

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness segment where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I am Katie Johnson, your host, and my guest today is Dana Haagenson. She is a human resource and accounting instructor and a strengths coach at M State. Good morning, Dana.

Dana Haagenson: Good morning. How are you today?

Katie Johnson: I am well. How are you?

Dana Haagenson: I'm doing just great.

Katie Johnson: Well, as our listeners might recall, we are, each week on Apple a Day during our community health challenge, focusing on one of the components of wellness. Our Wheel of Wellness Challenge is inviting the community to take a deep dive each week into one of the components and learn more about how they can improve their own personal wellness in that component. And one of the, I don't know, maybe more obscure components, in my opinion, is occupational wellness, something that maybe we don't think about as a major contributor to our overall health, but when you think about how much time you spend at work, if you're a full-time working person, or just how much time you spend contributing your energy to a cause, whether that's volunteer, whether that's your family, whatever you're using your talents and your gifts to accomplish and to find purpose and meaning in your life, that all contributes to occupational health.

Our occupational wellness definition can be found on our LRHC.org/wow website, but it really encompasses those pieces of our overall wellbeing about doing what we love and loving what we do, because when we do what we're meant to do, we deepen our sense of meaning and purpose, and Dana, you are a strengths coach at M State, as I said, and let's start out by talking about what that means. What is a strengths coach and what kind of training do you have and who and what do you coach?

Dana Haagenson: Awesome. I would be happy to do that. I love what you said about how our work life and our volunteer life and our home life are so interconnected, and I always start when I do sessions, like strength, talking about the fact that we bring our whole self to work and we bring our whole self home and we bring our whole self everywhere we go, so we can't really separate those areas of our life, so occupational wellness is really a critical component.

As a strengths coach, what I get the opportunity to do is to work with individuals, as well as teams to help them better understand what their own natural strengths and talents are, and sometimes when people hear the word talent, they often just think about physical talents, like music or sports or those sorts of things, but talents are actually naturally recurring patterns of thoughts, feelings,

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or behaviors that you can productively apply, and so that means things being able to start conversations with people, having a positive outlook on life, having empathy for others, those sorts of things.

And so I get to help people assess themselves on all of the different talents and strengths that they might have as an individual, and then I really go through a process to help them better understand how they can utilize those strengths to be a more productive employee, to be a better parent, to be a better teammate to other individuals. And so it really gives you an opportunity, I think, to really look at yourself and what your natural filters are, what your natural tendencies are going to be, and how you can effectively apply those in the workplace and in the rest of your life.

Katie Johnson: I really like that emphasis on naturally occurring, because you're right. We think about talents as something that we learn and practice, but so many of our strengths are really natural strengths that we just need to define and build upon. And from what I know about the StrengthsFinder Assessment program, which is something I believe your certified or licensed to do, it's built on this premise that the most effective leaders in any organization, regardless of what type of business they might be in, focus and invest in those strengths or talents of the people on their team. And I know there's a lot of research to back that up. Can you tell us what the research tells us about focusing on strengths and how that impacts engagement?

Dana Haagenon: Yes, absolutely. The Gallup organization has done a ton of research on thousands of individuals and organizations across the world, and around employee engagement, and their data shows that worldwide, only about 13% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs. And what that means is that they want to be there every day. They're really dedicated and focused on that workplace, and that if tomorrow somebody came and offered them a better job, they wouldn't take it because they were engaged in the job that they were in.

Only 13% worldwide, and in the US we're a little better. It's about 30%. But still, only one-third of our employees are engaged in the actual job they have, and what the research has found is that some of the reason for that is because, as organizations and as leaders, we often focus on what's wrong with people. We look at here's what you're weak at. Here's what you need to focus on. You need to develop in that area. And that's just not natural for us.

And so what research has found is that when people understand what their strengths are and they find ways to develop and continue to use those strengths every day on their job, those individuals are three times more likely to report having an excellent quality of life. They're six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs. They have higher productivity, so that means they get more done on a daily basis, but they're also nicer to customers. They're nicer to their coworkers. They're more positive to work with. They're more creative and innovative.

And teams, when teams understand each other's strengths, and so they kind of know what drives the other person on their team, they're more profitable. They're almost 10% more profitable than teams who don't understand how to utilize their strengths. And when leaders give feedback to employees based on what their strengths are rather than what their weaknesses are, the active disengagement in an organization, that those employees who are actively disengaged don't want to be there, could care less, goes down to less than 1% in organizations where leaders are giving that kind of feedback that's looking at hey, where do your strengths lie and how can we utilize those to help you get your job done on a regular basis. There's lots of good data, I think, around understanding your own strengths and the strengths of the teams that you work with.

Katie Johnson: Oh, for sure. What a powerful ripple effect. You talked a little bit about exercises that leaders can do to recognize and build on the strengths of people and their teams. On the flip side of that, individually, if I'm doing my part as an employee or a volunteer on the hockey boosters or whatever it might be, I would presume I'm going to be more effective and enjoy my role more if I'm good at identifying and building on my own strengths. How do you teach individuals to do that, in addition to in teaching leaders how to do that?

Dana Haagenson: Yeah, absolutely. Really, it starts there, with the individual. Whether they're an individual contributor or a manager, as a leader I'm still an individual, so I still contribute as an individual. The place to start is really to build awareness. The tool I use is the Clifton StrengthsFinder Assessment, and so people are able to take that assessment, and it lists for them what their top five strengths are out of a total of 34 strengths that exist.

They start by looking at those top five strengths, and then we go through a process that is called Name It, Claim It, Aim It. Naming it is really just understanding what each of the different strength themes means and just being able to articulate that, and then claiming it is understanding how it applies to you. With individuals, I really help them to think about ... for example, my number one strength is achiever, which is people who like to check things off the list and are really focused on getting lots of things done on a regular basis ...I get people to think about when have you used that strength of achiever or whatever it is.

Think about a time when you've used that in the past, and based on that, what was the meaningful impact? What was the positive thing that happened, the result, because you used that? And then you can think about oh, that's how I used that achiever before and it really got me by. Now when I'm in this new situation at work that I'm not very comfortable with, how can I tap into that natural strength to make me more effective at that particular thing that I might be struggling with. Really it's building awareness. It's becoming very familiar with your strengths, what they mean, how you've used them, and then how you can use them into the future, as well.

Katie Johnson: And I think you're kind of touching on my next question. I think it's unrealistic not to mention weaknesses when we're talking about strengths, because we all undoubtedly have weaknesses, too, so part of this is coaching people to develop in areas they aren't naturally good at, but they need to improve on based on what their job responsibility might be. How do you tie those two together?

Dana Haagenson: Yeah, that's a great question. Our little joke as strengths coaches is that it's strengths finder, not excuse finder. So you can't say oh, I'm not good at that, so I don't need to do that task anymore. Certainly, we can't do that in the work world. We have to recognize and we have to manage our weaknesses, and what we find when we look at our strengths is that a lot of our weakness are actually sort of what we call basement behaviors related to our strengths.

For example, if I mention I have a strength that's achiever and I like to get a lot of stuff done, a basement of that is that sometimes I might let the work, because I'm so anxious to get it done, I might let that get in the way of a relationship, a communication that I need to have with somebody else. And then that becomes a weakness if I let that take over.

When we talk about that, when we talk about strengths, is to be able to identify what the basement behaviors are related to each one of those strengths that you have, and to recognize when you get there, and when you get into those basement behaviors, or what you might call those weakness areas, you can develop a plan. If you recognize it there, you can develop a plan for how to get out of it.

The other thing about weaknesses and basements is that when you're in the workplace and you know the strengths of the rest of your team, then you can find people to partner with and to collaborate with who maybe can help you find systems and tools that maybe support your weaknesses that you might need a little extra help on. That's where that team component comes into play, as well.

Katie Johnson: Oh, for sure. I'm sure you encounter people at all stages of career satisfaction and engagement in your job. What do you find are the most common reasons that employees say they are either engaged or disengaged? Are there some trends?

Dana Haagenson: Well, certainly, what you usually find is that it has a lot to do with leadership. There's a saying that says people don't leave companies, they leave managers. I saw a stat somewhere that said 35% of people would rather see their manager fired than get a substantial raise in pay. Certainly, leadership effectiveness and the way that employees are treated by their leaders is a huge aspect of their engagement or disengagement, and I think the thing is that managers are not ... they're not out there trying to be bad people, so they're not bad people.

A lot of them just have not been trained appropriately and they're not aware of their own natural tendencies and filters and strengths, and so they're not aware of how those things are coming across to their team. And the other piece of that

is when ... lots of research around what do followers need from their leaders? What do those employees need from their leaders? And there's four key categories that really keep people engaged in their job. And it's when their leader provides them with trust, hope, compassion, and stability. That's when they're going to feel engaged and happy in their workplace the most.

Katie Johnson: They're powerful, powerful areas. For our listeners and our challenge participants who might be struggling to find that rewarding feeling of purpose and joy in their work, do you have some resources you recommend, whether they're books or websites or other ways that we can do some self-help towards our occupational wellness?

Dana Haagenon: Yeah, absolutely. One place I think I would start is the StrengthsFinder, kind of the core book that gives the information about is called StrengthsFinder 2.0. If you were to just google strengths finder, it would be the top thing that would come up. 17 million worldwide have taken the assessment, and so it's very well known. I would certainly recommend starting there.

And I think it's really interesting is when you start to dig into the strengths finder movement, there's books around strengths-based leadership, strengths-based parenting, strengths-based teaching, strengths-based churches. Whatever your area is, whether it's volunteerism, whether it's home life and parenting, there are lots of resources around strengths finder that help you with that. I would just my whole family has taken StrengthsFinder, and it's made me a better parent, I believe, to my kids-

Katie Johnson: Oh, that's great.

Dana Haagenon: ... because I know the differences between me and each of my children and my husband. It's a great resource, not just for your work life, but for your home life, as well.

Katie Johnson: Pretty powerful. Any last tips for practicing good occupational wellness? Things we can intentionally do to nurture our success and enrichment?

Dana Haagenon: Yeah, that's a big question. One kind of buzz word right now that I really think makes a lot of sense is changing the term work life balance that we use a lot of times to work life fusion, meaning that we are happiest when we can do high energy and things we're passionate about throughout our day, whether it be at work, whether it be at home, and trying to be able to instill those things that really give you energy, those things that really make you happy. Trying to find ways to infuse those throughout all the different parts of your life, and maybe not feeling so stressed about I need to have absolutely equal balance between work and home, but how do I effectively kind of fuse those things together. That's another little term I would have people google is work life fusion, because there's lots of TED Talks and different books or studies mostly right now related to that topic, which is sort of interesting.

Katie Johnson: Very interesting. We will definitely post all of these resources on our Occupational Wellness page this week, lrhc.org/wow, Wheel of Wellness page, for our community health challenge participants, and for anyone in the community who wants to dive into this topic a little bit further on occupational wellness. Dana Haagenson, human resource and accounting instructor and a strengths coach at M State. Thank you for joining us this morning and sharing all of this great information. We appreciate it so much.

Dana Haagenson: Absolutely. Thanks for having me.

Katie Johnson: Thank you, Dana. Dana Haagenson and Katie Johnson both reminding you this morning there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.