

# 1.

## INTRODUCTION

*What is to give light must endure burning.*

—Victor Frankl

*The more empathically attuned we are, the greater level of neural activation and shared pain we experience—aka empathy’s double-edge sword.*

—Dr. Mark C. Russel

*Lack of resources, lack of staffing, lack of getting all our concerns addressed, things like that. Those are very draining, especially when we’re supposed to provide patient care and do a good job. But definitely, all the drama from work and things like that, those don’t help. If anything, it just makes the environment more toxic and unbearable, definitely, and at one point, it will start affecting the overall well-being of your mental health and your physical health, even your spiritual health.*

—Anonymous nurse

## Skilled Compassion

Above all else, nurses are givers. They give care, of course, but they also give their time, their attention, and in a very real sense, a piece of themselves. This gift of one's mind and emotions is at the center of the caregiver's world in the form of empathy and compassion.

Skilled caregiving requires skilled *empathy*, the ability to feel and understand the emotional states of others. Also required is skilled *compassion*, taking action to alleviate suffering. Being empathic and compassionate requires giving yourself to others—to their feelings and to their care.

However, empathy and compassion also contain a bitter irony: Witnessing pain causes pain—something that nurses know well. This is true at the deepest levels; exposure to the suffering of others activates neural pathways associated with first-hand suffering. The very empathy that calls us to action cuts us at the same time. **This is the double-edged sword of compassionate service: To be good at compassion, we must be good at suffering.**

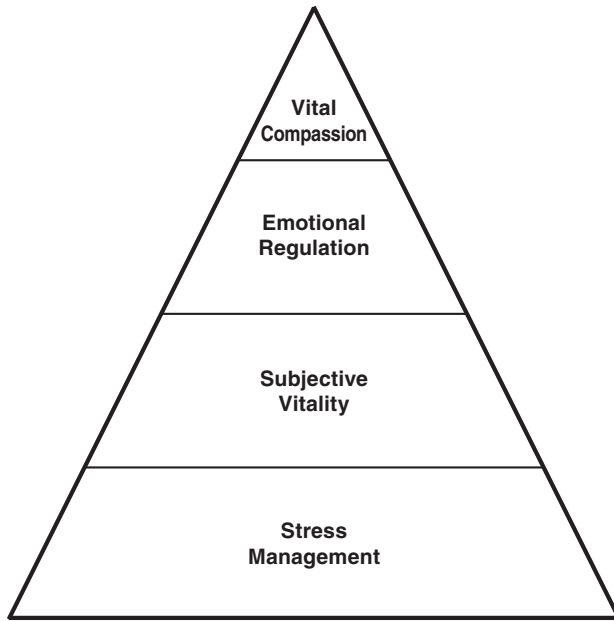
Nurses' challenges don't just arise from the double-edged sword of compassion. The demands of the profession—time commitments, accumulative stress, management, and organizational politics—all contribute to the overwhelm that is a root cause of the profession's high attrition rates and growing mental health challenges (Haddad et al., 2022; Litzzen-Brown et al., 2023; NSI Nursing Solutions, 2023). In this broader sense, to be good at nursing is to be good at suffering, to develop the skills to sustain the altruism, optimism, energy, and compassion that first called you to caregiving.

Nursing school trained you in the practice of skilled care. This workbook is about skilled suffering. Recent understandings in neurology, psychology, and compassion science provide solutions to the riddle of the double-edged sword. There are indeed evidence-based methods for supporting compassionate action, gaining energy from this work, and successfully and continually coping with the stresses and strains inherent to caring about and for others.

This workbook is organized by the key elements of skilled compassion. Starting with the foundational abilities of managing *stress* and subjective *vitality*, the workbook progresses through *emotional regulation* and *compassion science* (see Figure 1–1). Each of these elements is a tool in your toolbox to help you wield the double-edged sword of compassionate service and, ultimately, aid in alleviating your suffering.

## A Note on Organizations

While *The Double-Edged Sword* focuses on your skills as an individual compassion practitioner, it is important to note that skilled compassion is not just the responsibility of the individual. It is, of course, essential that we as individuals prepare our



**Figure 1-1.** Key Components of Skilled Compassion

### Activity 1-1: Emotional Acknowledgment

The first step of skilled compassion is to actively acknowledge both edges of the sword.

Let's start by recognizing your *compassion satisfaction*. On the following list of positive feelings, circle those that you commonly experience when providing care. Try using these in a short piece of writing. For example, "When I am caring for patients, I sometimes feel . . ."

