“Contentment is not having so much money that a person doesn’t have to do anything. Quite the opposite, contentment is the fruit of long family commitments, meaningful and productive work, and deep and abiding attachments to community.”

“Let me whisper the name of a traditional virtue that in our present moment may strike contemporary ears as a vice—contentment. Perhaps we are far enough away from the last election and near enough to the holidays to consider contentment and imagine what it might look like. Let me tell you about Tommy.”

“At mid-afternoon I walked into the butcher shop and saw Tommy through the big glass window. He waved and said goodbye to the two other workers who were hacking their way through big beef flanks. As soon as he opened the door, the customers called him by name. We walked to the back offices and greeted his daughter-in-law who was working on the books and at the same time juggling her 3-year-old daughter. There were smiles and nods as Tommy took off his white butcher coat and apron.”

“We walked out to the parking lot and climbed into Tommy’s flatbed truck. It was a farmer’s truck, at least 15 years old, beat up and dirty on the inside, but able to haul whatever was needed from their farm into the butcher shop in town. We were on our way to visit Cliff, who was receiving hospice care at home. Cliff was Tommy’s father’s best friend throughout their lives. Cliff and Sarah welcomed us as we sat down in the family room of their modest and beautiful home. We heard the stories about working at the creamery and about Thomas and Cliff starting the Ruritan Club. It was a good and grateful time together. When I closed our hour-and-a-half visit with a prayer, I looked up to see Tommy wiping away tears from his eyes.”

“We rode back to the butcher shop. Tommy caught me up on how the family was doing. His family has been farming in the Shenandoah Valley for seven generations. His daughter and her husband live a stone’s throw away where they raise sheep and work at the co-op. Now Tommy’s son, Tom, and his wife have taken over the leadership of the farming operation. In his 30s, Tom took out a low-interest loan on another farm to add to what he inherited. He added more cattle and more acres for silage.”

“While he manages more acreage than his father did, they are still small farmers in today’s agribusiness world. But they are amazingly clever stewards of the cattle they raise and the creek-fed land they tend. In the nearest town, staff and faculty from the college..."
frequent the butcher shop because of the quality of the meat and their interest in ‘slow food.’ And the working-class locals come to the butcher shop because Tommy’s family is trusted in the community. This family does good, healthy work. They are rightly proud that they are able to hire and provide good jobs to numerous employees.”

“I always enjoy being around Tommy. He is an active man. Yet there is enough room in his life to attend to the important relationships of his family, friends and neighbors. He has time to ride with the minister to visit his father’s dying best friend. He appreciates and enjoys good work to be done; he sings in the church choir; he volunteers at the firehouse. His son’s family is juggling a 3-year-old and a baby while running the farm and managing the butcher shop. This busy time in their lives means that there is not enough margin in life to stop and smell the roses. But they will come to that stage in the cycle of life when they will reap the rewards of their good work like Tommy is now.”

“Contentment may be one of the most under-valued virtues in contemporary American life. Sometimes people confuse contentment with ease. Yet as I witness Tommy, I know that he is constantly challenged with the financial difficulties of a family farm, the burden of being asked to do too many things in his community because he is a trusted soul, and the same aging struggles we all face. Contentment is not having so much money that a person doesn’t have to do anything. Quite the opposite, contentment is the fruit of long family commitments, meaningful and productive work, and deep and abiding attachments to community. The creative putting together of these elements over time brings genuine satisfaction to a person and puts into perspective the ordinary, daily tasks that can drive us crazy.”

“The inspiration for a better way can be seen in someone like Tommy and so many others who are all around us. People who live contented lives do not do it by themselves. Nor do they construct meaningful experiences all on their own. They are both formed by human institutions and they contribute to them as well. Family, church, volunteer associations, local economy and civic responsibility are all a part of a web of relationships through which we as individuals are shaped and through which we creatively construct our lives.”

“For those seeking greater contentment, the Holidays offers us a chance to give thanks for this web of relationships and a moment to consider how we may better connect with them.”

