

Federal Judicial Center
Off Paper Episode 25
Finding Happiness in Your Life and Work
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Mark Sherman: From the FJC in Washington, D.C., I'm Mark Sherman and this is *Off Paper*.

Okay. It's another day in the life of a U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services officer. You're stuck in your office on your way out for that report you need for a hearing tomorrow. At the same time you're wondering how long it's going to take to finish it and what's for dinner. You've misplaced your personal phone. Ah, it's in the desk with your keys under yesterday's lunch menu. You're also wondering if you'll be able to catch the express train home and rush to the station as it's pulling out. Oy, you wait 15 minutes for the next one which is not an express. You finally get home as the plates are being cleared.

Or how about this? It's the end of the day. You walk into your office, grab the report you wanted to work on tonight for tomorrow's hearing. Your phones and keys are where they should be and you make it to the station in plenty of time to catch the train you'd like to take. You make it home in time to take a quick jog before dinner.

Mindfulness, a method of mental training, increases awareness and improves performance. It's being awake and consciously attentive in the present moment rather than

mindlessly moving throughout the day on autopilot and not even being aware of the thoughts and feelings that pop up constantly and randomly and which may or may not be relevant to finding that report, or your phone, or your keys, or preparing for that hearing tomorrow which, by the way, has a 50/50 chance of not even happening.

Recent studies suggest being mindful can prevent burnout and have a positive effect on the brain patterns that often lead to stress, anxiety, and depression. Stress is normal and in fact necessary. But left unchecked, it hijacks our attention away from what we are doing now and launches us into a sort of mental time travel ruminating about the past or worrying about the future.

By training our brains to be in the moment while manifesting compassion and self-compassion, U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services officers can learn to better cope with stress, better serve clients, the court, and the public and create more time in their day.

Today on *Off Paper* I talk with Helene Creager who, before retiring in 2018, served as a U.S. probation officer for 23 years in the Central District of California, 17 of those years as a supervisory probation officer. Before becoming a supervisor, she was involved in the supervision of sex offenders and contracting for treatment services.

Helene was also integrally involved in officer wellness initiatives, leading California Central's Critical Incident Stress Management team and serving as a founding member of the federal Probation and Pretrial Services system's National Wellness Committee which is now the Wellness Working Group at the Federal Probation and Pretrial Academy.

Helene has a background as a licensed clinical social worker and since retiring from the federal judiciary has become a trainer in mindfulness, compassion, self-compassion, and positive neuroplasticity.

In 2022 she helped the FJC train U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services officers in Every Day Wellness - a program focusing on mindfulness, compassion, and self-compassion. The six-hour trainings were attended by over 300 officers and me.

And as we were conducting the training, it occurred to me that many officers might not even be aware of what mindfulness, compassion, and self-compassion are and how they can be helpful in every day work and life. So I'm like, hey, we've got a podcast for probation and pretrial officers. So let's invite Helene to be a guest on the program where she can expound on these ideas and practices and talk about how her work as an officer led her to that.

Helene Creager, welcome to *Off Paper*.

Helene Creager: Thank you so much, Mark. I am so excited and grateful to be here today.

Mark Sherman: Excited to have you here and grateful to you for taking the time. So you and I first met many years ago, when you were a senior probation officer supervising sex offenders in the community and I was planning a training program for officers on sex offender supervision. You may have even been a supervisor by that time. I don't recall. It doesn't matter. It was a long time ago. We've known each other for a long time.

Eventually, of course, you did become a supervisor. So I kind of want to start with what your story is. So let's start by asking you how you got to this place in your life or, more specifically, how did your experience as an officer affect your own wellness and your struggles with it. So maybe let's just start there.

Helene Creager: Sure. I think that I experienced what most officers experience, like a rollercoaster of stress. Sometimes I was okay, a lot of times not. I did what I considered to be anticipatory stress where I would push myself hard early on to avoid being stressed out later. I was really hard on myself, at times harder than my supervisors were. I really noticed a lot of stress - a lot. So mandatory retirement

was a good thing for me because I knew at a certain point I wouldn't have this anymore.

So I tried to maximize the experience. I tried to be in the moment. It was very difficult. I really didn't know how to do that. I tried to have that elusive work-life balance. It doesn't happen. So it was difficult. I got involved with a critical incident stress management team. As part of that, we brought in the EAP coordinator and we were teaching methods of stress management at all our safety trainings.

Towards the end of my career I found out about meditation apps. That was helpful to me, but I was stressed a lot. Sometimes I would get sick and my back would go out, you know, I think challenges that we all have in the workplace.

Mark Sherman: We know. The job is inherently stressful. You're working with people in the community. If you're doing post-conviction supervision or pre-trial supervision, you're working with potentially very difficult people and sometimes violent people in the community. You're going into their homes. It's just an inherently very, very stressful job.

In addition, many people have families. So there are kids to be concerned about or we have aging parents - all kinds of things that happen to anybody in sort of typical daily life. It must have really taken a toll on you.

Helene Creager: It did. Probably the most stress I ever had is dealing with performance issues of staff. Dealing with people under supervision, dealing with vendors is not as stressful as dealing with supervising somebody, a coworker, and helping them through some performance issues or having to deal with that with them.

Mark Sherman: Absolutely, because as a manager, your primary concern are the officers in your unit. You are responsible for working with them to help them develop, and so the stress won't go away.

I wanted to ask you, you spent a long time working in the federal courts, what are your thoughts now about the contributory factors that might be things we should be considering when we talk about the federal judicial culture?

Helene Creager: I think that's such an excellent question. The culture is that, you know, we have to show that we're strong. We're not vulnerable. We're able to handle it all and more. Officers strive for above excellence, so there's so much of pushing themselves. But now that I'm looking at it, I really think that the underlying personal issue is fear of shame. Shame is different than guilt. Guilt you have, you know, I can make something better. I did something wrong, I can improve. Shame is I'm bad.

I think people were so afraid and still are so afraid of showing that I did something wrong. That other people would see them as badly as you're seeing themselves. When in truth, if one of your coworkers had the same problem, you would be so much kinder to them than you are to yourself about it. So I think that is a big factor.

The other factor, people think that they're alone, that they're the only ones experiencing this. When I do the class, the Every Day Wellness, we do an exercise called Just Like Me. One of the comments people frequently make is I didn't realize other people were feeling the same way that I do. And it's comforting. It also can encourage people to ask for resources.

Then on a more external level, I think that as -- and I know this, for me, as being a supervisor and talking with my fellow supervisors, it is difficult to know how do I deal with staff when they're struggling, how do I create the safe space. I really think that there needs to be a lot more training.

We try to do that where we have just the supervisors meet. But it was really hard for people to get comfortable and feel safe to really talk about dealing with this really difficult staff or personnel issue. I need some support in doing this. Or even when do I ask somebody how are you doing and how far do I go with that? And if people have a performance issue, how do I get to maybe there's something going on?

I'll tell you the thing that really sparked me in this journey was in 2009, I believe it was, when a probation administrator who was head of mental health killed herself. She was surrounded by those of us who were her friends and who were in mental health who would have been there in a minute. We could have helped her. We could have been there. We could have given her resources. She did not reach out. So that has always sparked me to want to encourage officers to give them the tools so they feel okay about reaching out and getting help.

Unfortunately, you know, we had a suicide in my district. I don't know if it's on the rise or we just know about it. I know at the time, when I was getting into the national wellness stuff, it was pretty hidden. People didn't talk about it. So that was always a big motivation for me. But I think this culture of I need to be strong, I need to have this illusion that I'm not vulnerable is present and actually harmful.

Mark Sherman: Yeah. No question. And thank you so much. I want us to get into this conversation about mindfulness, compassion, self-compassion and positive neuroplasticity training. Why was it appealing to you? How did you think it would be helpful to you? So let's talk about that.

Helene Creager: Sure. I had been meditating on and off for many years, but I didn't quite understand it and I didn't quite know what I was doing. The meditation apps were helpful.

I had heard about mindfulness, actually, when I was on vacation. I met a mindfulness facilitator and she talked to me about it. I started to listen more and more to mindfulness apps and it was something I was really curious about. When the pandemic hit and everything went online, I was able to start to really take courses and I started with mindfulness. I loved it. All of a sudden things were clicking and they made sense.

I'll tell you one of my main motivations, Mark, is even though I was retired, I found I was anxious a lot. There's a general feeling of anxiety. I realized that I had felt that way when I was working. But when I was working, there were so many reasons I could make. This is why I was feeling anxious, because I have something due tomorrow. I feel anxious because this is going on. But it wasn't working. Yeah, life was happening. I had stress in my life. But I really needed to find a way to deal with that anxiety and I found that mindfulness was helping.

Then I took a course on mindful self-compassion. Of course, I did it with a friend thinking this would be really good for her. It wasn't until I was in it, even on the first day, that I was like, oh my god, I really need this. I really didn't realize how mean I used to talk to myself and how hard I was on myself. That, in conjunction with mindfulness, really started me thinking about the offices in the district and just

how helpful this would be to folks so that they could feel good. They do such important work and they're all such good people. I really want them to feel good and feel happy about themselves.

So I wanted to do something where I would teach and share back. I started pursuing a way where I could teach it and I found the Applied Compassion Training Program through Stanford. The reason, it's an 11-month intensive program, and the reason I like that one is you design your own program. On some of the other ones, you have to teach their program. I wanted to make it flexible. I wanted officers to be able to get a little bit of the things that I felt would be the most useful, and I created the Every Day Wellness program which I piloted. That's become one of the programs that I teach now.

Through that one of my colleagues in the program, because we helped each other, recommended *Hardwiring Happiness* by Dr. Rick Hanson. That book is on positive neuroplasticity. I incorporated that into the training and I loved it because it's positive focused. It's about taking in the good. So much of the other stuff is about noticing your suffering, which is important, but it's also good to take in the good. I decided to take some courses on that and then I became certified in that as well.

Mark Sherman: As you know, we don't want to put more pressure on officers but we've got this set of competencies.

That includes two wellness-related competencies, resiliency and workload management. How do you see these practices of mindfulness, compassion and self-compassion, understanding positive neuroplasticity? How would these in the ideal world benefit the officer?

Helene Creager: Well, in so many ways, Mark, first of all it does increase our capacity to handle life's challenges. It also helps with being able to enjoy the job more if you're not stressed as much and if you know how to savor the good moments. I did some of that. I wish I did more of that because there were so many really good moments.

But you know if you're focused - and you said this a bit in your intro - if you're focused you are saving time. You're more efficient. Your mind isn't wandering. You're actually safer. If you're in the field and you're attentive, you're present and you're focusing your attention where it needs to - sometimes on the person in front of you, sometimes on the environment around you.

If you can be more responsive instead of reactive, it can improve the relationships not only with the people you're working with but in your personal life too. How can I step back and be the most objective that I can be by looking at what is true in the moment, not what my reaction to it is. So I think it can be helpful in so many ways - your physical health, your

mental health. You might be more likely to ask for help and you're more compassionate.

You can take risks and try things out maybe that you didn't because you know you'll have a softer landing. Like me doing this podcast. So afterwards, when I'm like evaluating how I did, I'm going to be kinder to myself and focus more on the things that I think I did well. Because of our mind's negative bias, we'll focus on the negative. So it would just help us enjoy our job more, enjoy our life more in so many ways.

Mark Sherman: I'm Mark Sherman. When we come back, we'll discuss the differences in practices, how they work together, and why you should consider doing them. You're listening to *Off Paper*.

Female Voice: Criminal justice is dynamic and practitioners must learn continuously to stay current. The Federal Judicial Center is here to help. Check out the FJC's newest eLearning programs for U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services officers focusing on things like how being trauma-informed will make you better at your job, taking a reentry-centered approach to probation and pretrial services practice, and the officer's role in countering violent extremism. Go to fjc.dcn/elearningprograms.

Also did you know that the National Institute of Corrections, a public agency within the U.S. Department of

Justice, offers a vast library of free eLearning programs for U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services officers? All you need to do is set up an account. Visit the NIC Learn Center at <https://nic.learn.com>.

Mike Sherman: Helene, I want to have you take a deep dive into mindfulness, compassion, and self-compassion as well as positive neuroplasticity to give listeners a good sense of what they are and why they should do them. So first, what do mindfulness, compassion, and self-compassion mean? How would you define them?

Helene Creager: Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose in the present moment in a nonjudgmental way. Also, a lot of times people also add - with openness and curiosity. All of those components are really important. So you're controlling your attention purposefully. You're in the present moment.

The big piece to me also is the nonjudgmental part of it. What is true in this moment? So it's not the stories we tell ourselves. It's not the guesses that we make about the future. It's what is really true. It's really about learning how to use our mind. We don't control it. We don't quiet it. It doesn't quiet, it's impossible. But using our mind, getting to know it, and then choosing where we're going to put our attention. So that's mindfulness.

Compassion is the recognition of suffering and the desire to alleviate it. So suffering doesn't have to be huge. It doesn't have to be this great suffering. It could be feeling uneasy, feeling anxiety or stress, or feeling sad or angry. So it's any time things are not the way you want them to be.

Compassion can be tender, but it also can be fierce and protectant. So when you are wanting to be compassionate, you don't want anyone to suffer. So the idea that we want to prevent and alleviate suffering I think is what our system is about. Right? Community protection to me is very compassionate. You want to protect society. You want to protect the victims. And holding people accountable to me is also part of compassion. So I think it's really a big part of our work.

Mark Sherman: I do think, including myself, people kind of default to empathy and sometimes conflate compassion and empathy. But they're different things. So can you talk about that?

Helene Creager: Sure. And I think it's important. I think empathy is a component of compassion because I think you need some empathy to recognize that somebody is suffering even if it's yourself. The problem is, especially in a profession like ours, is you're constantly dealing with suffering and people's problems and trauma - people's trauma, even our own

trauma, secondary trauma from the things that we're exposed to. People in our system they read materials, they see sometimes images. So all of that can cause actually direct trauma.

So there's trauma, secondary trauma, and just being exposed to suffering. If you're feeling with somebody all the time, it's not empowering. You can't change that. You're just feeling it. Right? It's their feelings. So too much of that can cause empathic distress.

Mark Sherman: That's a very interesting term. I'm like isn't that the same as compassion fatigue, and maybe that's where you are going.

Helene Creager: Yes. Thank you for bringing that up. So compassion fatigue is a misnomer. It's really empathic distress. Compassion, you're feeling not with somebody, you're feeling for them. And you have this desire to do something about the suffering. So it's empowering. It leads to positive emotions. It leads to people feeling good. As a matter of fact, compassion is one of the factors to help rewire our brain in a positive way.

So if you notice through empathy that somebody is suffering and then you're motivated to do something and you do it, it moves it. It feels better. You feel better. It doesn't stay stuck. The compassionate action doesn't have to be huge. We

know that if somebody is grieving, just sitting with somebody, just being there.

But everybody can express it in their own way. Not everybody -- like I'm okay to go with somebody deep and emotional. I have brothers. When we're dealing with my parents and their death, I have one brother who wouldn't go there emotionally, but he was like arranging the doctor visits.

So everybody can do it the way that they feel. Showing up and bringing food. So it can be expressed in different ways. But compassion is energizing, and motivating, and healing actually. So that's why it's not compassion fatigue. It's empathic distress.

Mark Sherman: Interesting. Talk about self-compassion.

Helene Creager: Self-compassion is when we bring that compassion to ourselves. When we notice our own suffering and then we are motivated to do something to alleviate that.

In all of these that I'm sharing, by the way, there are so many great teachers. But for self-compassion, the leaders have been Dr. Kristin Neff and Dr. Christopher Germer. They have three components of self-compassion which is kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity.

Common humanity is really important. That's part of compassion also in general. But with self-compassion, you know, you want to first notice. That's the mindfulness. The second

part is knowing I'm not alone. Everybody suffers. This is part of the human experience. Then kindness is, you know, can I be kind to myself right now? How can I be kind?

So self-compassion is really treating yourself as if you would a good friend. We have to say it that way because, as I said earlier, people are harder on themselves than they are with their good friends. So if you think about how you would feel towards your good friend, what you would say, how you would support them and talk to yourself that way, then you're able to give yourself self-compassion.

Mark Sherman: The last thing I want to ask you to sort of define and give us a more sort of meaty sense of what it is, because we haven't really talked about it, is positive neuroplasticity. Then I want to talk about how all of these things interrelate.

Helene Creager: So positive neuroplasticity is based on neuroscience. It is that we can use our mind to rewire our brain. The reason this is important is because our brains have a negative bias. This was evolutionarily adaptive. It's very important to know where the lion and the tiger are and that you're ready to fight, flight, flee. So, it wasn't as important to know where the food was as it was to not be food. Right?

So now though the threat is mostly to our self-concept. There are times we are physically threatened. At those times we

need our biological adaptations to jump in. But most of the time it's against our self-concept. And at those times we still have this negative bias where we focus on the negative.

Dr. Rick Hanson is the developer of positive neuroplasticity training. One of his sayings is our brain is like Velcro for the bad and Teflon for the good. So the good experiences, we don't really benefit from them. We don't learn from them the way that we should because they move out of our brain very rapidly.

So the idea behind positive neuroplasticity training is to consciously install beneficial experiences into our brain so that we learn from them and we grow. There are actual neural pathways that are created and strengthened by doing that. So it's like if anything happens, you're at a party or you have an interview, our brains will naturally focus on anything that went wrong. It won't focus on the positive things and even beneficial things. Somebody's in therapy or you're doing a mindfulness meditation. You might not get the full benefit of it if you don't take some time for it to really install in your brain.

So there's a set of techniques that you can learn, but even just savoring the moment. Right now, in this moment, there are so many wonderful things. I'm out in nature. What can I take in? What can I savor? Part of the training is you really

identify what is it that you might need to focus on more than others. Maybe for some people it's a sense of belonging. So then you really can, every time you feel a sense of belonging, really take that in and that can actually heal some old wounds.

The idea is you become more responsive, less reactive, and less likely to trigger. So there are a lot of real positives with positive neuroplasticity. It's fun to focus on taking in the good, you know, going around your day. I take walks and I'm like what good can I take in during my walk? It enhances the experience. I'm able to carry that further in my day. I really feel like for me the mindfulness and the compassion, the self-compassion, was fantastic. But the positive neuroplasticity like turbocharged all of that.

Mark Sherman: You've talked about these different interrelated concepts. So what are some practices that our primary audience here, the probation and pretrial services officers, should be thinking about or considering? How should they be thinking about what can I do? Like what are the things I can do?

Helene Creager: The first thing is, if you can, do something on a regular basis. I think the biggest thing and something I wish I would have done more is taking pauses through the day. Just take a pause 10, 20 seconds. Notice if there's a

good thing going on. Or just take a breath and listen to the sounds around you.

I know I worked revved up adrenaline pumping, pumping, pumping, pumping. It's not good. It's not healthy for us. So just to take a breath and step back, it helps put things in perspective. How am I going to proceed with the rest of my day? So I think that's really simple.

A simple thing you can do is to take a pause. Observe what's going on. When something good is happening, savor it 10, 20 seconds. It doesn't have to be long. At the end of the day do some inventory about what went right. What do you appreciate about yourself? Well, I think an ideal day is you start the morning with gratitude. You wake up and say what am I grateful for? Gratitude rewires your brain, right? It's so positive.

End of the day, what went well today? What do I feel good about? What did I do well? And whatever you're measuring -- my measurements right now for myself is what did I do well in taking care of myself, what self-care? It can be simple. I meditated. I took a walk. I brushed my teeth. You know, it can be very simple. Help rewire that brain because at the end of the day our default would be I didn't get this done, I didn't get this done, I didn't do this and the things I did I didn't do well. So we miss all the good things. It's not that we didn't

do good things. It's that we don't recognize it. We don't acknowledge it.

Mark Sherman: I did already have sort of a mindfulness meditation practice that I've been doing now for several years. I was doing that well before COVID. But one of the things that I did during COVID to maintain my sanity, because at the height of COVID we were all kind of stuck at home, is just to go out and get some fresh air. I began sort of as my exercise regimen is taking long walks every day.

Toward the end of the day, go out and walk three, four, or five miles and be very again aware. So not listening to anything. Not listening to music. Not listening to podcasts. No offense, Sherman, but we're not listening to your podcast today. We're going to take a walk. I found it to be very, very helpful. Not so much in like tangible ways. Like, oh, you know, I'm sleeping better or whatever. Maybe I was. But just sort of just a better general feeling of ease in handling some pretty stressful situations.

Which kind of brings me to a question I want to ask you before we go to the next break. That is, you talked about this idea of being more responsive which I really think is helpful, responsive versus reactive. I've heard you in the past, you've used this term the window of tolerance. So could you talk about that?

Helene Creager: The window of tolerance was developed by Dr. Dan Siegel. I love the concept of it. Our parasympathetic system is operating and we're able to handle stress better. Our parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems are going up and down throughout the day. Things might not be going perfectly but there's a place in there where, no matter what's happening, we could pretty much handle it. I might get a little stressed or aggravated, but I'm still okay to handle it while I'm in this window of tolerance.

