



EXTENSION



Toxic Grit:

Is the greatest strength of farmers, ranchers, and their advisers also their greatest weakness?

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Mental health in America by the numbers

1 in 5

U.S. adults experienced mental illness (2020)

1 in 20

U.S. adults experienced serious mental illness (2020)

1 in 6

U.S. kids (6-17) experienced a mental health disorder (2016)

1 in 15 of U.S. adults experienced a co-occurring substance use disorder *and* mental illness (2020)

Oklahoma's mental health crisis

Citizens experiencing mental illness	3rd nationally
Citizens experiencing serious mental illness	2nd nationally
Rate of substance abuse disorders	2nd nationally
Adverse childhood experiences per person	1st nationally
Adolescent diagnosed depression	33% increase
Adolescent suicide attempts	23% increase
Adolescent completed suicides	21% increase
Overall mental health ranking	49th
Drug overdose rates in rural areas now surpass urban areas	

State suicide rates

Rank	State	Rate	Deaths
1	WY	30.5	182
2	AK	27.5	204
3	MT	26.1	300
4	NM	24.2	516
5	ID	23.2	419
6	OK	21.9	869

Mental health in Rural America by the numbers

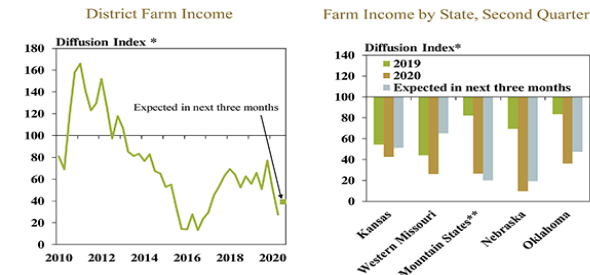
- Rural America:
 - Rural mental health was in the toilet *before* COVID-19
 - 75% of rural Americans live in an area classified as a mental healthcare desert
 - Agriculture's suicide rate is 4th among industry categories, and has one of the highest suicide completion rates

What's so special about "farm stress?"

- Farming is among the most stressful and dangerous professions
 - ▶ **Lack of control**
 - ▶ **Dangerous conditions**
 - ▶ Low income
 - ▶ Financial stress / foreclosures
- COVID-19: perfect storm for maximum psychological damage!
- More spread-out communities...
 - Rural communities tend to be older
 - Higher levels of long-term health problems
 - Hospitals already strained



Chart 1: Tenth District Farm Income



*Barkers responded to each item by indicating whether conditions during the current quarter were higher than, lower than or the same as in the year earlier period. The index numbers are computed by subtracting the percentage of barkers who responded "lower" from the percentage who responded "higher" and adding 100.

**Mountain States include Colorado, northern New Mexico and Wyoming, which are grouped because of limited survey responses from each state.



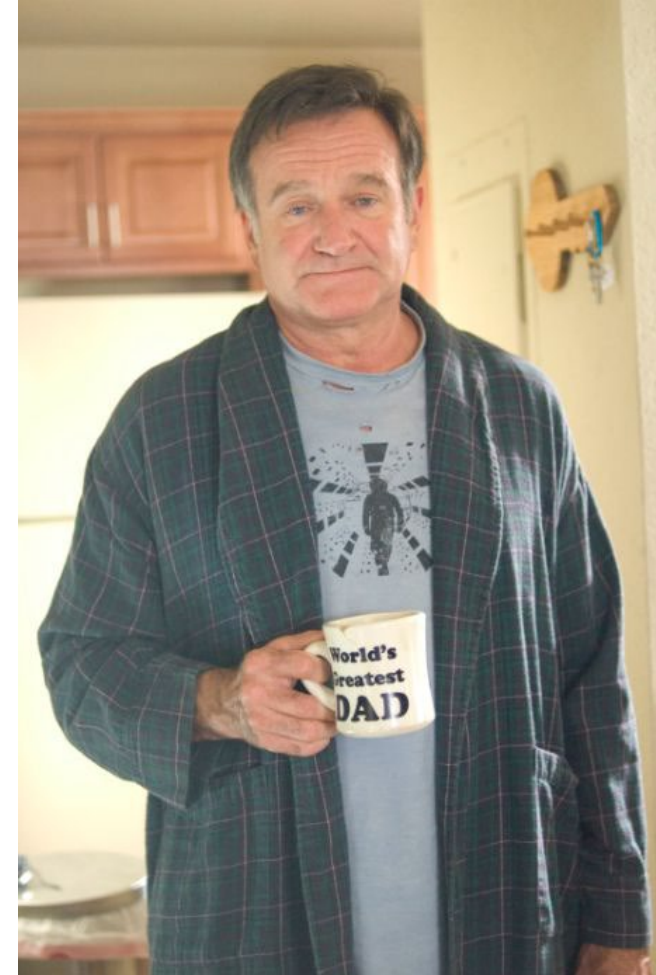
Toxic Grit

Could our greatest strength be our greatest weakness?