Steve Willis is a Presbyterian (USA) minister who pastors small town and country churches. He currently serves New Dublin Presbyterian Church in Southwest Virginia. His writing about the resilience of rural churches and communities includes the book Imagining the Small Church, Celebrating a Simpler Path (https://goo.gl/8NP6hd). He is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and lives with his family in Bedford, Virginia, where from his front door he can be hiking the Appalachian Trail in 15 minutes.
Making Holidays Better for Caregivers

From “How to Make the Holidays Better for Caregivers, Caregiving is hard, and the holidays can be particularly challenging,” by Anthony Cirillo, US News & World Report, 11/15:

“For the last few years, my wife and I have been in caregiver situations with each of our moms during the holiday season. This year will be our first as non-caregivers. It can be a stressful time. Trying to maintain traditions in the midst of caregiving is hard. We pushed through it, despite my grumblings of having to decorate the house–again! In reality, it’s easier said than done, especially with the season being thrust on us earlier and earlier each year. It’s easy to tip the fragile balance you’re trying to maintain. And let’s face it: The holidays can be a sad time for many. So how can caregivers push through and make the best of things?”

Adjust Expectations–“I admit it. I have Clark Griswold’s sunny optimism when it comes to the holidays. I have certain expectations. When you’re a caregiver, those expectations need to be adjusted. Reset your brain. The perfect holidays you remember were probably not that perfect.”

“Don’t aim for perfection. You can’t make the pizzelles this year? No sweat. Share your recipe with another family member, and have him or her make them instead.”

“I dread the decorating each year. Here’s an idea: Farm it out. There are professionals who can do it but that costs money. The young people in my local Rotary made decorating peoples’ houses a fundraiser, so see if there are options like that in your community. Cut back on decorationss or ask friends and family to help.”

“Maintain traditions that make you laugh and relieve stress. My wife and I have certain movies and TV shows that are non-negotiable each year. ‘White Christmas,’ ‘Christmas Vacation,’ ‘Charlie Brown,’ ‘Rudolph’ (OK, ‘Rudolph’ is for me!) They make us laugh and reminisce, and they help relieve stress.”

“Make a holiday to-do list, and then figure out which activities you can eliminate, delegate or do yourself. Put together a support network and get comfortable delegating.”

“Oh yeah: And learn to say no!”

Gift to Yourself Before Others–“Roll your eyes, but my wife and I have a spreadsheet for Christmas gifts – how much we spend, who gets what, etc. There is tremendous stress in having to shop for others. Put yourself and your health first. That can recharge you for plowing forward with the gift giving.”

“Maintain your health. You know the drill: exercise, healthy eating, taking your medications and not lapsing in your medical appointments. When people ask what you want for the holidays, ask for time off from caregiving duties as a gift. Ask other family members to step in. They may not know you need help or know what to do.”

“Find a listening companion – someone you can talk and vent to as you go through the season. Ask people over to help lift your spirits. Meet at a coffee shop or have a video chat.”

“Make shopping easier by shopping online. And yes, it’s OK to give gift cards when you simply don’t have the energy or the creative bandwidth to think of interesting gifts. If you need to cross some people off the list, do so. Caregiving can be financially draining. People will understand.”

Clear the Air With Family–“Whether you’re in a caregiving situation or not, the holidays can be stressful in fractured families. Consider clearing the air before the holidays, or resolve to put feelings on hold until after the season.”
“The reality for many is that often in a large family, one member bears the burden for caregiving. Sometimes other family members just aren’t capable or aware of the situation. It’s worse when people aren’t talking to each other. So, break the ice. Write a note with your holiday card describing mom or dad’s situation. Don’t be accusatory. If family members have a better understanding, they may be more willing to step forward and help.”

“If you regularly get together with family, be in the moment and enjoy the moment. But do take the time for some heart-to-heart communication. Write a thank you note to family members or friends who spent time with your loved one. Emphasize the impact their visit made on you and your loved one.”

Conquer the Post-Holiday Blues—“The holidays can be depressing for some, but after they’re over and the adrenaline rush ends, it can be equally devastating. So, prepare for it. Don’t let the holidays win. Reset your expectations and start new traditions during and after the season. You won’t be a caregiver forever, so new traditions can give you a new start and lease on life.”

The Growing Rural Family Caregiver Crisis

From “For Elderly in Rural Areas, Volunteers Step In” by Clare Ansberry in The Wall Street Journal, 12/10:

“Growing older in America’s smaller towns and remote areas is often a struggle amid shortages of health professionals and other needed services. The strains and limits on the country’s caregiving system are especially acute in rural areas, where 1 out of 4 Americans 65 and older live—some 10 million people. The percentage of family caregivers—unpaid relatives or friends—living in rural areas fell to 16% in 2015 from 31% in 2009, according to reports by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute.”