When we're outside that window of tolerance, we might be hypoaroused. So we're less responsive. We might go numb so that we're knocked out of our window of tolerance. Anything happens, we're not really functioning at our fullest. We're shut down. Basically we're withdrawn.

On the other side of the window of tolerance is we might be not in a reactive place where we're more agitated and anxious. Anything happens, we're really reactive to it. So what we want is we want to be in that window of tolerance and we also want to increase the window of tolerance so we're more and more able to handle things from a more calm and peaceful place because the bottom line is things are going to happen. So these practices, compassion, mindfulness, self-compassion and positive neuroplasticity increase this window so that we have a bigger capacity to handle things as they hit us. Which is great.

Also, if we're knocked out of that window of tolerance, if we go into hypoarousal where we shut down or hyperarousal where we're really agitated and anxious, we can use those same tools to bring us back into the window of tolerance. So then we're really able to deal with whatever it is that's bothering us. I will say that it might not be immediate, but it'll get us there maybe in a little bit.

Like the first thing is noticing I'm knocked out. I'm in the reactive zone and I need to do whatever I can to help myself get out. So if you're hypoaroused, meaning you're really shut down, breathwork. But even movement, exercise, that can really help get you moving again and help you get back in.

The same thing, if you're hyperaroused and you're agitated, you can do things - breathwork, breathing, some exercise. But things that kind of calm your nervous system. Maybe some soothing things, body scans. You know, doing whatever is comforting to you to kind of bring your nervous system back down. So it's really about regulating our nervous system.

Mark Sherman: We're going to take another break. When we come back, Helene is going to tell us about how you can get started with these practices. We've already sort of begun that conversation, so we're going to continue it. And she'll also talk about the resources available to help you do that. Stay with us.

Female Voice: Support for this program comes from FJC Probation and Pretrial Services Education. At FJC Probation and Pretrial Services Education, we believe transformative education and training are essential to the administration of justice. We use proven instructional methods to inform, engage, and inspire the people we serve to reach individual and organizational excellence. Visit us at fjc.dcn/p&p. That's fjc.dcn/p&p.

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Mark Sherman: Okay. Helene, I'm an officer listening to this conversation and I am intrigued by it and want to know

more. Your favorite kind of officer. How can I get started if I haven't had the benefit of your or others' training on the topic?

Helene Creager: I would say the first thing underlying all of this is to be kind to yourself and be patient. There are so many different ways to help calm the nervous system to help rewire the brain. You might need to try different things before something works for you, but be kind. You know, when you start off, it can be awkward. That's why, especially with mindfulness, it's about nonjudgmental. Because when you start and you notice you're trying to focus and your mind is wandering, just be kind. Just be kind. So that's the first thing.

Mark Sherman: That's very helpful because that was a hard thing for me to learn. I think that's a hard thing generally for people to learn and put into practice. So you're doing some kind of a meditation. It's a walking meditation, it's a seated. Whatever it might be, right? And of course your mind is going to wander. One of the most difficult things to learn how to do is not be judgmental of those thoughts, to actually acknowledge them, and get to know them, and then let them go. So how do you do that?

Helene Creager: Yeah, it is the most challenging. I agree.

Mark Sherman: Very challenging.

Helene Creager: It's very challenging. Well, the first thing is to really accept that this is what the brain was designed to do. Our intellect and our thinking are important. It's necessary. And especially we are trained in our society but especially on our job to be doers and to be thinkers. Sometimes I kind of talk to that part of me and say you need a little rest right now. Okay? You need a bit of a rest.

So the first thing is not to acknowledge it's okay. It's doing what is normal to do. And the noticing is the mindfulness part. So we do want the focus, but the real goal is the noticing part. So if we're noticing we're aware, we're aware, we've woken up because so much -- we get lost, literally lost in thoughts. That's where that term comes from. So you notice, and that's number one. You bring it back and you start again. And that's practicing resilience. So you're practicing mindfulness, you're practicing kindness, and you're practicing beginning again in resilience. In one meditation, if you notice just one time, that's success.

