

CHAPTER 1

HOW CAN I KEEP MY VALUES AND MORAL PURPOSE AT THE FOREFRONT OF MY PROFESSIONAL ROLE?

This chapter explores the ideas that:

- Having a strong sense of purpose in your work can help support your wellbeing.
- Wellbeing at work is about feeling trusted and supported to do a good job.
- Being aware of your morals and values, and knowing what is important to you, will help you carve out a career that is meaningful to you.



*'Scratch any teacher hard enough and they're
in it to make a difference.'
(Mentor of trainees)*

WHY DO YOU TEACH?



REFLECTION

Let's kick off this book with a really simple question: **why do you teach?** Jot down your response below *without reading ahead!* Try to keep it to one sentence.

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HINTS & TIPS: WHY DO YOU TEACH?

Take your response to this question, put it on a Post-it note and keep it above your desk as a reminder of your fundamental motivation. Keeping this at the forefront of your mind can really help to cut through the messiness and clarify your reasoning for getting out of bed in the morning.

THE FUNDAMENTAL NATURE OF WELLBEING

To be clear from the outset: this book is founded upon the belief that wellbeing is innately linked to the essential satisfaction we draw from our professional roles.

Wellbeing is *not* about the fluffy, bolt-on things. ‘Please don’t give me free chocolate on a Friday if you’re going to treat me like crap for the rest of the week’, said one teacher. Yoga might be great for some people, but compulsory yoga for all staff on a Friday afternoon in February (true story) is not what this book is about. Not only might seeing our colleagues in lycra not be desirable, but the notion that adding a wellbeing initiative to an already inexhaustible list of new initiatives will make teachers feel better about their jobs is a nonsense. At the heart of teacher wellbeing is a sense of professional integrity and trust: put most simply, it is the sense that teachers are feeling good and doing a good job. Teaching will always be busy and emotionally demanding, but getting home and feeling that *your efforts are worth it* is the key.

Therefore, being able to articulate why you made the decision – with all the costs, financial, intellectual and personal – to dedicate your career to teaching is essential.

THE SIMPLEST QUESTION OF ALL: WHY DO TEACHERS TEACH?

Of the thousands of teachers who’ve been asked thousands of questions about their wellbeing and motivation at work, this one is by far the simplest to answer. ‘For the salary’ is a response found almost never; ‘for the holidays’ rarely (though understandable for those with children of school age).

There are two overarching reasons why teachers teach, based on responses to this question collated over the last decade:

- To share their love for their subject
- To make a difference in society.

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Here is a selection of responses from teachers in response to the question, 'why teach?' (Twitter, February 2020):

'To do a job which means something.'

'To work with young people and make a difference to their future.'

'To make a difference to individuals and the world.'

'Working with young people, to change their perception of life and events is just enriching and you do at points, sometimes, truly transform their world.'

IKIGAI



Figure 1.1 Ikigai

Source: 'The View Inside Me' by Marc Winn. Reproduced with permission.

Ikigai can give us a helpful way of visualising the link between wellbeing and professional fulfilment. Ikigai is a Japanese concept that can be loosely translated as your 'reason for being'. The Venn diagram represents the cross-section of your values, the things you are good at and the things

you enjoy. It is a useful model for reflecting on where you sit at present in terms of your identity as a teacher and human being, and what small steps you might take to move closer to the centre – the highest possible level of fulfilment.

SHAPED BY EXPERIENCE

Teachers’ own experience of school as children also plays a key role in their accounts of why they teach. This can be one or both of negative and positive experiences and role models. Some teachers describe the desire to give young people as joyful and fulfilling an experience as they themselves were lucky enough to have at school. Others wish to right the wrongs they themselves experienced at school, for we are shaped as much, if not more, by our challenges as we are by our positive experiences.



REFLECTION

Take a moment to consider the teacher(s) who really inspired you at school. Try to be specific about *how* they inspired you – did they push you further than you thought you could go? Did they help you at a time of need? Did they spark a passion for a particular subject?

Write your response here:

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.....
.....

(Continued)



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Now, think about a teacher who actively did *not* inspire you. Did they underestimate you, belittle or misunderstand you? Were they overly harsh or overly intrusive?

Write your response here:

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.....

Use these reflections to consider how you would like your students to remember you.

REMEMBER, YOU ARE EACH SOMEBODY'S 'EVERYDAY HERO'

These are the words of teacher and inspirational speaker, Jaz Ampaw-Farr, who credits key teachers in her life for enabling her to survive and thrive during a devastating childhood of abuse and poverty. Jaz says that many teachers have no idea just how great their influence is. 'You have no idea of your power to influence. It's often the smallest acts which make the biggest difference', says Jaz (Ampaw-Farr, 2017).

CAPTURING YOUR SUCCESSES

As we will see in Chapter 2, teachers have a tendency to hold on to the negatives and to frequently question their own competence – there isn't enough celebration of success in many schools. If you're reading this as a school leader, it might be worth considering how you can make this a regular feature of your culture.





REFLECTION

Challenge: make this a regular reflection at the end of every term!

Make a note of three successes or three of your proudest moments from your teaching career so far – three differences you’ve made to others. Many teachers find this very challenging, but you are guaranteed to have many to choose from. They might include comforting a colleague in distress, giving a student the confidence to read aloud, or supporting a family in crisis.

1.
2.
3.

WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

*'I didn't know I had educational values until I worked in a school whose ethos flew in the face of them.'
 (A teacher who struggled (and is still teaching in another context))*

Purpose and values are huge concepts and can be very hard to articulate but doing so is well worth the effort. Pinpointing, and then sharing, what you stand for as an educator, a team, a school is extremely powerful. As with all such tasks, it’s best to keep it succinct. Ending up with school walls plastered with 15 different buzzwords like loyalty, resilience, grit and persistence dilutes the message.



REFLECTION

What are the three key qualities that you seek to instil in all members of the community in your classroom, team or school?

1.
2.
3.

A MOMENT OF QUIET

Time for reflection in school is scarce but the value of such quiet moments is huge. Taking time to reflect on your values, on your key lessons from each day and how they will shape you tomorrow, and to simply take in the numerous interactions you have each day, is well worth the effort. It's something that needs to be consciously built in, bearing in mind that both adults and children are constantly bombarded with information and requests from numerous sources.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2011, Americans took in five times as much information every day as they did in 1986 – the equivalent of 34 gigabytes or 100,000 words (Levitin, 2015).

Building in periods of quiet reflection allows you and your teams to relish precious silence and capitalise on valuable thinking time. Jamie Thom,

English teacher and author of *A Quiet Education* (2020: 82), puts it like this: ‘We can certainly make practical changes to our work habits to allow ourselves time for quiet ... a bit of space for thought might make a real difference to our work’



HINTS & TIPS: BUILDING QUIET TIME INTO YOUR DAY

Consciously build quiet time into your day. This could be at school – silent working in class, a few moments of meditation, a walk alone at lunchtime, or at home – in the bath or in the garden.

WHAT DO YOU HOLD DEAR?

Delving a bit deeper into values, either alone or with your colleagues, is also an extremely valuable exercise. It helps you start to articulate your ‘red lines’ – the difference between the tasks that you don’t particularly see the value of but are prepared to suck up (because no system is perfect) and the tasks which you are prepared to fundamentally oppose. Giving voice to your values also helps you to understand your own assumptions, your own biases and your own possible blind spots.

This set of questions, from Ruthellen Josselson, Professor of Clinical Psychology at The Fielding Graduate University in California, is extremely powerful for probing into the things that really make you tick:

- What matters to you?
- What goals do you pursue?
- How do you want others to think of you?
- What do you believe in?
- What guides your actions?

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- Whom do you love?
- What values do you hold dear?
- Where do you expend your passion?
- What causes you pain? (Josselson, 1998: 29)

SELF-AWARENESS

This book is underpinned by two further key beliefs:

1. None of us is perfect.
2. Wellbeing and self-care take different forms for each of us – and what an individual needs might change regularly in the course of a day, a week or a year.

Whilst one teacher's week may be ruined by another teacher failing to respond to their cheery, 'Good morning!' another may be sent over the edge by someone moving their stapler from its usual spot. It's also important to remain aware of our own strengths and foibles – and not giving ourselves too much of a hard time for not being perfect, as discussed in Chapter 2.

CHOOSING BATTLES AND THE MORAL COMPASS

'I have learned that as long as I hold fast to my beliefs and values - and follow my own moral compass - then the only expectations I need to live up to are my own.'
(Michelle Obama, 2015)

Just as no individual is perfect, no system is perfect and no school is perfect. As with so many themes in this book, when it comes to making decisions and being guided by your moral compass, balance is key. Just as individuals are bombarded with information, our education system is full of potential 'silver bullets' in the form of the latest fads or initiatives. There are times when you might choose

just to put up with the latest data duplication of exams administration but, equally, there are times when you may feel you need to take a stand and hold your moral compass fast. A good rule of thumb is the ‘three-week rule’: if you wake up every morning for three weeks not wanting to go to work, it’s a signal that your moral compass is being persistently challenged and it may be time for a reappraisal. The strategies provided in this book will help guide you through, whether you are thriving and wish to keep it this way, or you are struggling with one or more elements of your wellbeing and self-care.



HINTS & TIPS: UTILISING YOUR CONFIDANTES

Choose your confidantes carefully – if you are struggling, those who know you well and care for you will have seen signs that you may have missed. Seek them out in a safe space for a chat.



CASE STUDY 1.1: VALUES-LED LEADERSHIP

LESSON OBSERVATIONS AT ASPIRE – FLIPPING THE HYPER-ACCOUNTABILITY MODEL

Aspire is a Pupil Referral Unit in Buckinghamshire. At Aspire, teachers welcome lesson observations. You’re scoffing. For most teachers, the very word ‘observation’ is enough to induce a stomach flip. Like most answers to most questions in this book, it’s disarmingly simple. Instead of focusing on constantly striving to be better, observations at Aspire focus on what was great – and why. Rather than just shrugging off a success (and this could be the smallest interaction with a child), teachers are urged, through coaching-style conversations in their feedback, to focus on *how and why* the success occurred – and how it can be replicated, celebrated and shared.

NOTE IT DOWN

AS YOU GO THROUGH THIS BOOK, YOU'LL BE EXPLORING DIFFERENT ELEMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR WELLBEING. THIS READY RECKONER IS A REALLY POWERFUL EXERCISE FOR LOOKING AT THE AREAS THAT WE ARE CURRENTLY STRONG IN AND IDENTIFYING AREAS THAT MAY NEED MORE OF A FOCUS. AT THIS EARLY POINT, COMPLETE THE EXERCISE ON THE NEXT PAGE.

NEXT, THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE (REALISTICALLY BUT OPTIMISTICALLY) IN SIX MONTHS' TIME AND MARK THAT SCORE ON THE CHART TOO.

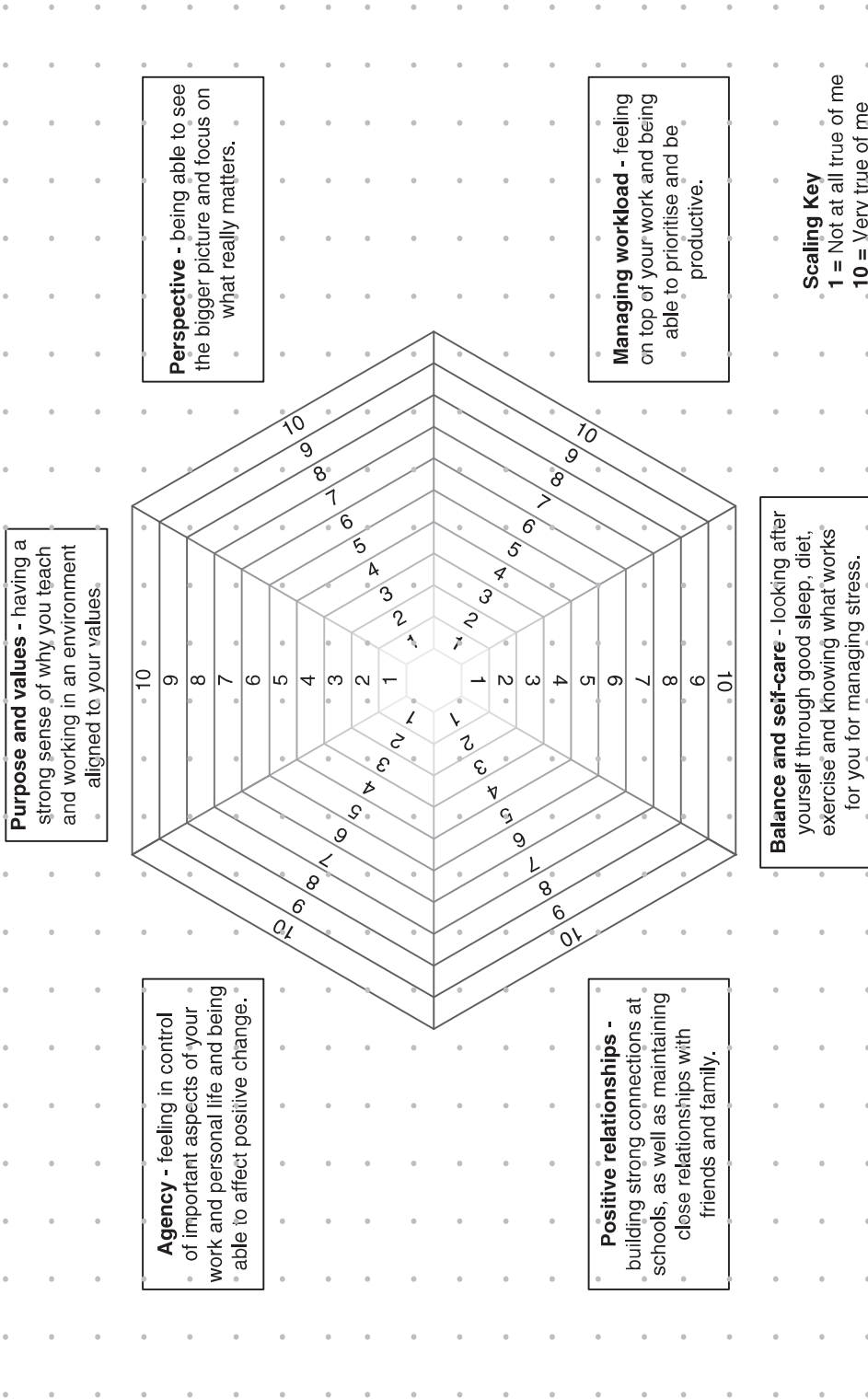


Figure 1.2 Personal wellbeing wheel – what areas of wellbeing do you need to prioritise?