“The Alzheimer’s Association has a 24-hour hotline <800-272-3900> that fields 310,000 calls a year, and telephone support groups help those who live too far away from community support groups. Calls range from people wanting to know the difference between Alzheimer’s and dementia to those who don’t know what to do when their parent no longer recognizes them.”

“In North Dakota—among the states one report published in 2017 called a ‘dementia neurology desert’ because of its shortage of neurologists—the Alzheimer’s Association worked with the state to develop a dementia-care services program. Beth Olson, a care consultant with the program, covers 15 counties—a 17,000 square mile territory—meeting with families to answer questions and direct them to resources such as the National Family Caregiver Support Program, which offers free respite care for a limited number of hours a week. Given the shortage of neurologists, especially in rural areas, the association is also developing tools to help primary care physicians diagnose and treat Alzheimer’s.”

The whole article is at: https://goo.gl/G5wYEc
A Path to Improving Clinicians’ Engagement

From the RAND Corporation study, “Factors Affecting Physician Professional Satisfaction,” downloaded 12/9/18 from https://goo.gl/E3uDSf:

“The American Medical Association asked RAND Health to identify the factors that influence physicians’ professional satisfaction and describe their implications for the U.S. health care system. To do this, the researchers interviewed and surveyed physicians, allied health professionals, and other staff in 30 practices across 6 states, including a variety of practice sizes, specialties, and ownership models. Among the factors identified, two stood out as the most novel and important:

Physicians’ perceptions about quality of care. Being able to deliver high-quality patient care was an overarching source of better physician professional satisfaction. Obstacles to providing high-quality care, such as lack of leadership support for quality improvement efforts, were major sources of dissatisfaction. These findings suggest that, in many cases, sources of physician professional dissatisfaction could represent important targets for quality improvement.

Electronic health records (EHRs). Physicians noted that EHRs had the potential to improve some aspects of patient care and professional satisfaction. Yet for many physicians, the current state of EHR technology significantly worsened professional satisfaction in multiple ways, due to poor usability, time-consuming data entry, interference with face-to-face patient care, inefficient and less fulfilling work content, insufficient health information exchange, and degradation of clinical documentation. Some practices took steps—such as allowing multiple modes of data entry—to address a subset of these problems, but solving others (such as information exchange) may require industrywide cooperation. Other factors improved physicians’ professional satisfaction as well:

- **greater autonomy and control over work content**, which were associated with physician ownership among the practices in the study
- **practice leadership** that shared physicians’ values concerning patient care and that protected physician autonomy when implementing new practice-wide initiatives
- **collegiality, fairness, and respect** in relationships with colleagues, patients, and payers
- **work quantity and pace** that allowed sufficient time and attention to patient care
- **work content** that was meaningful and matched physicians’ training, facilitated by teamwork with allied health professionals and support staff
- **income stability and fairness**, which were especially important in transitions between practice ownership models and payment systems

“In addition, the cumulative burden of rules and regulations affecting clinical practice, including but not limited to ‘meaningful-use’ rules for EHRs, detracted from professional satisfaction.”

“Most physicians included in this study were satisfied with their careers. However, even those who were generally satisfied described a range of specific factors that frustrated and stressed them.”

“When these sources of dissatisfaction also detract from the quality and efficiency of patient care, solving them may appeal to a wide range of stakeholders.”
It takes a relentlessness to answer the call to care. To give your best without fail. To provide the kind of excellence that becomes recognized as one of the finest in the country for patient experience and quality care.*

It takes the strength of the champions of health who work in our hospital. Every day, they give the most of themselves to be a champion for you. To be a champion for this community.

When you choose a health plan, ask for (your hospital or health system name here).

*Wisconsin’s Critical Access Hospitals were recently recognized as the best in the nation by the Federal Health Resources and Services Administration for outstanding quality performance.

Ad example for individual hospitals. Please contact Tim Size to discuss how this campaign can drive patient choice in your local markets:

Tim Size
Executive Director
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative
608-643-2343
timsize@rwhc.com
www.RWHC.com
Leadership Insights: “Story Time”

The Leadership Insights series is by Jo Anne Preston, RWHC Workforce & Organizational Development Senior Manager. Back issues at www.RWHC.com.

