nobody cares how hard I work, how much I care.
- ✓ I have to be successful with all my clients all the time.
- ✓ I must be an outstanding care giver, better than other care givers I know.
- ✓ I can't feel good about myself unless I am completely successful in alleviating clients' problems.
- ✓ I must have all good sessions with my clients.
- ✓ I should not dislike any of my clients.
- ✓ As a care giver I should have no emotional problems myself and should feel guilty and ashamed if I do. I should not have to ask for advice or support either professionally or personally.

Chapter 6: The Joy of Being Good Enough

Self-acceptance is the process of accepting myself as being good enough.

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow

What did you discover about yourself from the focusing exercise? What self-limiting core beliefs did you uncover? How do those beliefs affect your sense of enoughness?

The root cause for so many of my self-limiting core beliefs is that I do not accept myself as I am. I feel that in order to really accept myself I must have, be, or do something more, different and better so that I stand out from others.

Carl Rogers, a famous psychologist once wrote:

“The curious paradox is, only when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.”⁵

⁵ Carl Rogers Ph.D. On Becoming A Person: A Therapists View of Psychotherapy (1961)

This means that self-acceptance will never come from doing better in order to feel better about who I am. It can only come from accepting who I am NOW and feeling good enough about myself as I am. Not in the future, not when I've done this or achieved that; NOW.

The paradox is, if I wait to accomplish something more in order to feel better about myself, it will never happen.

Think about it. How many times have you set out to accomplish something expecting that once you've achieved your goal you will have an enduring sense of self-esteem?

I can personally recall many times and many achievements in my life; getting all "As" one year in high school, getting on the varsity wrestling team, earning my black belt, graduating from college, being accepted into an ivy league graduate school, etc., etc., etc.

Each time there is the excitement of the achievement, the sense that I made it! Look at me! Look how good I am! But after a while the thrill and sense of being noticed, seen and admired, fades. Doing better rarely has a lasting effect of being a better person or feeling better about who I am.

For care givers this is key because we are in a position at work that despite how hard we may try, the effort and intelligence we may bring to working with clients, in some cases our very best may not be good enough.

It is the nature of our work. There are many factors that are beyond our control and out of our influence – even though we may be evaluated (or evaluate ourselves) on results we cannot directly influence.

As one counsellor recently stated at a workshop:

“I now see why I get so disappointed and exhausted. I’ve been evaluating myself by how well my client is doing. When my client does well I feel like a success. But when they don’t I feel like such a lousy counsellor. Feels like I’ve been on a roller coaster ride.”

Enoughness is a term I use to describe a state of inner acceptance of who I am as a person. It is not a statement about my performance as a care giver.

Enoughness is a function of belonging to, being a part of, having deep connection with, gratitude and appreciation for yourself and other people and the relationships that give life meaning.

Enoughness springs from a deep inner sense of connection and purpose that allows the realization that

we are in fact, a part of something larger than ourselves. It is the result of a re-sizing and realigning our ego to be a part of something rather than standing apart. It is the realization that it is only in letting go of the need to be right that we can live rightly.

Enoughness results in a feeling of calm confidence while being honest about your strengths and weaknesses. It allows you the freedom to honestly appraise your performance without feeling defensive. Knowing in your heart that you are good enough releases you to do better without the fear of failure.

Accepting your enoughness for who you are does not limit your motivation to do better, it increases it.

In fact, accepting your enoughness releases you to discover and develop your unique talents and strengths. Most of us walk around with an endless stream of negative, critical self-talk because we feel we rarely meet up to the standards we set for ourselves.

Learning to cultivate enoughness begins with learning how to positive self-talk which is a major part of the widely used practice of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Basically, CBT argues that the way we think alters the way we feel ... and the way we feel affects the way we behave. Therefore, if we begin to change our thinking about ourselves (even if we don't believe our affirmations at first), eventually we will feel and behave in ways that align with our thoughts.

An affirmation is an alternative belief you form that is more in alignment with who you truly are. When you begin to shift your perception from enoughless to enoughness you will begin to notice things you hadn't noticed previously and gradually let go of the endless stream of negative self-talk.

Affirmations are more than just words you repeat to yourself – they are specifically crafted thoughts, emotions and images that speak to you individually and are internalized through creative visualization. They are a reflection who you really, already are.

“When you change enough of your core beliefs about ‘this is the way the world works’, the cumulative effect is massive.”

- Srikumar S. Rao, Ph.D.: Happiness at Work

Affirmations are:

- ✓ Written down
- ✓ Stated in the positive
- ✓ Succinct
- ✓ Specific
- ✓ Magnetic
- ✓ Stated as if it already exists
- ✓ About you, not anyone else and always include you

Sample Affirmations

- ✓ I accept myself as I am – knowing, that as I do, I feel more secure and confident within myself and with others.
- ✓ I am doing the best I know how to do, given the person I am today and the situation I am dealing with. When I know a better way and can do it I will.
- ✓ I am good enough today as the person I really am. While I will strive to do better in my work and life, I always accept who I am today.
- ✓ I can embrace the stresses of my work while providing soothing and comfort to my own sense of self.

- ✓ I am strong, stable and secure within my own heart. I can work effectively with others who do not always agree with me or see things my way.
- ✓ I am secure and free within myself. While I strive to create harmonious relationships with others I can also be true to who I am.

Once you've chosen or developed an affirmation that feels right for you, you will need to anchor the affirmation deep within yourself so that it will take root and grow. The way to do this is through creative visualization.

Creative visualization is another often misunderstood concept. Like affirmations, creative visualization utilizes the ability you already use, although usually reactively rather than creatively.

Reactive visualization occurs when we habitually and usually unconsciously visualize in the morning how badly our day is going to go and when something "bad" happens we repeat to ourselves: "I knew it! I just knew that would happen!"

We set the stage and then look for the evidence that we were right. And even when the "evidence" isn't clear and convincing, we shape and mould it to fit our

unquestioned core beliefs rather than challenge the beliefs themselves.

Creative visualization utilizes the power of your entire imagination; your visual abilities, your memories, emotions, sensations, attention, intention and even your intuition. It *consciously* aligns a positive intention (affirmation) with a visual, emotional and kinaesthetic experience that plants the affirmation in your unconscious mind.

Like a seed, the affirmation requires nourishment and weeding. With regular practice you will nourish your affirmation sensing, feeling and knowing that you deserve the benefits your affirmation will bring.

By being mindful of negative, sabotaging thoughts that are still active from your negative core belief, you can weed the soil your affirmation is planted in so that it can take root and grow strong and resilient.

To practice and anchor your creative visualization:

1. SIT

Pick a time and place where you can be alone for a couple of minutes. Sit in a comfortable chair with the spine straight.

2. BREATHE

Breathe fully and slowly from the diaphragm. Breathe in to a count of 4 and out to a count of 5.

3. RELAX

Relax your body and calm the mind. Allow yourself to relax and release restless thoughts, fears, insecurities, and doubts. When your mind gets restless, breathe, relax and focus on a sense of calm and stillness that is growing inside you.

4. OPEN

Open your mind. Suspend judgment and disbelief. Allow yourself to accept the idea that you are worth what you are affirming and you deserve the benefits of your affirmation.

5. AFFIRM

Choose an affirmation and repeat it with increasing clarity, focus and intention. Allow yourself to become immersed in the process of repeating, sensing, feeling and accepting the affirmation. Hold the affirmation in the center of your heart for several minutes. At some point, notice the affirmation repeating itself even when you do not consciously try to repeat it.

6. FEEL

Feel the energy, form and intent of the affirmation. Allow it to permeate your conscious and even your

subconscious minds, every cell of your entire being and surrounding space. Feel a growing a space of calm, clarity and peacefulness in the center of your heart.

7. VISUALIZE

Visualize yourself as you imagine yourself to be when the affirmation has become completely real. Visualize how you will perceive a usually stressful situation from a place of calm and confidence. Sense how you will respond to others and they to you from this secure place of enoughness.

8. ALLOW

As you rehearse new perceptions, emotions, thought patterns and behaviours, allow yourself to internalize this shift of perception into your sense of self. Allow a sense of gratitude to emerge as your inner sense of authentic self-worth grows and takes root in your mind and body.

Conclusion

“Good-enoughness” is the result of accepting my self as I am, as I remember myself in the past and how I imagine myself to be in the future.”

- Karl D. LaRowe M.A., LCSW: Breath of Relief: Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Flow

The joy of being (good) enough is the easiest and the most difficult thing you will do.

It is easy because it is natural. It is my belief that we were born into a state of good enoughness. When I observe the natural joy that appears inherent in young children when that child feels safe and secure enough in the loving, accepting arms and eyes of their parent or care giver, it seems clear this is our birth right. It is who we are naturally.

When we can allow ourselves to accept ourselves as we are without the need to pretend we are something else, we experience good enoughness. It is as easy and as natural as allowing yourself to be who you truly are.

It is also as difficult as allowing yourself to be who you truly are.

As a result of the conditional love and acceptance we received for always needing to do better most of us have grown up with a core belief that who we are naturally simply isn't good enough. We become convinced the only way to accept ourselves and be accepted by others is to be better by doing better.

The flaw with this kind of thinking is, it hasn't worked, it doesn't work now, and it will never work. All you need to do is to honestly examine how many times trying to gain self-acceptance by meeting somebody else's expectations has eventually let you down.

Now, there is nothing at all wrong with doing better. It is wonderful when doing better is a natural expression of how you feel about yourself. When you truly get that you're a good (enough) person, your motivation to do better changes. Rather than doing better to impress someone else to prove to yourself how good you are, increasing your performance in what you love to do is a natural extension and expression of who you are.

The other sense of joy that begins to emerge with this kind of self-acceptance is a deep inner-security. You begin to really understand and accept that you have nothing to prove to anyone else about your core value as a person. You may need at times to prove your

effectiveness as a professional but that is not the same thing as proving your worthiness as a person.

When your core worthiness as a person is secure you are much more open to looking at flaws in your performance as a professional. You are no longer personally threatened by making mistakes. You understand this is a very demanding profession and even the most educated and experienced care giver always have more to learn.

You are also more secure in your relationships with co-workers. As your sense of inner-security and good enoughness grows, you are not afraid to appear vulnerable or not to always be right.

You are more authentic and genuine in your communication and relationships. This authenticity is usually perceived by others as your being a “real” or “solid” person. Others see you as safe and will begin to share their real feelings with you.

As your perception continues to shift from enoughless to enoughness you begin to realize you have certain strengths that you never recognized before. You bring these strengths into the helping relationship and you begin to notice your clients have strengths as well.

As you become more strengths oriented in your counselling you begin to experience a sense of lightness and energy when working with clients. Rather than become exhausted by their struggles and pain, you see this as part of their growth toward strengths.

As your good-enoughness continues to grow and becomes internalized you find yourself in a positive mood more often. You develop a deep inner appreciation and sense of gratitude that reinforces positive emotions. You begin to experience a growth cycle of good enoughness activating strengths, releasing positive energy and emotions and a deep appreciation leading to re-claiming the joy you have for your work.

This growth cycle is the natural outcome of accepting ourselves as we are, embracing our strengths and learning to increase our positivity ratio. I've personally seen a transformation in hundreds of individuals, teams and even organizations who have applied these principles on three continents over the past 20 years.

Most recently I've had the privilege of working with 18 family service centres in Singapore in my *Thriving! at Work* workshops and consultations sponsored by the National Council of Social Services. All participants completed a before and after Thriving! at Work (Th@W) assessment which measured their level of positive

feeling about their work. Below are just a few of their voices in comments they left at the end of the project:

“To thrive at work means to remind myself of the meaning of the work, to take care of myself despite the heavy caseload. Besides, I need to influence others to thrive at work through savouring good moments with other colleagues on a regular basis.”

“The built up anxiety and sometimes guilt when thinking or feeling about work have been reduced by regular practice of visualization and discharging the negative energy.”

“I now know my work is meaningful and that makes me want to do my best.”

“Work can be full of meaning or just routine, it depends on how we choose to look at it. We can still thrive despite being overloaded!”

“Thrive at work: love myself and love what I am doing. After attending the workshop I have more awareness on what was going on when I was experiencing compassion fatigue so that I could find a more effective way to overcome it.”

“To thrive is to feel empowered and able to embrace the positive moments at work. I am more conscious at

reminding myself to self-care, whenever I am low I can now look at my own strengths.”

“To accept that whatever I am doing now is good enough given my current capabilities and skills, if I could, I would have done better and did not intentionally do bad.”

“Thriving means embracing and accepting who we really are, being grateful about our strengths and being able to embrace our enoughness, that we all have weaknesses but we are not defined by them.”

“To thrive is to feel empowered and more able to embrace each positive moment at work. I am more conscious about reminding myself to self-care, whenever I am low, I can now look at my strengths.”

There is no need to feel exhausted and defeated. Compassion fatigue can be transformed. You really can recapture the joy of providing care for others. The most difficult thing is to begin the process of transformation today.

For more information on how to transform compassion fatigue visit my website:

www.compassionstrengths.com.