The other really important concept is being okay in taking care of yourself. I think that we have this pressure in our society, especially in our system, that it's selfish if you do self-care. And I think to give yourself permission, not only permission, it is an imperative. You know, in our job we are

the main instrument of how anything gets done. So the more we take care of our tool and our instrument, the better we're going to be at the job, the more productive. Taking five minutes at the beginning of the day or taking pauses throughout the day. Give yourself permission that taking care of yourself is important and you're worth it. Start small. You don't have to take on meditating for like an hour. Then maybe a couple of times during the day just stop, and pause, and notice what's going on.

Another really helpful thing is if you could find a practice buddy or a community. I find it very supportive. I went into a lot of this with a friend. I'm part of quite a few communities, that we meditate together. But also, like I have a friend, we just check in with each other - what have you been doing, what practices have you been in trying. We send each other different meditations from the apps.

Mark Sherman: Well, I could see that really working in probation and pre-trial because so many of our colleagues in probation and pre-trial have great relationships with each other, friendly relations with each other. They may exercise together or whatever. So this would be something very similar to that.

Helene Creager: So anything we can do to build our social connections is really important.

Mark Sherman: You talked earlier about self-care and how our system, the probation pre-trial services system and the judiciary generally, has sort of looked askance at people engaging in what we now refer to as self-care. Obviously that is changing to the good, to the very good. And obviously within probation and pre-trial we now have the National Wellness Working Group which you helped start way back. And there's the Wellness Committee. That is now an important part of our infrastructure in probation and pretrial. That's fantastic. We're seeing a lot more attention being paid to self-care up and down and across the judiciary. That's been very refreshing to see.

And I referred to in our first segment the competencies, one of which is resilience, and there are several associated behaviors. Officers are aware of this. If they're not, they can consult the competencies on the FJC website.

But one of those behaviors uses wellness strategies to manage case-related stress. So not only is self-care a good thing, it is now part of the professional expectation of officers as embodied within these 10 officer competencies. And there are multiple other behaviors there, folks can look at them.

But I really feel like we're in the midst of a fundamental shift in terms of how our system views self-care and different

approaches to self-care. So I just wanted to reiterate and emphasize that officers hopefully will give themselves space to do this and that their managers will give them space to do it. In fact, the managers are taking space themselves to do it.

So if I'm an officer and haven't participated in your FJC training, what are some ways I can explore these types of practices? Maybe you can talk about some apps or resources that you have found to be particularly helpful especially in the context of probation and pretrial work.

Helene Creager: Well, I found that some of the apps have been just really helpful. The one I use is called Insight, I-n-s-i-g-h-t, Timer. It's free and it has thousands and thousands of meditations. I started by just looking up, and I still do, if I have a particular issue like anxiety or stress or sleep. You can look up special things like that.

They also have a timer. Now more and more I just use the timer and I do it silently for myself. But you can just explore and try different meditations. You could even explore by amount of time. They have them for one minute, five minutes, 20 minutes. They have music. I even use some of the music when I do my morning stretches. So it's all really helpful.

Another one, UCLA has something called UCLA Mindful through their Mindful Awareness Research Center. On their app they have -- these are the ones I first started because I took my first

mindfulness course through them. They have a 5-minute mindfulness of awareness and 12-minute. All sorts of ones. Also they do live meditations at the Hammer Museum that you can listen to. They record all of them and you can access all of them.

Another thing that I use a lot are podcasts whenever I'm driving. Some of my favorites is *Being Well* with Dr. Rick Hanson. *Ten Percent Happier* with Dan Harris, he does really great interviews with lots of different people. *Happiness* by Dr. Laurie Santos, that's excellent also. So there are a lot of really good podcasts out there. I found some really good podcasts through the FJC that are helpful, that are focused on wellness. I like to listen to them when I drive. It really helps.

There are so many websites with so much information. There are free meditations on websites. There are classes where you could drop in and practice for free. I'll say I read many, many, many books. I'll just list a couple. I have a list of resources that I give out at my trainings. I am right now in the middle of updating and improving my website. I will be including resources on my website. So that will be ready hopefully in August or September of 2023 where you can access it. helenecreager.com is the website address.

But some books that would be nice to start with include Rick Hanson's *Hardwiring Happiness*. One that I'm reading now that I love is called *The Self-Talk Workout*. It has very simple and practical ways to be kinder to yourself. Tara Brach has a lot of great books and great resources in meditation.

Mark Sherman: She's outstanding.

Helene Creager: The first book of hers that I read that really talked to me was *Radical Self-Acceptance*. Kristin Neff did a book on self-compassion. Dan Siegel has written a lot of books. One is called *Mindsight*. Another is *Aware*. So he has a lot of great books.

Mark Sherman: All the authors you just listed are either researchers, clinicians, or both behavioral health people. Psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, psychiatrists. I mean many of them favor clinical work. Many of them favor research. Many of them do both. So this is years and years of research data that has been collected. The research projects themselves have been led by these people that you're mentioning. They employ them in their clinical practice as well and they do them themselves. So because we are an organization that focuses on evidence-based practice, we want to stay true to that and the things that we're doing.

Helene Creager: That is so true. All of this is evidence-based. Many of the centers on mindfulness and compassion are

based at universities, and even mindful self-compassion. So it's all based on research.

Mark Sherman: You mentioned the UCLA Center, for example, and you mentioned the work that you did at Stanford. So there are multiple research centers across the world that are looking at this stuff.

A personal story. I am in my late 50s and a few years ago discovered that I have a mild form of heart disease. So one of the tests that my primary care physician did was to -- it was a test that assesses inflammation in one's body which is a really telltale sign that something is wrong.

This article that I read was about inflammation in the body and about a research study. The experimental group engaged in real mindfulness meditation over a period of time. The other group was instructed in another type of practice which was not evidence-based. Those who were engaging in the practices saw a reduction in their physical bodily inflammation which again leads to all kinds of physical ailments. So if you can reduce that through mindfulness meditation and perhaps avoid even having to take medication, that's a really positive thing.

My test came back measuring the inflammation. My doctor calls me and she said, "I was really shocked to see that your inflammation it really is at a totally normal level." Who knows whether it had to do with the meditation practice that I had

been engaged in for several years? But I like to think that that had something positive to do with it. We know from the research that mindfulness meditation can reduce inflammation fairly significantly. So if people are looking for a physical or tangible manifestation of engaging in these practices, they're out there.

Helene Creager: Absolutely. You know Jon Kabat-Zinn, who is one of the --

Mark Sherman: He's terrific.

Helene Creager: -- creators of mindfulness, was a medical doctor I believe, and working with people who are experiencing pain, and their doctors just pretty much gave up on them. He created mindfulness initially to help people deal with pain and they saw such great results with that. So that is also an area that I have found all of this helpful with, is with pain management and pain reduction.

Mark Sherman: We have to go. But before we do, I want to just ask you to take a minute to talk about what's next for your work with the FJC.

Helene Creager: Well, right now we're working on some videos that we're going to be creating that officers or anybody, all the staff, can use for mindfulness. So some of them will be actual meditation practices. Some will be introductions to some

of these concepts we've been talking about. They're all five minutes or less. So we're creating these videos.

Mark Sherman: So like microlearning, right?

Helene Creager: Yeah, microlearning videos. They'll be available I believe on your website and I believe on the wellness app.

Mark Sherman: Yes.

Helene Creager: So we're in the process of making those. I am part of the Resilience and Workload Management Planning Group. We're getting together to plan trainings for the districts on wellness, resilience, and workload management. So I'm really excited about that.

We are also on target to present the positive neuroplasticity training at some point. I believe, hopefully, it will be by the end of this calendar year. That will be a great opportunity to help officers really dive into that and earn a certificate for being trained in positive neuroplasticity.

I believe we're talking about for next fiscal year doing more of the Every Day Wellness, mindfulness, compassion and self-compassion virtual training. I hope that comes to fruition for next year. So we'll see. A lot of things continue to unfold. That's what I know of right now.

Mark Sherman: We're going to keep you busy, Helene. This is fantastic. I just want to thank you so much for talking with us.

Helene Creager: Thank you, Mark. It's been my pleasure. This has been really fun. I just love the opportunity to share this back with our system. So thank you so much for this opportunity.

Mark Sherman: *Off Paper* is produced by Shelly Easter. The program is directed by Craig Bowden and edited by Chris Murray. Our program coordinator is Anna Glouchkova. Our amazing team of colleagues working behind the scenes to launch each episode of this podcast into cyberspace includes LaTonja Cox, Sam Golant, José Idler, Yvonne Washington, and Ed Liberatore.

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