Wellness and Self-Care for the Veterinary Professional:
Navigating Work-Life Integration and Cultivating Hardiness and Resilience

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Session Description: Seeking the holy grail of happiness, satisfaction and balance across our life experiences sometimes can feel like an epic quest. In this session's section we will explore concepts, challenges and opportunities related to work-life integration and balance, including some proven and adaptable options for navigating along the way, and improving personal resilience and hardiness.

Definitions and Concepts:

Work-Life Balance vs. Work-Life Integration:
Terminology helps us categorize, classify, define, learn, and establish shared understandings. While these are important purposes, sometimes complexity cannot be defined in one term or phrase. This is particularly true when discussing the breadth and depth of experiences throughout a lifetime.

Terminology and definitions provided here are meant to help frame a complex topic and provide a basis for exploration of what a fulfilling, happy, healthy, safe, connected, productive, meaningful existence "looks like" for each person. Although we use "work-life" to define a separation between "work" and the rest of our lives, work is obviously a significant component and is inextricably woven into the fabric of our lives as a whole. Regardless of whether or not we prefer the term "work-life balance," or "work-life integration," it is likely we can agree that our general goals are to increase comfort and decrease suffering whilst navigating our individual and shared experiences.

Domains: the "separate" *areas* of our lives: work, family, community and "personal time" are some.

Role: Particular *functions* we perform (e.g. mother, veterinarian, receptionist, father, spouse, child)

Other Theories:
Work-Family Border Theory[i] and Boundary Theory[ii]: frameworks to explore the meaning attributed to, ability to move between, and satisfaction derived from experiences in different roles and domains. Researchers aim to identify contributors to "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000, p. 751).

Integration and boundaries: it is posited that integration is influenced through two mechanisms. *Flexibility* refers to "plasticity" of boundaries when navigating shifting needs across different domains or roles. *Permeability* refers to the degree of "porosity" of boundaries—the degree to which those boundaries allow behavioral and psychological "seepage" from one domain or role into another. For instance, Clark found that high flexibility and low permeability were associated with the lowest levels of work-family conflict. Other researchers have found levels of work-family conflict influence worker preferences for flexibility or adjustments to work schedules and locale (flex-time, tele-working, on-site working, for instance) were influenced by the levels of work-family conflict. While these theories provide a framework for ongoing research into satisfaction across domains and roles, more practically they provide workers and management deeper understanding of some of the factors that influence stress in the workplace.

Work-Life Balance through a Western economic business-model lens (such as that which dominates in the U.S.) appears to pose an organizational systems challenge to worker health, happiness and quality of life. All that we do to cultivate and maintain that balance plays out within the systems in which we live. Westernized,

industrialized, economically –driven, hierarchical work systems cause stress by limiting or restraining, and under- or misusing skills, talents, perspectives, creativity and innovation of workers. This stress then translates into other domains and negatively impacts quality of life.

While this prominent business culture requires that we learn how to function within flawed systems, we can try to foster change within our organizations that allows for individuals to fully contribute, develop, and innovate. Most organizational theory is economically focused, and falls short in addressing loss in productivity and health that is attributed to hierarchical constraints on the contributions employees could, and would, like to make. Likewise, this increases stress on managers and leaders who are tasked with responsibilities that could be better distributed to and managed by "lower-ranking" employees.

Changes to this long-standing construct will come with time, and some discomfort. Navigating and flourishing at work can benefit by engaging skills and attributes developed in our personal lives and other domains, and vice versa. This is one reason there is such emphasis placed on work-life balance and work-life integration. Ultimately, this balance reduces stress, and improves resilience.

Complex adaptive systems: we live, work, experience, learn and interact within complex adaptive systems, where "perfect understanding of the individual parts does not automatically convey a perfect understanding of the whole system's behavior" (Wikipedia, 2017). In simplistic terms, this means that concepts, theories, and current knowledge about "what is" and "what works" iterate over time because of iteration within the systems, changing external influencers, and new knowledge that is gained.

Work Life Integration: an effective and efficient coordination of efforts, energies and transitions between personal, work, family, and community obligations (Morris et al., 2007)

Domains: the "arenas" where we live our lives individually and in relation with others. These include work, family, self, and community.

Resilience: the ability to adapt to, bounce back from, and even grow in the face of difficulties and stress. Individuals are born with varying degrees of resilience. Regardless of the level of inherent resilience and individual possesses, increased resilience can be developed over time. Dr. Al Siebert has identified **five levels of resilience** that impact our ability to navigate, withstand, recover from, and grow in the face of stress:
1. Maintaining your emotional stability, health, and well-being as a basic foundation for wellness
2. Focus Outward: Good problem solving skills. Problem-focused coping is more effective for developing resilience than is emotion-focused coping
3. Focus Inward: Strong inner "selfs": includes attribute such as "strong self-esteem, self-confidence, and a positive self-concept".
4. Well-developed resiliency skills: attributes and skills
5. The Talent for Serendipity: the highest level of resilience—the ability to see challenge as serendipitous opportunity—"making lemons from lemonade."

Psychological Hardiness: the ability to withstand stress. Dr. Salvatore Maddi identified three characteristics of psychological hardiness through which we can frame stress, and build hardiness. Maddi describes "The Three Cs of hardiness" as a way to understand how people experience stress, and how they can flourish in the face of adversity:
1. Challenge: seeing problems as challenges vs. threats, and seeking solutions rather than avoiding, retreating, ignoring or disengaging.
2. Control: In the face of challenge, be able to recognize and take action to "gain control" where you can, rather than become overwhelmed or helpless. It is an orientation to hopefulness, possibility and the realization that while not all circumstances can be controlled, intentional positivity and optimism can improve our ability to navigate stressors.

3. Commitment: "stick-to-itiveness." The ability to stay the course, focused on outcomes and goals in the face of "set-backs, obstacles and discouraging news."

Work-life balance has been defined as "an individual's ability to meet their work and family commitments, as well as other non-work responsibilities and activities" (P. Delecta, 2011)[iii] and "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict" (Greenhaus, 2002)". This balance is subjective and individual..."allocating available resources like time, thought and labor wisely among the elements of life (P. Delecta)."

This also can be viewed as a "mind-set spectrum" ranging from "working to live" to "living to work," with time, attention, effort, tangible resources and energy allocations changing with things such as life and career stage, personal circumstances and preferences, and shifting demands of life.

Components of Work Life Balance: In their study, Greenhaus et al.[iv] examine work-life balance through an organizational lens assessing three components of work-family balance:
1. Time balance (an equal amount of time devoted to work and family roles)
2. Involvement balance (an equal level of psychological involvement in work and family roles
3. Satisfaction balance (an equal level of satisfaction with work and family roles

They found that those investing significant time in both family and work, but relatively more time on family compared with work, experienced higher quality of life, and both higher involvement and satisfaction balance. As well, balance reduces conflict and stress, and improves work productivity.

Other life domains: Of course there are components of life beyond work and family. Things such as leisure, recreation, personal development, and community engagement also require time, consideration, and resources, and are figured into the work-life balance and integration equations.

Diversity of Roles: Involvement in diverse roles in life appears to offer protection from negative impacts of experiences encountered in any one role.

High-risk occupations and stress: veterinary medicine has been identified as a high-risk occupation, and medical practice is considered to be a high-risk enterprise (harm to workers, patients and public health). Employing principles and practices of high-risk organizations can minimize harm, allow for surveillance, recognition, response, and recovery from untoward events, and improve organizational safety, outcomes and psychological wellbeing of workers[v].

Psychological health and Cognitive "energy":
Life and work stress can impact psychological health. In turn, psychological consequences of stress (depression, fatigue, anxiety, sleeplessness) can negatively impact personal relationships. Likewise, physical and psychoemotional fatigue can negatively impact cognitive functioning, impairing our ability to navigate, maintain and deepen significant relationships.

Cognitive reframing: "a way of viewing and experiencing events, ideas, concepts and emotions to find more positive alternatives" (Wikipedia, 2017).

Eight-Dimensional Model of Self-Care Extrapolated:
1. **Physical** (please consult your licensed medical care provider for individualized advice as needed)
   a. Strength
   b. Stamina/cardiovascular fitness
   c. Flexibility
   d. Balance
   e. Nutrition

2. **Psychological/Emotional**
   a. How are you feeling?
   b. What do you need?
   c. Do you need support*? If so, what kind*?
   d. Enlist your "buddy" to help remind you when you're "off center" (i.e. "when I'm getting stressed, I get more irritable/withdrawn/etc.) and what might help (i.e. a walk around the building or a moment outside in nature)

   *It's always best to see a licensed mental health care provider if there is any question, or even for prevention and strategizing to maintain psychoemotional health and relationships.

3. **Spiritual**
   a. Finding meaning and purpose in one's life and work, especially as they relate to a larger, sometimes non-tangible experience of connectedness
   b. Living with balance in relation to an "ultimate or immaterial reality...which can encompass an experience of an immanent or transcendent nature of the world,"[vi]
   c. Seek support from a spiritual care provider. Practitioners span all faith, wisdom and belief traditions, *including for those who do not identify as spiritual or religious.*

4. **Intellectual**
   a. Learning, growth and development in areas related to personal and professional life
   b. Ongoing cultivation of interests and skills that stimulate the mind, and keep one stimulated and engaged.

5. **Financial**
   a. Financial security (near- and long-term)
   b. Sufficient income to meet basic needs without
   c. Legal documents in order (consider including an "Ethical Will"[vii] for your practice if applicable)

6. **Social**
   a. Your "outer circle" of friends, acquaintances, organizational connections (professional, charitable, religious, or other social or support groups)
   a. Evaluation of where/with whom you have fun, rejuvenate, laugh, relax
   b. Assessment of social support and engagement

7. **Family**
   a. Your "inner circle" of relatives, those with whom you live, or others with whom you have developed intimate relationships
   b. The trusted people you can safely and reliably turn to for support and nurturance

8. **Occupational**
   a. How you spend your time "giving back," providing income, etc.
   b. Can be professional work, or volunteer in nature

Gratitude: taking time each day to identify things for which we are grateful has been shown to increase happiness (see Robert Emmons in Resources). Starting our days by noting five things for which you are grateful accomplishes several things:
   1. Orients us to look for "good things."
   2. Makes it easier for us to notice "good things."
   3. Reminds us that, even in the face of disappointment and diversity, there are good things in our lives.
   4. Releases neurochemicals that enhance our psychoemotional well being.

Mindfulness: life happens, and memories are made in the moments we are engaging with life. "Future tripping," and worrying are the ways we create narratives for things that have not yet happened, and can add unnecessary stress. Likewise, dwelling on the past in a way that is unproductive can take our time and attention away from the opportunity to be fully present to what is happening now. While there is value in reviewing the past for lessons learnt and as a way of moving forward in greater happiness and health, merely reliving unpleasant experiences

adds stress. "Be here now" is a simple phrase we can use to bring ourselves back to the present. In the present, we can enjoy, manage, learn and make memories.

One simple mindfulness exercise is to breathe slowly and fully into and out of the nose, simply focusing on how the breath moves in and out. Some studies show that doing this for one minute every hour is just as effective as 20 minutes of the same type of mindfulness "meditation."

Positive Psychology: Taking notice of, and building on what we accomplish and do well. This has been shown to be very effective in improving mental health and positive self-concept.

Positive Intelligence: "When your mind acts as a friend far more than as your enemy.[viii]

Relationship Management: Time, Quality, Quantity, Frequency and "Health"
Humans and many other animals are hardwired for connection and safety. "Significant Other" is a term classically used to describe a particular individual with whom a person is in a committed romantic relationship. As a cognitive reframe, I invite you to think of "significant others" more broadly, and extend the sense of what it means to have significant others in your life. Significant others can be any person or being you deeply care about, and with whom you want to spend time and make memories. In our popular culture, the term "work wife," "BFF," "soul mate," "travel companion" "companion animal" are a few examples of the types of the varied and important relationships that provide variety, richness, support, fun, and companionship.

Sometimes, it can be difficult to find time to nurture these important connections. Likewise, it can be difficult to understand and accept changes in the quantity, quality and frequency of our interactions with those we care about. Connections are made, lost, or put on the backburner depending on where we "are" in our lives. Some will serve us at some times in our lives, not in others. Sometimes, relationships become unhealthy and making a decision to step away can be difficult. In the latter case, doing so with civility and grace maintains the possibility for future healthy engagement, and can lay the groundwork for an understanding that, with time, hurts can heal and perspective can shift.

Options for Engaging with Self and Significant Others:
1. Each day, spend 15 minutes in conversation. No phones, no interruptions, no going over "issues" or problem solving…just undivided shared attention.
2. Review of the day: Each person takes a few minutes to look back on his or her day. What went well, brought joy or happiness, was satisfying, fulfilling or made them feel loved? What did not go well, or brought experiences of fear, upset, frustration, etc.? Allow some time for the person sharing to reflect on they are impacted by, and can manage or navigate the range of experiences encountered in the course of the day, as well as over time. With this intentional review, patterns (both productive and counterproductive) can be revealed that move us forward toward greater life satisfaction. In sharing these experiences (uninterrupted, active listening) and "holding a space" for those you care about, we are growing in companionship, and learning how to stand with others "through thick and thin." Likewise, we can see the places we are most aligned with what brings us happiness, as well as gain understanding about the things that diminish our happiness and satisfaction.