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| ◆ Accepting    | ◆ Comfortable  |
| ◆ Active       | ◆ Courageous   |
| ◆ Admiring     | ◆ Curious      |
| ◆ Affectionate | ◆ Determined   |
| ◆ Amazed       | ◆ Eager        |
| ◆ Amused       | ◆ Elated       |
| ◆ Assertive    | ◆ Enthusiastic |
| ◆ Attentive    | ◆ Epiphanic    |
| ◆ Brazen       | ◆ Euphoric     |
| ◆ Caring       | ◆ Excited      |
| ◆ Cheerful     | ◆ Expectant    |

(continues)

- |              |                      |
|--------------|----------------------|
| ◆ Fascinated | ◆ Relaxed            |
| ◆ Focused    | ◆ Satisfied          |
| ◆ Friendly   | ◆ Self-caring        |
| ◆ Grateful   | ◆ Self-compassionate |
| ◆ Happy      | ◆ Self-confident     |
| ◆ Hopeful    | ◆ Self-motivated     |
| ◆ Humble     | ◆ Self-respecting    |
| ◆ Insightful | ◆ Self-understanding |
| ◆ Inspired   | ◆ Sentimental        |
| ◆ Interested | ◆ Serene             |
| ◆ Intrigued  | ◆ Strong             |
| ◆ Joyful     | ◆ Surprised          |
| ◆ Kind       | ◆ Sympathetic        |
| ◆ Loving     | ◆ Tender             |
| ◆ Mystified  | ◆ Thrilled           |
| ◆ Nostalgic  | ◆ Triumphant         |
| ◆ Optimistic | ◆ Trusted            |
| ◆ Passionate | ◆ Worthy             |
| ◆ Proud      |                      |

Now, let's find the contours of your *compassion stress*. On the list of negative feelings below, circle those that you commonly experience when providing care. Try using these in a short piece of writing. For example, "When I am caring for patients, I sometimes feel . . ."

- |                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| ◆ Afraid       | ◆ Baffled        |
| ◆ Aggressive   | ◆ Bitter         |
| ◆ Agitated     | ◆ Bored          |
| ◆ Alienated    | ◆ Claustrophobic |
| ◆ Angry        | ◆ Coercive       |
| ◆ Anguished    | ◆ Confused       |
| ◆ Annoyed      | ◆ Contemptuous   |
| ◆ Anxious      | ◆ Cruel          |
| ◆ Apathetic    | ◆ Demoralized    |
| ◆ Apprehensive | ◆ Depressed      |
| ◆ Ashamed      | ◆ Disappointed   |

- ◆ Disgusted
- ◆ Disheartened
- ◆ Disliked
- ◆ Dispirited
- ◆ Doubtful
- ◆ Frustrated
- ◆ Furious
- ◆ Grieving
- ◆ Guilty
- ◆ Helpless
- ◆ Hurt
- ◆ Impatient
- ◆ Insecure
- ◆ Irritated
- ◆ Isolated
- ◆ Jealous
- ◆ Lonely
- ◆ Mad
- ◆ Melancholic
- ◆ Miserable
- ◆ Moody
- ◆ Nauseated
- ◆ Neglected
- ◆ Nervous
- ◆ Numb
- ◆ Offended
- ◆ Pessimistic
- ◆ Powerless
- ◆ Rageful
- ◆ Regretful
- ◆ Rejected
- ◆ Reluctant
- ◆ Resentful
- ◆ Resigned
- ◆ Restless
- ◆ Sad
- ◆ Self-critical
- ◆ Self-loathing
- ◆ Self-pitying
- ◆ Shocked
- ◆ Sorrowful
- ◆ Spiteful
- ◆ Stressed
- ◆ Stubborn
- ◆ Stuck
- ◆ Submissive
- ◆ Suffering
- ◆ Tense
- ◆ Tired
- ◆ Troubled
- ◆ Uncertain
- ◆ Undermined
- ◆ Upset
- ◆ Weak
- ◆ Worried
- ◆ Wrathful

Combine all the writing into a single statement about the double-edged sword. This can follow a pattern such as, “When engaging in work as a nurse, I feel both positive feelings and negative feelings.”

This will help you name and acknowledge the emotional complexity of your work. The next exercise is also an effective means of achieving and habituating awareness of your emotional and mental states—an essential first step to engaging with your thoughts and feelings and (re)gaining agency and balance.

### **Activity 1–2: The Morning Pages**

The Morning Pages is a powerful journaling technique propagated by artist, teacher, and writer Julia Cameron in her book *The Artist's Way*. The method is simple. Every day (at least while working through this workbook) find a time, preferably but not necessarily in the morning, and with pen or pencil and paper do the following:

Write down anything that comes to mind—automatically and without pause or long reflection—for two sides of a blank page of notebook paper and one side of a second page.