“‘The brain craves meaning before details,’ John Medina from Brain Rules tells us. If you are going to tell a story in coaching or presenting, the listener wants to understand why it matters to them much more than, ‘First this happened, then that happened...’ A well-placed, brief and relevant story enhances learning by hooking into the listener’s emotions. We remember the lessons from stories because of this connection.”

“Stories have an important place in a leader’s coaching and teaching. Spend a little time thinking about-and writing down-your experiences worth sharing to be able to recall and use them effectively in moments when they matter. Collect your most significant.”

Failures—“Unpleasant as they are, failures are great teachers. Make note: what did your failure teach you about yourself? About what you remembered going forward from it? How did you forgave yourself and moved on? About the value of humility, asking for help, saying no, knowing your strengths and weaknesses? Are there any phrases you now incorporate into your daily thinking to prevent repeating a mistake? USE FOR: normalizing the fact that we all fail sometimes, and what we do with it is what matters.”

Success against the odds—“These are the times when you didn’t think you could do it, but you did. How did you keep from quitting when it seemed impossible? Where did you seek support and resources? What kept you going outside of your comfort zone and why was it worth it? USE FOR: encouraging someone to grow and a reminder that we never reach the goals we don’t try for. It is especially helpful for those who look up to you and think they could never do what you do. Use it also to build commitment to change initiatives.”

Turning points—“Recall some of the critical junctures in your life, experiences that make you who you are but that wouldn’t be on your resume. Think back to your childhood for key moments that stand out as, ‘This is one thing that makes me the person I am today.’ What tough decisions have you made that changed the course of your life? What moves were difficult, courageous or bold for you, without which you would not have subsequent successes and joys? When would it have been easier to do one thing, but by doing the hard thing, doors opened that might not have otherwise? USE FOR: helping someone at their own turning point who could benefit from your wisdom, and to remind them that they too have core strengths built from their own significant life events.”

Aha moments—“Recall those moments when you thought, ‘I finally get it!’ like the micromanager who learned to trust his employees when he realized how he was getting in their way. In your aha moments, how were your eyes opened? What was the benefit? USE FOR: nudging the listener when they can’t seem to see to the other side of a problem to look for it, or in coaching someone with limited self-awareness.”

Funny moments—“Life is better when we laugh a little, especially at ourselves. When have you seen the humor in your experience and how did that change your mindset? USE FOR: helping someone gain perspective when they are beating themselves up.”

General tips:

- “When teaching, have one story ready for each major learning objective. You may not use all the stories but thinking about them in advance prepares you for in-the-moment delivery.”
Share the stage. Eliciting others’ relevant stories can be powerful too. Be ready though to manage others who share too often, go on too long or veer off topic.

When coaching, sharing stories in every session might backfire on you. Balance with good inquiry to help people discover their own stories, e.g., ‘Have you ever faced a similar challenge? How did you work through it? What did you learn?’

Keep your stories fresh. Old stories are great and often worth retelling, but you will get bored by them and it will show.”

Skip the story when:

“It is more about your need to tell it than the listener’s need to hear it. Though you own it, you must ask yourself why you are telling it.

People start to fidget. This can be hard to read, but overuse of storytelling diminishes your influence and frustrates the audience. Think ‘judicious’ use. Ask someone you trust to give you feedback after a presentation or staff meeting about whether your stories hit or missed the mark, were too brief or too long, or were too frequent or sparse.

Someone's confidentiality could be breached. Perhaps your story would be very relatable to your employee in their current struggle, but in telling it, they could identify who you are talking about. Only tell it if you can credibly adapt it to protect privacy.”

Contact Jo Anne Preston for individual or group coaching at jpreston@RWHC.com or 608-644-3261. For info re the RWHC Leadership Series go to www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx or contact Carrie Ballweg at cballweg@RWHC.com or 608-643-2343.

Upcoming RWHC Leadership Programs
1/29 - Conflict: Building Trust through Conversations
2/5 - CPI Nonviolent Crisis Intervention
2/14 & 15 - Preceptor Training Program (2-days)

Non-Members Welcome. Register & other events at: www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx