MINDFULNESS IN PRACTICE

Putting Compassion to Work: Compassion as a Tool for Navigating Challenging Workplace Relationships

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We have all likely had our share of interacting with people in the workplace who exhibit behaviors that bother us—the free-rider, the narcissist, the Machiavellian, the person who never misses an opportunity to hit reply all, or the person whom, despite your best efforts, is continually unsatisfied with your work. While we could continue this list, we are certain that you can bring at least one person to mind whose behavior has been, or perhaps is, a source of suffering for you at work. Given that we spend the majority of our time at work (somewhere around ~ 90,000 hours over the course of our lives), often interacting with people whose behaviors do not match our preferences, it is surprising how poorly equipped we are to skillfully navigate these challenging interpersonal situations. Relatedly, we are often taken aback, when this person engages in this same behavior, yet again. Inevitably, our experiences with this person often spill over to our lives outside of work (e.g., impacting mood, sleep, conversation, and otherwise just taking up time and energy that could be spent elsewhere). This is exhausting.

One way of skillfully navigating challenging workplace relationships is by engaging with compassion. Compassion, or the willingness to (1) notice suffering, (2) allow oneself to feel moved by suffering, (3) wish for the alleviation of suffering, and (4) be motivated to take action to alleviate suffering, has become an important topic for organizations. Suffering refers to any moments of pain, distress, or hardship for a person, and does not have to be serious, extreme, or intense to "count" as suffering. We do not subscribe to the "suffering Olympics"—suffering is not ranked or compared—all forms of suffering are valid experiences. The academic literature contains a number of examples of how organizations that value compassion are actively working to reduce employee suffering (by truly enacting the value of compassion, not just espousing it), which unsurprisingly has significant benefits to both the employee and organization. Yet at the same time, many organizations simply do not acknowledge employee suffering—particularly suffering that is to some degree institutionalized, or part of the organizational culture. For these reasons, it is most practical if employees are equipped to notice their own suffering, take their suffering seriously, and act in ways to help alleviate their suffering.

While many forms of suffering take place at work, often, workplace suffering stems from interpersonal interactions with bosses, colleagues, customers, clients, and so forth. While it can be tempting to call these people "difficult" (e.g., "Taylor's my difficult colleague"), what is actually accurate and true is that the person's *behavior* at times proves difficult for *you*. When we can separate the person from the problematic behavior, it suddenly opens up possibilities for change. It is also equally important to acknowledge that just because this person's behavior proves difficult for *you*, that does not mean that others in the organization experience this same behavior as difficult or troubling to them. For example, while you may deem your colleague's meeting etiquette to be quite unskillful and challenging for you (i.e., generates negative emotions), others in the organization may not have any issues with it. This does not mean that your suffering is not true or valid, simply that it is *your* suffering, and not something that is universally true about that person (i.e., "he's difficult"), or something that is necessarily shared by everyone in the organization. Additionally, it is worth explicitly acknowledging that there is a spectrum of people involved in these challenging interpersonal workplace situations (e.g., people who are more active vs. passive in their behavior that contributes to your suffering, those with whom you interact regularly vs. those with whom you thankfully seldom interact, and those who are in positions of power or authority over you vs. those who are your peers or subordinates). Regardless of where your person falls on this spectrum, we need to have skills and tools to address the distress

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that often follows those painful interpersonal interactions. These strategies must be adaptable in the workplace, perhaps even in the presence of this person, and also for when our work suffering spills over outside of work. It is crucial to note that these strategies are intended to alleviate *your* distress and suffering, not to change this person's behavior.

Coping with Your Suffering at Work

Be Present

While some may call it "mindfulness," we are simply referring to the skill of staying grounded in the present moment. It is easy when faced with a challenging situation at work to want to check out, literally or figuratively; yet, at times, it is important to learn to stay firmly rooted in the present moment. To do this, acknowledge any thoughts, emotions, or experiences that are coming up for you in this moment. Even though the temptation to suppress and avoid your experience will likely be present, try reminding yourself that there is no evidence that suppression works or is effective; in fact, the data suggests that it just makes the situation worse.

Often, when we are experiencing hurt, we choose to "carry on" without acknowledging it. Instead, try to practice calmly noticing your experience without being consumed by it (a common fear). The present moment does not include what happened last week, yesterday, or even an hour ago. The present moment also does not include what may, or may not, happen in the next hour, tomorrow, or next week. As I (HJ) often say to my students, the present moment is just what is at the tip of your nose. It can be helpful to literally observe and describe exactly that—what is happening right now in this moment? To stay grounded, try paying attention to the sensations of breathing cool air in through your nostrils and breathing warm air out through your mouth, or noticing the physical sensations of your feet making contact with the floor beneath you. These simple focusing practices can bring clarity and groundedness to any moment and can help combat rumination and overwhelming emotions. It is from this place of being firmly grounded in the present moment that we can take action to alleviate our suffering.

Practice Nonjudgment

While being firmly grounded in the present moment, remind yourself of what is *actually* true. Often what is going through our minds are judgments about ourselves (e.g., "I'll never make it", "I'm a failure") or others (e.g., "He doesn't deserve to be here," "She's manipulative"). The colorful language that we use when making judgments about ourselves or others may feel good in the moment, but it is likely making the situation worse in terms of our emotions and physiology.

These cognitive distortions (yes, they are distorted thoughts even though you strongly believe it is objectively true that your colleague is a jerk) about what we believe to be true often leads us down a path of taking things very personally. Instead, pause and ask yourself, what is *actually* true? What did this person *actually* say to me? Write it down for clarity. Remind yourself to observe and describe just the facts—not adding anything to it, and not taking anything away from the situation. So while you may be telling yourself the story that "she thinks I'm incompetent," what is actually true is she said, "This is incorrect. I don't think we're on the same page." While the difference in the two statements may seem subtle, one is fixed statement about oneself (incompetent), which leaves little room for problem solving, whereas the other (being incorrect and not being on the same page) is what was actually said. While the latter (being incorrect) is not a joyful experience, it does imply that there is indeed another method of approaching the situation. Of course, this is much easier said than done. It does take deliberate practice. One method that I (HJ) teach my students is to continually ask oneself two questions: "What else could be true?" and "What is the most generous interpretation I can make of this situation?"—from this place, we can employ curiosity and allow ourselves to generate alternative hypotheses rather than getting attached to one single explanation of the person's behavior (which often contains our judgments about them and their behavior). Generating alternative interpretations is not intended to merely cast a rosy glow on the behavior as much as demonstrate that these are theories, stories, hypotheses, not hard facts, and encourage more investigations.

Perspective Taking

Closely related to nonjudgment is the skill of perspective taking. Perspective taking also has the potential to ease some of the distress one is experiencing by inviting ourselves to pause and consider the situation or life more generally from the other person's perspective. Perspective taking is considered to be one of the core components of empathy. To practice perspective taking, it can be helpful to ask oneself questions such as: "What might life be like for this person?," "What does this person value at work?," "What are this person's needs in life?." "Are their needs being met or unmet?," or "What might this person feel insecure or uncertain about?" For example, Marshall Rosenberg's work on Nonviolent Communication suggests that unskillful behavior is simply an expression of an unmet need; thus, when the irritating behavior shows up, it can be especially helpful to wonder "what need is this person trying to meet through this behavior?" While we will not know the answers to these questions for certain (as this is purely speculation/hypothesis generation at this point), taking a moment to ponder the

other person's perspective and feelings can be very effective in gaining an alternative perspective on the situation. One concrete exercise you could try out is taking a few minutes to write down or verbally articulate the situation from your point of view, and then, doing a second pass but this time, writing down or verbally articulating the situation from the *other person's* point of view. Given that reasonable minds can disagree, it is helpful to pause and consider how the other person is likely viewing the *same situation* very differently from you. Perspective taking is akin to choosing to "walk a mile in another's shoes"; however, instead of a mile, see if you are willing to do this even if for just a few breaths. With perspective taking, we are actively (and willingly) employing an open, nonjudgmental, mindset of curiosity regarding the experience of others.

Similarity/Just Like Me

From this place of curiosity, we can briefly consider the similarities that we have with the person who exhibits behaviors that prove difficult for us. Often, when we are experiencing interpersonal challenges, we engage in "othering" behavior—convincing ourselves that this is *their* behavior, and *we* are quite different. Surely *we* do not have these same shortcomings and ill behaviors... right? When we get locked into this "us" vs. "them" perspective, it can be very difficult to see what is *actually* true. Thus, it can be helpful to gain a broader perspective—from the most basic (e.g., "just like me, he has parents who love him," "just like me, she is a sister to someone") to more specific (e.g., "even though I find her behavior to be hurtful, just like me, she is doing the best that she can in this moment"). It is important to note that when we are acknowledging similarity, we are not condoning the person's behavior or "accepting it," instead, we are acknowledging the common humanity that exists between us. To take it a step further, we can entertain, even if for just a few breaths, how we might share some similar behaviors with this person (e.g., impatience, reactivity, poor listening), acknowledging that I too can exhibit these *same* behaviors at times. Just as we are imperfect, so too are others.

Additionally, depending on the situation, we can almost always recognize how we are contributing (intentionally or unintentionally) in some way to the status quo. For example, perhaps rather than having a potentially uncomfortable conversation early on with this person, you chose to avoid the uncomfortable conversation and thus, the person's behavior just continues, along with your mounting annoyance. Or perhaps in response to the person's aggressive behavior, you may engage in passive aggressive behavior. It is important to acknowledge how in some situations we may be subtly, or not so subtly, contributing to the interpersonal difficulties we are experiencing in the workplace. Again, at the most

basic level, just as I can sometimes be unskillful, so too can this person.

Intention Setting Using Your Personal Work Values

It seems that many people begin their workdays anticipating with dread those difficult interpersonal interactions, or resigned to the endless email scrolling. Instead, consider beginning your workday with intention setting based on your personal work values. As author and meditation teacher Jack Kornfield often says, our intention is like "setting the compass of our hearts." In other words, our intention guides our behavior and has consequences for our subsequent actions. For example, if one of your work values is *collaboration*, you could begin your work day by setting an intention to listen to others generously (e.g., not interrupting, holding your thoughts and ideas, noticing judgments). Grounding ourselves in our values offers a present moment focused activity that prepares us to deal with the difficulties that will inevitably arise throughout the day. From this place, we have a stable foundation where we are less likely to be caught off guard.

Most of us spend little time considering our personal work values (we discuss general life values more generally in later sections). Thus, if you are unsure what your personal work values are, you could ponder some questions such as: "How do I want to show up at work?," "What is most important to me as an employee/colleague?," "Why am I in this organization?" These questions may help you identify some of your personal work values. Examples of workplace values might include: *contributing* (e.g., believing that your work is contributing to people in a useful way), *community* (e.g., experiencing a sense of care, concern, respect, and connection among colleagues), *autonomy* (e.g., having a reasonable amount of control over the work that you are doing), *fairness* (e.g., believing that you are being fairly compensated for the work that you are doing), and so forth. After identifying your personal work values, you can do a values audit. For example, if one of your personal work values is *intellectual stimulation*, you could (1) rate how important this value is to you on a scale from 0 (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important), (2) rate the degree to which you think this value is currently being fulfilled at work on a scale from 0 to 10, and (3) describe in detail what *enacting* this value looks like for you at work. This values exercise is unlikely to be completed in one sitting. Thus, you could do an ongoing journaling exercise around your work values—taking 5–10 min every day to consider your personal work values, rating them, and visualizing what enacting these values will look like for you today. While there are likely going to be some discrepancies between the importance of a value and its current fulfillment at work, this is not necessarily a "bad" thing. It is important to simply acknowledge the areas where

there is congruence and incongruence between the importance of our values and successful fulfillment of this value. If the value is fulfilled, this may open up the door for gratitude, an emotion that can help offset some of the suffering you are experiencing. However, if your values audit suggests that an important personal work value is not currently being fulfilled, this may open the door for acceptance or problem solving. Getting clear about your workplace values will help you better articulate your goals in the workplace (e.g., a workplace needs analysis). With presence and perspective taking, you can ask yourself the question: "What do I need to be in alignment with my values at work?" At the end of the workday, you can choose to "reset" with a new intention for the rest of your day outside of work. Moving through your day with intention, guided by your core values, can help you feel grounded and stable when you encounter moments of suffering.

Reconsider Expectations of Mindless Productivity

A common source of interpersonal strain in workplace relationships is the constant tug of war between wanting to meet (implicit or explicit) unrealistic expectations and what is actually viable given one's time, values, and resources. Perhaps the description of this pattern is readily familiar to you. If not, it can often go like this: unrealistic expectations held by others are implicitly or explicitly communicated to you, and you then feel some degree of pressure to agree to these unrealistic expectations. This pressure to agree to these unrealistic expectations may come from an attempt to avoid a potentially uncomfortable conversation of telling the requester that you are unable to meet their expectations, or that you are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices to fulfill these expectations. Or perhaps this pressure to agree comes from a place of wanting to fulfill your own desire to meet others' expectations and "people please" (e.g., pull off a miracle). After agreeing (often reluctantly) to the unrealistic request, you may then immediately start to engage in "mindless productivity" (i.e., working longer, harder, faster, often without a clear sense of direction or being grounded in reality). This mindless productivity is an attempt to meet these unrealistic expectations, even if it means that this attempt is coming at a cost to your own basic needs and values (e.g., sleep, exercise, hygiene), which of course creates or compounds your suffering.

When exhaustion kicks in and/or time is up, you may find that these unrealistic expectations are inevitably not fully met, often resulting in an increase in interpersonal tension. Additionally, the strain is made worse when there is a discrepancy in power, status, and hierarchy between you (as it sometimes feels more difficult to say "no" or negotiate in these situations). Given that we are not focused on attempting to change other people's behavior (e.g., getting

the requester to stop having those unrealistic expectations), we instead invite you to consider *your* role in this process. In doing so, you may consider some of the following questions—"Is there a way for me to not give in to this facade of endless productivity?," "Am I willing to reconsider engaging in mindless productivity and accept any potential negative consequences?," "What would the worst-case scenario be and could I survive this worst-case scenario?" While it is understandable (for you and others) to have the wish to sustain your highest intensity efforts and have continuous progress on work projects 7 days a week, this pace is unrealistic, unsustainable, and unlikely to be aligned with your work or life values. Can you take a moment to prioritize and decide what you can do with this work day that is realistic *and* aligned with your values?

Our compassion work starts with mindfulness—focusing on the present moment with openness and curiosity. Early in my (MR) career working at a law firm, I noticed my pattern of taking a big stack of files home with me Friday evening and returning them—usually untouched—Monday morning. The pretense that I would work all weekend helped resolve the Friday awkwardness of wanting to call it a week but then set me up to feel horribly behind on Monday morning. What would it have been like to close out my work week with some self-compassion (it is time to restore my energy) and acceptance of the job's sizeable demands? Could I then enjoy my weekend without the looming specter of the pile and importantly, start my week fresh? Now, when I feel overwhelmed by my to-do list, I reframe my plans in terms of doing "a great day's worth" and then I can choose the most important steps with clarity.

Intervene on Your Physiology

Difficult interpersonal interactions are almost always paired with strong negative emotions. The next time you feel irritated, annoyed, and angry with this person at work, pause and observe how this emotion is showing up in your body. We often experience the physiological changes associated with experiencing an emotion before it even registers in our brain. For example, when experiencing impatience with someone at work, perhaps you notice some tightness in your chest, your hands are clenched, or you are holding your breath. If this is the case, intervene on your physiology when you find yourself experiencing these strong emotions.

As simple as it sounds, we often forget that breathing can help us get through difficult moments at work. Some of our favorite breathing techniques include simply taking three deep cleansing breaths, breathing in through the nose and fully exhaling out from the mouth. These deep breaths create expansion in your chest and diaphragm and quite literally create spaciousness. It is remarkable what three simple breaths can do when you are feeling an oncoming amygdala

hijack. Another breathing technique that can be helpful is the "4–2-6" breathing technique in which you take a breath in through your nose for 4 seconds expanding your belly as you do so, holding the breath for 2 seconds, and then slowly exhaling from your mouth for 6 seconds, releasing the breath fully. You can repeat this 4–2-6 breathing for a couple minutes. A second way to intervene on our physiology while at work is through temperature, particularly cold temperature. For example, you could go drink a cup of ice-cold water, you could go to the bathroom and splash some cold water on your face, or you could put a cold paper towel on the back of your neck. Some people prefer applying warmth by holding a mug with a warm beverage inside or putting on a warm, comfortable, article of clothing or a blanket. Yet another way to act on our physiology is through movement and getting outside, even briefly. Perhaps, there is a garden near your office where you could go for a brisk walk to get some fresh air, move your body, and take in an expansive view. If you are unable to leave your office to change your physiology, you could try doing a brief progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) exercise where you systematically tense a group of muscles in your body (e.g., your right hand and forearm) as you breathe in, and then fully relax these muscles as you breath out. Then do this same practice with other body parts (e.g., right upper arm, left hand and forearm, left upper arm). Like the 4–2-6 breathing technique, PMR is a strategy that can even be deployed covertly.

Strategies for Coping with Your Suffering Outside of Work

Self-Care

We often forget that how we take care of ourselves *outside* of work has implications for our lives *at* work. When faced with challenging interpersonal situations and negative emotions at work, it is even more imperative that we prioritize self-care. Self-care is a word that gets used quite a bit and can include a number of different activities. We recommend that these activities are *actually* caring for yourself and not harming yourself in any way or moving you away from your goals. For example, often when people think of self-care they consider behaviors that might sound good in theory or might even feel good in the moment but can have negative consequences (e.g., drinking alcohol, spending money you do not have on things you do not need, eating high-calorie, indulgent foods). Thus, it is important that your self-care activity is not harming you or hindering progress toward your larger life goals.

Finding the right kind of self-care activities might require a bit of trial and error in order to identify which activities are most effective for you. Some of our favorites include

physical activity or exercise (e.g., going to the gym, dancing, yoga, hitting golf balls at the driving range, getting outside for a walk with a friend). Another form of self-care can be engaging in hobbies that you enjoy (e.g., arts and crafts, adult coloring books, volunteering, leisure reading, planning a vacation). Often when we are feeling bad about a work situation, we are ineffective at actually doing things to pull ourselves out of the slump. A useful analogy is one of a bank account—if your work environment and the challenging interpersonal interactions are making consistent withdrawals out of your bank account, then you ought to be willing to engage in activities outside of work in order to make deposits into your bank account, otherwise you risk running a deficit (i.e., overdrafting), which will no doubt have immediate and delayed consequences. Thus, the idea here is that we are intentionally scheduling and engaging in pleasant activities in an effort to generate positive emotions to counter some of the negative emotions experienced at work.

Part of your self-care may include eliciting support from people outside of work—taking a "team approach" to easing your distress. Try making a list of the people in your life that you can turn to, those who are nonjudgmental, present, wise, and do not provide unsolicited advice; these people are your "squad", whom you can turn to for support. It can be helpful to specifically include people where work conversations do not dominate the time together. If you notice tendencies (by you or others) to center discussions around your work, continually redirect attention and discussion to other, non-work-related topics.

Sitting Meditation Practice

For many, meditation practice is an effective way to regulate emotions—increasing positive emotions and reducing negative emotions. Specifically, when dealing with difficult interpersonal situations at work, it can be helpful to practice compassion meditation practices aimed at oneself (i.e., self-compassion). Just as when another is suffering, we can treat ourselves in a similar way. What might you say to a close friend who is suffering? How might you treat a loved one when they are experiencing suffering? Now, would you be willing to extend this same concern and compassion toward yourself during your difficult times?

In addition to self-compassion practices, another popular form of meditation is called loving-kindness meditation or LKM. Rather than focusing on suffering (as is the case with compassion practices), loving-kindness is a practice intended to increase feelings of caring and warmth for oneself and others. "Others" includes loved ones, strangers, and even people who contribute to the challenging interpersonal situations at work. While loving-kindness for oneself might make intuitive sense, you may be wondering why we would

recommend trying out a loving-kindness meditation, which includes warm and caring wishes, for a colleague who exhibits behaviors that you despise. In fact, perhaps this person is the *last* person that you feel *any* loving-kindness toward. If this is the case, then it is likely that this person could in fact be a great focus for your loving-kindness practice. While the empirical literature on loving-kindness practice is pretty convincing regarding its potential outcomes (e.g., increased positive emotions, reductions in distress), as always, it is recommended that you are your *own* experimental laboratory and try it out and see if it "works" (i.e., reduces distress) for you.

Thus, if you are willing to try, here are some examples of some warm, kind, and caring wishes you could cultivate for this person from work—first, vividly picture this person in your mind. Now, silently say the following phrases to yourself for this person, "May you be at ease," "May you know peace," "May you feel joy," or "May you feel fulfilled." As compassion instructors, we often see with our students that the loving-kindness practice for a person whom we have a difficult interpersonal relationship can be one of the more challenging meditation practices. You may need to get creative to rise to this challenge. Imagine how different your workday or a meeting would be if you spent time wishing that this person felt "safe and secure", "happy and content", or maybe even just has a refreshing lunch or encounters something that makes them smile or laugh. The essence of this practice is to imagine this person's unmet or unfulfilled need, and silently (and genuinely) wish for it to be fulfilled.

For guided meditation practices, there are many platforms (e.g., YouTube) and apps (e.g., Insight Timer, Headspace, Calm) to support your meditation practices around mindfulness, self-compassion, loving-kindness, etc. More recently, several physical fitness programs (e.g., Peloton, Apple Fitness +) have started including guided meditations (i.e., mental fitness) that are as short as 5 min and up to 30 min. With our students, we find that guided practices can be a nice starting point before going to the self-guided meditation practices.

Identify Values About Cultivating a Full Life

For many people, work-related thoughts can consume life outside of work. Negative interpersonal interactions at work can cause a person to lose sight of what is important to them in life. Similar to what we described regarding identifying your personal work values, it is equally important to identify your overall life values. While there may be some overlap, this is not necessarily the case. For example, some of my (HJ) personal work values include *challenge*, *persistence*, and *contribution*. In my life outside of work, I value *health*, *self-development*, and *order*. At the same time, I have some overlapping values that guide me both at work and outside

of work such as *integrity*, *patience*, and *generosity*. The idea here is that your values help provide clarity, illuminate options, and assist in guiding you in your subsequent coping strategies.

Again, it is possible that you are unsure what your life values are. If this is the case, you could ponder some questions such as: What do I want for myself and my life? What do I have to offer the world? Am I living my life in accordance with my most important life values? We would again recommend engaging in a journaling exercise around your life values. When reflecting on your life values, it is important to acknowledge when your life values are *not* aligned with your work values (e.g., valuing health and well-being for your life, and at work valuing extreme productivity and thus engaging in behaviors that are not aligned with health and well-being). Relatedly, you may find that your life values and work values are perfectly aligned, but that your environmental context (the organization or even industry) does not share your values and may even punish you for trying to live consistently with your values. This tension can be very difficult to reconcile as it may require some problem solving; for example, if you are able, you could start looking for a job where your values are more aligned with the organization and industry, or perhaps you could work toward acceptance of your current decision to stay in the organization, even though you are currently miserable. Misalignment between our core values and how we actually spend our time will generate cognitive dissonance, negative emotions, and more generally result in "withdrawals" from our bank account. Awareness of this misalignment is valuable information to have.

What If You Have Behaviors That Are Challenging for Others?

Is it possible that *we* ourselves are the people who exhibit behaviors that are challenging for others at work? If your first response is "of course not," we would invite you to read on and reconsider whether in the past or present, you were potentially a source of suffering for someone else in your workplace. At times, our own unskillful behaviors can be more covert and not outwardly obvious; for example, perhaps we are impatient with our colleagues and often interrupt, or are critical of ideas and provide unconstructive feedback. At other times, we may make incorrect assumptions about others at work or get angry when our expectations are not met—while seemingly minor, these behaviors can create suffering for others in the workplace. If you are still having difficulty identifying some of your own behaviors that may be contributing to the suffering of others in your workplace, ponder the following questions: "Do people approach or avoid me at work?," "Are people willing to give me difficult

feedback?," "Do people disagree with me and engage in real dialog or am I surrounded by 'yes people'?," "Do I have high turnover of people in my life?".

It is important to acknowledge when we are the source of suffering for others. If you are still unsure, you could elicit feedback (even using an anonymous feedback form) from your colleagues. At times, an apology for past behavior may be appropriate. If you are interested in changing the behavior, you can set goals for small behavioral change. For example, if you notice that your impatience causes you to interrupt others and you rarely let them finish a statement, you could notice when impatience arises within you, acknowledging what it feels like in your physical body (e.g., tightness in chest) and noticing any thoughts that are going through your mind (e.g., "this is not a good use of time") and any emotions that are present (e.g., frustration). You can then practice replacing the interrupting behavior with another behavior (e.g., a brief meditation before the meeting, or taking three deep cleansing breaths, or writing down your thoughts in your notebook rather than interrupting). It might make sense to even set up a positive reinforcement and/or negative consequence schedule to help reinforce the new behavior. Small actions can lead to noticeable changes.

While it may be tempting to continue fuming about your challenging interpersonal situations at work, or fantasize about certain people leaving your organization, or entertaining the thought that there must be an organization where there are zero "difficult people" (i.e., people with behaviors that prove challenging for you), these behaviors are unlikely to be effective. While not intended to be an exhaustive list, in this paper, we have briefly laid out a few tools that can be practiced in the workplace and outside of work to provide you some relief. As is always the case with behavior change, we recommend choosing one strategy to focus on implementing (rather than trying to change too much too fast). Our hope is that these initial strategies will give you some ideas to begin to ease some of your distress. It is our ultimate hope that you, and *all* of your colleagues, may be happy, and free from suffering.