When you are done, destroy the pages. Rip them out and rip them up; burn them; feed them to the pigs.

Destroying the pages ensures that you are not writing for an audience, not even your future self. This removes any inhibitions from your expression and establishes flow between your head, hand, and heart. Achieving this flow is a central skill for honest and constructive self-exploration. Building a skilled practice of introspection bolsters your ability to better recognize and, ultimately, regulate your internal states.

bodies, psyches, and souls for the good work of giving care, but it is at least equally important that the organizations in which we operate actively support and encourage skilled compassion. With a shared goal of sustainable excellent care, nurses and nurse-hiring institutions must collaborate to design a way of working that centers the essential skills of giving care. Toward this aim, the final section of the workbook addresses institutions, systems, leadership, and change.

## **References**

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# 2.

## SUBJECTIVE VITALITY

### Entropy Versus Energy

The entire universe is constructed with only a few simple rules, known collectively as the laws of thermodynamics. Chief among these is the law of entropy. Simply stated, entropy is the universal tendency for systems to increase in disorder and randomness over time. Left unsupported, systems leak energy and eventually dissolve into chaos. This is true for molecules, planets, your silverware drawer, and your life. Entropy can be seen as the cause of disorder and malfunction of the systems in which you are embedded—your work, your family, your daily routine, and your mind.

Entropy manifests in our lives as the volatility, uncertainty, confusion, and arbitrariness (collectively known as VUCA) common to everyday life. It also manifests in our emotional reactions to VUCA; left unattended, chronic fear, stress, and sorrow can all work as agents of entropy, draining your systems of their energy and inviting disorder.

The only way to counter entropy, to maintain order and encourage growth, is to add energy into the system. We will call this energy *vitality*, the “positive feeling of being alive and energetic” (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

### Ready and Resilient

There are two kinds of vitality that we can manage: physical and psychological. The sources of physical vitality are well known and include nutrition, exercise, and sleep. While these are indeed very important, this workbook focuses more on *psychological vitality*.

The sources of psychological vitality are less well-known. Also referred to as subjective vitality, psychological vitality is defined as “a sense of energy available to the self” (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Although it is subjective, this kind of vitality is still measurable and observable. High subjective vitality is a functionally significant indicator of physical and mental health, including immune function, affect, and memory.

If we successfully manage the sources of our psychological vitality, we can assure we have enough energy to counter the entropy always eroding our well-being. In this way, when psychologically vitalized, we are at once *ready* and *resilient*:

- ◆ Ready for the inevitable VUCA and suffering that accompanies daily life and that is magnified by being a professional caregiver.
- ◆ Resilient enough to get up again should those forces knock you over.

In life, for both work and play, readiness and resilience are required. Subjective vitality is the underlying factor in each.

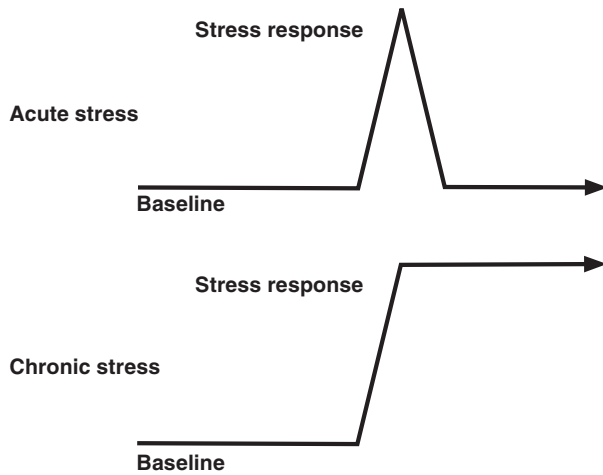
## Regulating Stress

Despite the relative ease and efficacy of the vitality management techniques in this workbook, they will not be accessible or useful to you if you are in a state of stress. Before we learn to work with our vitality, we must first learn to mitigate stress—chronic stress, to be precise.

Stress is a specific set of neurological, psychological, and physiological responses to a perceived threat. As such, stress is a natural and adaptive reflex for all sorts of living creatures, including all mammals, reptiles, and birds. When a threat is perceived, the stress response is automatically engaged by your nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. And when the perceived threat goes away, the stress response turns off. This pattern—threat—stress—relax—is called *acute stress*. Acute stress is good; it saves us from immediate harm and teaches us about danger and safety. It is useful suffering, you might say.

Stress, however, is not always acute. Sometimes we suffer from *chronic stress*. As the name indicates, chronic stress occurs when the stress response does not turn off (see Figure 2–1). Instead, a chronic stress response stays in the on position. This can be attributed to living under chronically threatening conditions or to our unique ability to imagine danger. The human imagination is a gift; it allows us to experience and express worlds beyond the real, to invent and innovate, to tell stories, to connect with others, and to guide our own futures. But, like empathy, it is a double-edged sword. Our imaginations often present danger when there is none or cause us to obsess on anticipated dangers—an agitated and devitalizing state of mind referred to as anticipatory angst. Sound familiar?





**Figure 2-1.** Acute Stress Versus Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is not merely a distraction. The physiological toll of being in a prolonged stress state is huge. The following is a list of the common effects of chronic stress. Which combination of these do you typically experience when stressed?

- ◆ Physical effects of chronic stress
  - Bloating and diarrhea
  - Frequent illness
  - Fatigue
  - Sore muscles
  - Headaches
  - Chest pains
  - Decreased libido
  - Tinnitus
  - Insomnia
- ◆ Mental and emotional effects of chronic stress
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Excessive worry
  - Low affect
  - Inability to concentrate
  - Obsessive worrying
  - Pessimism
  - Poor judgment
  - Forgetfulness

Needless to say, it is very difficult to manage your subjective vitality and gain readiness and resilience while stressed out. Learning to regulate your stress will allow you to abbreviate the stress response and regain an ability to think clearly, focus, and act with agency. Only then can you effectively engage in the project of self-vitalization.

Happily, the neurology of stress offers us a simple solution. The stress reflex is governed by the vagus nerve, our longest cranial nerve, which innervates many of your core systems, including the heart, lungs, throat, and the gut. It is also indirectly involved in general muscle tension and the operation of the pelvic floor. The stress reflex recruits all of these systems to get you out of danger.

The vagus nerve is both *afferent* and *efferent*—it both sends signals from the brain down to your body and shuttles signals from the body back up to the brain. So, if you can consciously relax the systems triggered by the stress response, the vagus nerve will inform your brain that all is well and that the stress reflex can be switched off. In other words, you can learn to transform your chronic stress into acute stress.

This can be achieved in a number of ways. Activity 2–1 describes one method that is particularly effective and can be enacted anywhere.

## The Sources of Vitality

Psychologists have identified the three universal nutriments of psychological vitality:

- ◆ Autonomy
- ◆ Competence
- ◆ Relatedness

*Autonomy* refers to the times in which you are engaged in behavior you intrinsically want to do. One is most autonomous when motivated by their values, identities, and interests and least autonomous when motivated by reward, punishment, guilt, and pressure.

As Figure 2–2 indicates, the more autonomous one’s motivations, the more vitality they experience. Importantly, the graph indicates that we are most vitalized when motivated by our values and identities. While engaging in our interests and excitements is indeed energizing, these are ultimately more ephemeral and less powerful engagements. We further discuss this later in the chapter.

*Competency* is a function of appropriate challenge. One gains vitality when engaged in activities that are just challenging enough. Think about a time when achieving your assigned tasks was simply not possible with the resources on hand and how devitalizing that was. It can also be draining to work at a task that is just too easy. But when your work (or play!) is appropriately challenging, vitality flows.

### **Activity 2–1: The Wet Noodle**

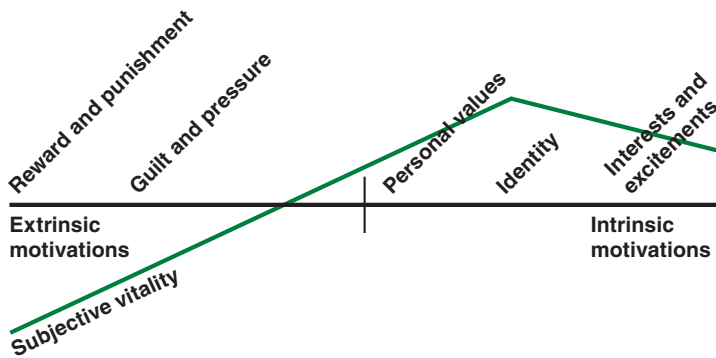
This is a progressive relaxation exercise designed to inform your vagus nerve that you are not under physical threat. By doing so, your nervous system will return to the “rest and digest” state and allow you to think clearly and calmly.

Sit comfortably with a softly straightened spine and feet on the floor. You can place your hands on your knees, palms up.

Slowly draw a deep breath and even more slowly exhale through pursed lips. Let’s call this a “long exhale” rather than a deep breath; it’s the exhale that counts. Do a few of these and notice your heart rate slowing down.

- ◆ Start by intentionally relaxing the muscles in your shoulders and your neck. Your head weighs about 10 pounds. Relieve your neck from the duty of having to hold that up anymore. Let your chin fall toward your chest as your muscles relax.
- ◆ Now release control of the muscles in your face. You no longer have to hold your cheeks in place. Relax the muscles around your eyes and give a long exhale.
- ◆ Wiggle your fingers, move your elbows around a little bit, and let your arms go slack in your lap.
- ◆ Now give a long exhale and let your rib cage slump over onto your belly. You no longer need to hold your body up straight. Relax.
- ◆ Wiggle your toes and let your knees go where they will.
- ◆ Now give a long exhale and then squeeze the muscles in your pelvis as if you’re stopping yourself from peeing. Hold this for three seconds. Then release and give a long exhale.
- ◆ Slowly open your eyes and raise your head.

Welcome back! Hopefully, you are now calmed and able once again to think clearly and be fully aware of the present. Consider practicing this exercise at least once or twice a day. This will help build the habit of volitionally switching the state of your autonomic nervous system. It also works really well in the moment should a stress episode occur. Of course, it is not always appropriate to stop everything and enact a whole Wet Noodle. In those cases, taking a few long exhales and relaxing your shoulders and pelvis will go a long way toward steering you away from your stress response. This is especially true if you’ve been practicing your Wet Noodles every day.



**Figure 2-2.** Motivation Spectrum

*Relatedness* occurs when we engage in supportive and meaningful relationships. Vitality from relatedness is experienced when one is connected to others via validating relationships. It’s not only relationships that give relatedness but also the feeling of being seen and understood. This is easier for some people to achieve than deep relationships. This may manifest in interpersonal groups such as a work- or play-oriented community. It may also arise in more personal one-on-one relationships with friends and family. Vitalizing relationships validate who we are and elevate our sense of potential.

To these, we can add a fourth important source of subjective vitality that appears to be as universal as autonomy, competency, and relatedness:

*Interaction with nature*, whether walking in the woods, just going outside, caring for houseplants, or playing with your pets, is associated with elevated vitality as well as a collection of other health benefits (see Activity 2–2).

## The ACoRN Test

Remember the sources of vitality easily by employing this simple acronym:

**Autonomy, Competency, Relatedness, Nature → ACoRN**

Managing your vitality starts with being aware of—and providing growth conditions for—your ACoRN. To get started, you can audit your current activities, relationships, and commitments using the ACoRN test. The ACoRN test is a simple way to evaluate if something will be vitalizing.

For example, let’s say you were asked to pick up an extra shift at work. Your immediate response to this opportunity/request/invitation is likely to be based on a

## Activity 2–2: Forest Bathing

Forest bathing, or as it is called in Japanese, *shinrin-yoku*, is the practice of walking in the woods, bathing in the sights, sounds, and smells of the natural environment. Studies indicate that nature-dosing has a demonstrably positive effect on mood, stress regulation, mindfulness, and physiological outcomes, including lower blood pressure as well as measurably lower cortisol levels.

Try this. Find a suitable natural space. This could be a park, a garden, a nature trail, or even an arboretum in a building. Set aside at least 20 minutes to visit this space alone. Once you arrive, do a Wet Noodle and then take the following steps:

- ◆ Walk through the space and bring your attention to your senses. What can you smell? What colors, shapes, and textures do you see? What can you hear?
- ◆ Notice things you can see but not hear. Notice things you can hear but not see.
- ◆ Stand still, close your eyes, and listen to all the sounds you can hear. Try to locate them in space. Make a mental map of the space based on sound alone.
- ◆ Now continue your walk leading with your nose. Do the scents change as you move through space? What colors do they smell like?
- ◆ When you are done, try another Wet Noodle.

variety of factors, including how you feel, how much time you may have, and even the weather. Employing the ACoRN test, however, will help you factor subjective vitality into the equation.

Let's provide a potential audit of this example:

A↑

This opportunity is right up my alley; it is well aligned with what I value and is something I truly intrinsically want to do.

Co↑

This task would indeed be appropriately challenging. I don't think I will be overwhelmed by the requirements and activities. In fact, I believe I stand to learn something from this.

R↑

The other people on the team all seem really interesting. Also, I look forward to working with people who overlap with my interests so nicely.

N↑

This event takes place outside, so I will be able to take some outdoor breathing breaks and walk around the grounds a bit, admiring the greenery.

Our audit revealed what appears to be a vitalizing opportunity: A↑Co↑R↑N↑. Overall, you are likely to be vitalized, or V+, by deciding to commit to this. In this way, the ACoRN test makes plain the vitality dimension of decision-making, and we cannot begin to center vitality in our lives without a simple and informal way of assessing vitality.

This scenario was decidedly rosy. Of course, many times, maybe even more times than not, the ACoRN test reveals a V- score. Discovering that a behavior will cause you to spend vitality is powerful knowledge. You are now equipped to better budget your psychological energy. Of course, there are many times in life when you will engage in V- situations, either out of duty or desire. That's life. But if you (and the organizations and institutions to which you belong) continue to prioritize subjective vitality, you will have enough vitality to spend on these moments and, potentially, gain from them.

See Activity 2–3 to practice ACoRN testing.

### Activity 2–3: ACoRN Testing

Choose an upcoming event or opportunity and evaluate whether it is vitalizing (V+), devitalizing (V-), or somewhere in between (V<sup>0</sup>). You can also try this with an event from your past. Does the event's ACoRN assessment match up to your vitality experience?

Now, think about an upcoming opportunity. Evaluate this using the ACoRN test and see how vitalizing it might be. If it is V-, how might this be redesigned to be more vitalizing? By completing the ACoRN assessment, will you change any of your current or future behaviors when asked to do something?

## Your Life Support Mosaic

### *Life Support*

I, Corey Pressman, recently conducted an informal poll of my colleagues in the School of Nursing. The question was simple: What are things you like to do on your own time that are vitalizing? The responses may look familiar to you:

- ◆ Cooking
- ◆ Singing in the car
- ◆ Yoga
- ◆ Napping
- ◆ Hiking
- ◆ Rowing
- ◆ Meditation
- ◆ Gardening
- ◆ Listening to music
- ◆ Family time
- ◆ Dog time
- ◆ Puzzles
- ◆ Reading mysteries
- ◆ Exercising

These activities are what we may consider common hobbies. However, if our goal is to maximize our vitality, it is fruitful to reframe how we think about these vitalizing activities. Instead of mere hobbies, think of these as your *life support*. Given the importance of vitality for sustained well-being, resilience, and readiness, it makes sense to prioritize activities that energize you. In fact, it is essential. Use Activity 2–4 to determine your life support.

#### **Activity 2–4: Your Life Support**

Make a list of the activities that vitalize you. It doesn't matter if you have not engaged in these recently. You can even include things you would like to do but have never done.

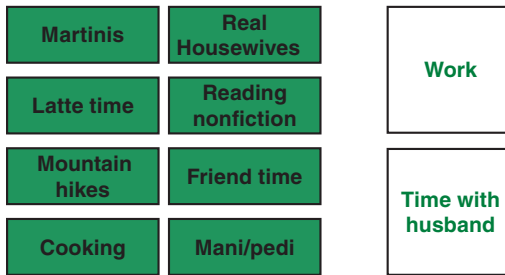
Of course, being a nurse precludes doing only the things on your life support list all the time. However, imagine a world in which you purposely structured one or two (or three!) of your life support activities into your day, week, or month. What would that look like? Write it down! You likely can't do them all, and nor do you have to, not all at once, at least. It's best to start small and build up over time.

## The Mosaic

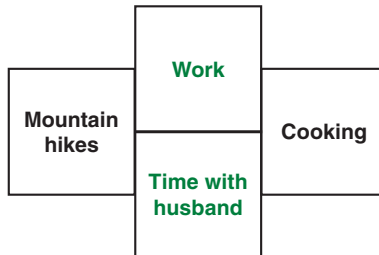
To help you decide what life support to structure into your calendar, look at the big picture of how all of your time is spent. To do this, think of your various activities as tiles in a great mosaic that is your daily life. For example, there may be a tile for work, a tile for family time, one for gardening, and so on. In constructing your mosaic, start with the less moveable tiles—things like work and family time. For example, Figure 2–3 shows the central tiles for Meredith, a nurse colleague. Off to the side, she made a tile for each of her various life support vitalizing activities.

This arrangement allows you to see which V+ activity you might choose to incorporate in your life, at least for the next few weeks. After a while, you can reevaluate your mosaic and see if it is working for you. In the case of Meredith, she decided to intentionally integrate cooking and mountain hikes into her weekly routine. Her mosaic now looks like Figure 2–4.

Her choice to include these was based on how readily they could realistically be achieved. Remember, her hikes and cooking are not mere hobbies or things that “would be nice to do.” Instead, these activities have been reframed as life support. Without the subjective vitality provided by hiking, she is risking low vitality and, ultimately, burnout. Activity 2–5 guides you in building your mosaic.



**Figure 2-3.** Meredith's Vitalizing Activities



**Figure 2-4.** Meredith's Vitalizing Activities Mosaic



### Activity 2–5: Your Mosaic

1. First, place the tiles that cannot move—activities like work and family.
2. Then, use the list from the previous activity and create life support tiles over to the side like in the earlier example.
3. Now, decide which of the life support tiles you can move over into your mosaic for a while.
4. Draw your new mosaic on a piece of paper (or use Post-it notes on paper or the fridge). Keep this somewhere you can see it regularly.

Now that your mosaic is done, you are ready to turn it into action and fold some vitality into your life. How you activate your mosaic is a matter of your personal relationship to structure. Some people need to really make room for their life support by explicitly adding activities to their calendar on specific days and at specific times. For others, it may suffice to be more improvisational and just go with a personal promise to get around to the life support activities. Which approach might work best for you?

## Vital Solitude

Solitude is the state of being truly physically alone as well as disengaged from activity that connects you to the outside world for at least 15 minutes. Episodes of *vital solitude* offer an opportunity for resetting, introspection, and vitalization. The practice of vital solitude is an intentional experience, a creation of space to spend authentic time with oneself free of the interference of others and the inevitable public self-awareness that occurs when we interact socially.

Crafting your own practice of solitude will create the conditions for vital reflection, insights, creativity, and self-acceptance. The *vital solitude rituals* (see Activity 2–6) proposed next were designed to pass the ACoRN test by

- ♦ Existing as an intrinsic, judgment-free, self-empathic activity (autonomy);
- ♦ Enabling the individual to work through potential discomfort with spending time truly alone (competence);
- ♦ Creating the conditions for the individual to better explore and understand oneself (relatedness); and
- ♦ Being transferable to the outdoors (nature).

### **Activity 2–6: Vital Solitude Ritual**

Begin this practice by getting yourself to a state in which you are truly alone. To do this, disconnect from your screens and devices (with the exception of turning on some music if that is comfortable for you) to avoid distractions. Now, step into comfortable clothing and prepare a warm beverage such as tea. Now that the basics are covered, you can take one of two paths: get seated and cozy or head out on a relaxing, solo walk.

If you choose to sit, prepare to set a 15-minute timer and nestle into a cozy spot. You have a few options of how you can spend this time seated:

- ◆ Haiku about you: following the traditional Japanese 5-7-5 syllable structure, release your inner poet.
- ◆ Doodle: grab a sheet of paper and writing utensils and sketch to your heart's desire.
- ◆ Just think: relinquish all activity and simply sit with your thoughts. As you do, try to be aware of how and where your thoughts are wandering.

If you choose to walk, prepare to set a 15-minute timer and toss on your walking shoes. You have a few options of how you can spend your walk:

- ◆ Collect: gather a few random treasures while trekking around (e.g., leaves, stones, or trash to tidy your neighborhood!).
- ◆ Color spotting: choose a color and observe your surroundings as you follow your color from place to place.
- ◆ Wander: simply roam around your place of choice without a plan or destination.

Designating a time to be alone and do almost nothing can be remarkably challenging. However, you will find that crafting repeatable solitude rituals can provide a reliable dose of clarity, confidence, and vitality.

## **Purpose Statement**

In developing readiness and resilience in the face of challenging and uncertain situations, few things are as useful as possessing a clear *purpose statement* (see Activity 2–7). A good purpose statement summarizes your intrinsic motivations, describes your values and identities, and acts both as a motivator and as a reminder when things get tough. After stress regulation, traumatologists list this clarity of purpose as the most important tool when confronted with overwhelm.

## Activity 2–7: Statement of Purpose

1. Make a list of your values. Think of your values as things that you feel are important, central, and essential for a good life. This list of values can help you get started:
  - ◆ Abundance
  - ◆ Acceptance
  - ◆ Authenticity
  - ◆ Autonomy
  - ◆ Balance
  - ◆ Beauty
  - ◆ Calmness
  - ◆ Caregiving
  - ◆ Change
  - ◆ Charity
  - ◆ Community
  - ◆ Compassion
  - ◆ Connection
  - ◆ Courage
  - ◆ Creativity
  - ◆ Efficiency
  - ◆ Fairness
  - ◆ Forgiveness
  - ◆ Generosity
  - ◆ Goodness
  - ◆ Gracefulness
  - ◆ Gratitude
  - ◆ Grit
  - ◆ Harmony
  - ◆ Honesty
  - ◆ Hope
  - ◆ Humility
  - ◆ Humor
  - ◆ Independence
  - ◆ Insightfulness
  - ◆ Integrity
  - ◆ Joy/Fun
  - ◆ Justice
  - ◆ Kindness
  - ◆ Learning
  - ◆ Love
  - ◆ Loyalty
  - ◆ Openness
  - ◆ Peacefulness
  - ◆ Self Transcendence
2. Now, list your identities. These can include family identities like sister or father. Also include identities from work, such as nurse, manager, or teacher. Go even deeper and include more generalized and essential identities, such as caregiver, learner, sharer, facilitator, or catalyst. What are the patterns in your life? What is a role you commonly gravitate to in situations? What roles vitalize you most?
3. Begin to craft your statement of purpose based on your responses. Try following this pattern: I am a   (identity)   of   (value)  . Experiment with different words and be playful. You'll know you are on to something when the statement you are crafting begins to excite you. It is not important for your statement to be perfect or beautiful. Don't think of this as something that needs to be clear enough to be shared as is or readily understood by someone else; it only needs to make sense to you.

Your purpose statement is an essential tool capable of orienting you toward your vitality in a few ways:

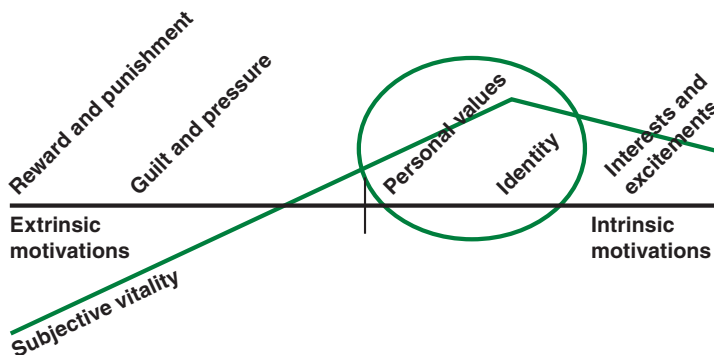
- ◆ Let your purpose statement guide you when deciding whether to commit to a task, opportunities, or activity. As with the ACoRN test, you can use your purpose statement to gauge opportunities as well as make and defend decisions.
- ◆ You can also rely on your statement of purpose when deciding *how* to engage in tasks, opportunities, and activities. Your most vital (and vitalizing) contribution to any endeavor is summarized by your statement of purpose. Staying on purpose is a win-win: You receive vitality from your work while your colleagues and patients benefit from your vital contribution.

Remember, vitality is essential for your survival. This isn't self-indulgence. This is self-preservation. This is self-validation.

Activity 2–8 helps you measure your vitality.

To help access a clear statement of purpose, let's return to the motivation spectrum from before (see Figure 2–5).

Your statement of purpose derives from the values and identities portion of the spectrum, where you are intrinsically motivated by your values and identity. This is the reason you went into a caregiving profession such as nursing; it is also the standard by which you can both seek and advocate for your vitality. A clear statement that encapsulates your values and identities provides an essential touchstone when you are making decisions big and small and when things get rough and you need a reminder as to why you are who—and where—you are.



**Figure 2–5.** The Motivation Spectrum: Purpose Statement

### Activity 2–8: The Subjective Vitality Survey

The simple questionnaire in Figure 2–6 is an effective tool for measuring your subjective vitality in the moment. Take the survey now and gain a baseline measurement. As you work on and begin to live via your purpose statement and mosaic, take the survey on occasion. Is your vitality growing?

Determine your scale score by averaging the item scores. Item #2 has to be reverse scored before it is averaged with the other items. Simply subtract your score on item #2 from 8 before averaging the resulting number with your responses on the remaining six items.

### State Level Version

#### Vitality Scale

Please respond to each of the following statements in terms of how you are feeling right now. Indicate how true each statement is for you at this time, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all true			Somewhat true			Very true
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
At this moment, I feel alive and vital.	I don't feel very energetic right now.	Currently I feel so alive I just want to burst.	At this time, I have energy and spirit.	I am looking forward to each new day.	At this moment, I feel alert and awake.	I feel energized right now.

**Figure 2–6.** The Subjective Vitality Survey

### Reference

Ryan, R. M., & Frederick, C. (1997). On energy, personality, and health: Subjective vitality as a dynamic reflection of well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 65(3), 529–565. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1997.tb00326.x>