Stewardship of "Stuff": Downsizing vs. "Right-sizing"
Optimizing the physical spaces where we live and work can help reduce stress, and allow for more time to fully enjoy what we're doing, when we're doing it. Clutter, disorganization and "stewardship of stuff" gobbles up a lot of time, and can cause stress in the following ways:
1. Lost time trying to find things
2. Frustration in not being able to find things
3. Interference with our ability to fully enjoy the things we've worked to build or have acquired because we are so busy taking care of those things.

4. Stress resulting from feeling as if there is always too much to do/take care of/maintain, and not enough time to do it. This can seep into and interfere with our ability to be present to and enjoy other things we are doing.

-->Solutions:
1. Find a good resource for gradually downsizing or right-sizing. There are often psychological reasons behind why we collect, obtain and cling to things that no longer serve us. Rather than criticize ourselves about the clutter and excess, it is more effective to understand our personal motivators and gradually move towards understanding the *why* while we are addressing the nuts and bolts of clearing and organizing. Importantly, this process should not be an unpleasant mandate we add to our "to do" lists, but rather a skill where tangible results should be celebrated and built up. There are several good online resources, books, online courses, and "organizing professionals" that can help you.

Information and Communications Management:
Boundaries: Knowing when to say "yes" or "no," and who, how much or what we want to allow into our lives and experiences. Healthy boundaries can be maintained, restored and strengthened over time, with practice, patience and sometimes the support of professional mental health care providers.

Limiting "electronic time": Time and cognitive and physical energy are limited. Defining boundaries around when and how much we engage on texts, phone calls, emails and social media can help us find more time for things that may have greater value or need. Before making a phone call to that long-winded client or friend, decide if there is a better time, or state up front something like, "I have 15 minutest to give you my undivided attention, then I have to go" to manage expectations. Then, follow up with "I have 3 minutes left" and take some of that time to agree upon future plans for continuing the discussion if needed. No explanation is necessary as to *why* you have time limitations.

Full Engagement:
When you are engaging in any activity or interaction, practice being fully present. In conversation, this means listening to focus on what the other person is saying in order to gain full and accurate understanding. This is also a way to build relationships. It is easy to lose that attention and instead fall into planning a response, or "mind-wandering" onto an altogether different imagining. If you find your mind wandering, just notice that it's wandering and refocus on the conversation. Simply noticing when your mind is wandering cultivates the ability to remain better focused over time.

Resources:
1. Sandra Martin- YouTube video, "Care for the Caregiver," On the Eight-Dimensional Model of Self-care**:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YtjAQNlGUU
2. Ed Batista, Executive Coaching: http://www.edbatista.com/2017/05/investments-not-indulgences.html
3. Al Siebert on Resilience: http://resiliencycenter.com/the-five-levels-of-resiliency/
4. Robert Emmons, The Emmons Lab: http://emmons.faculty.ucdavis.edu/
5. Martin Seligman on Positive Psychology: https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_on_the_state_of_psychology
6. Shirzad Chamine on Positive Intelligence: https://www.positiveintelligence.com/
7. Salvatorre R. Maddi on Hardiness: http://www.hardinessinstitute.com/?page_id=1020
8. Carrie La Jeunesse on Compassion Fatigue. The Compassion Fatigue Podcast: http://thecompassionfatiguepodcast.libsyn.com/the-human-animal-bond-with-dr-carrie-la-jeunesse
9. Thich Nhat Hahn on mindlfulness as one opportunity to cultivate happiness and peace: https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/

[i] Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations, 53*(6), 747-770

[ii] Zedeck, S. (1992). Introduction: Exploring the domain of work and family concerns. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *Work, families and organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 1-32.

[iii] Delecta, P. (2011), Work Life Balance, *International Journal of Current Research* 3:4, 86-189.

[iv] Greenhaus et al. The relation between work–family balance and quality of life, *Journal of Vocational Behavior,* 63, 510–531

[v] https://psnet.ahrq.gov/primers/primer/31/high-reliability