- **Fierce independence / self-reliance**
 - Counterpoint: physical, social, and emotional isolation
- **“Tough as nails” – able to withstand the many traumas of a risky environment**
 - Counterpoint: humans don’t have *limitless ability* to process trauma without support
- **“Suck it up, buttercup!”**
 - Counterpoint: agriculture might be the worst industry ever in terms of talking about feelings and getting others to do the same
- **Multi-generational legacy of business and assets...**
 - Counterpoint: *“If you blow it, you’ll have ruined what it took generations to build...”*
- **Strength in community – tremendous, sacrificial support in times of crisis**
 - Counterpoint: for some reason, mental health concerns are the glaring exception to this

Mood disorders & depression

- **Signs:**
 - Depressed mood (duh)
 - 70% of American adults can correctly diagnose depressive symptoms in others... just don't know what to do about it
 - Changes in sleeping / eating habits
 - Increasing social isolation
 - Suicidality
- **How you can help:**
 - “You don't seem to be quite yourself. I care about you – want to talk?”
 - Listen, empathize, and don't judge or try to “fix it”
 - Gently encourage them to connect and move out of isolation
 - If suicidal, **DO NOT LEAVE THEM ALONE**



Anxiety

- **Signs:**
 - Persistent worries about a wide range of situations or specific, acute concern over specific activities, situations, objects, or being around people
 - Intense fear and shortness of breath without presence of a physical threat
 - PTSD & OCD are anxiety disorders
- **How you can help (panic attack):**
 - Call 911 when in doubt of panic attack or cardiac arrest
 - Reassure the person of their safety in calm, firm manner
 - Model controlled breathing for them
 - Ask if they have had an attack before and what might help
 - Use the 5-4-3-2-1 method to help them refocus on present



Psychosis

- **Where most people’s minds go when you say “mental health”**
- **Signs:**
 - **Distressing disruptions in thinking, emotion, and behavior**
 - **Disconnection from reality**
 - **Perceiving things that are not there**
- **How you can help:**
 - **Assess the risk they may harm themselves or others and get emergency responders if needed**
 - **Keep the person safe, but keep yourself safe also**
 - **De-escalate; use quiet, calm, and moderately-paced tone**
 - **Respond to their requests so long as reasonable and safe to give them some sense of control**




Substance abuse disorders

- **See also: rural American opioid crisis**
- **Almost ALWAYS a maladaptive response to something else**
- **Signs:**
 - **Extraordinarily high levels of alertness, energy, or agitation (stimulants)**
 - **Depressed mood, slurred speech, excessive fatigue (depressants)**
 - **Unexplained absences, secretive behavior**
- **How you can help:**
 - **Chronic/addictive issue: Gently tell them you've noticed changes, ask if you can help**
 - **Interventions usually do more harm than good**
 - **Overdose: Call 911 immediately, get person into recovery position, and look for medical ID/bracelet that might provide information**



Dealing with disaster in agriculture

- Safeguard: Immediate physical safety
- Sustain: Meet basic physical needs 
- Comfort: Help with anxiety, be on the lookout for symptoms of disorders
- Connect: Keep people connected to support
- Educate: Create awareness of support resources (not preach)
- Empower: Strengthen them to help return to “normal” (but normal might be a new normal)



Suicide intervention:

Warning signs

- **I**deation – threatening or thinking about suicide
- **S**ubstance abuse – using substances at increased or excessive level
- **P**urposelessness – talking about not having a reason to live
- **A**nxiety – agitated and can't sleep
- **T**rapped – feeling there is no way out
- **H**opelessness – having increased/prolonged feelings of hopelessness
- **W**ithdrawing – decreasing engagement with others, giving away items
- **A**nger – uncontrolled rage or revenge-seeking
- **R**ecklessness – engaging in risky acts
- **M**ood change – dramatic worsening depression OR quick improvement

Suicide intervention: Response

- **ASK:** Directly ask the person
 - Are they having suicidal thoughts?
 - Do they have a specific plan?
 - Do they have access to lethal means?
- **LISTEN:**
 - Pay attention to their responses and listen empathetically
 - Look for IS PATH WARM or any other risk signs
- **ACT:**
 - If you think the person may do themselves harm, **DO NOT LEAVE THEM ALONE**
 - Tell them you are going to call/text for help
 - Remove all access to lethal means

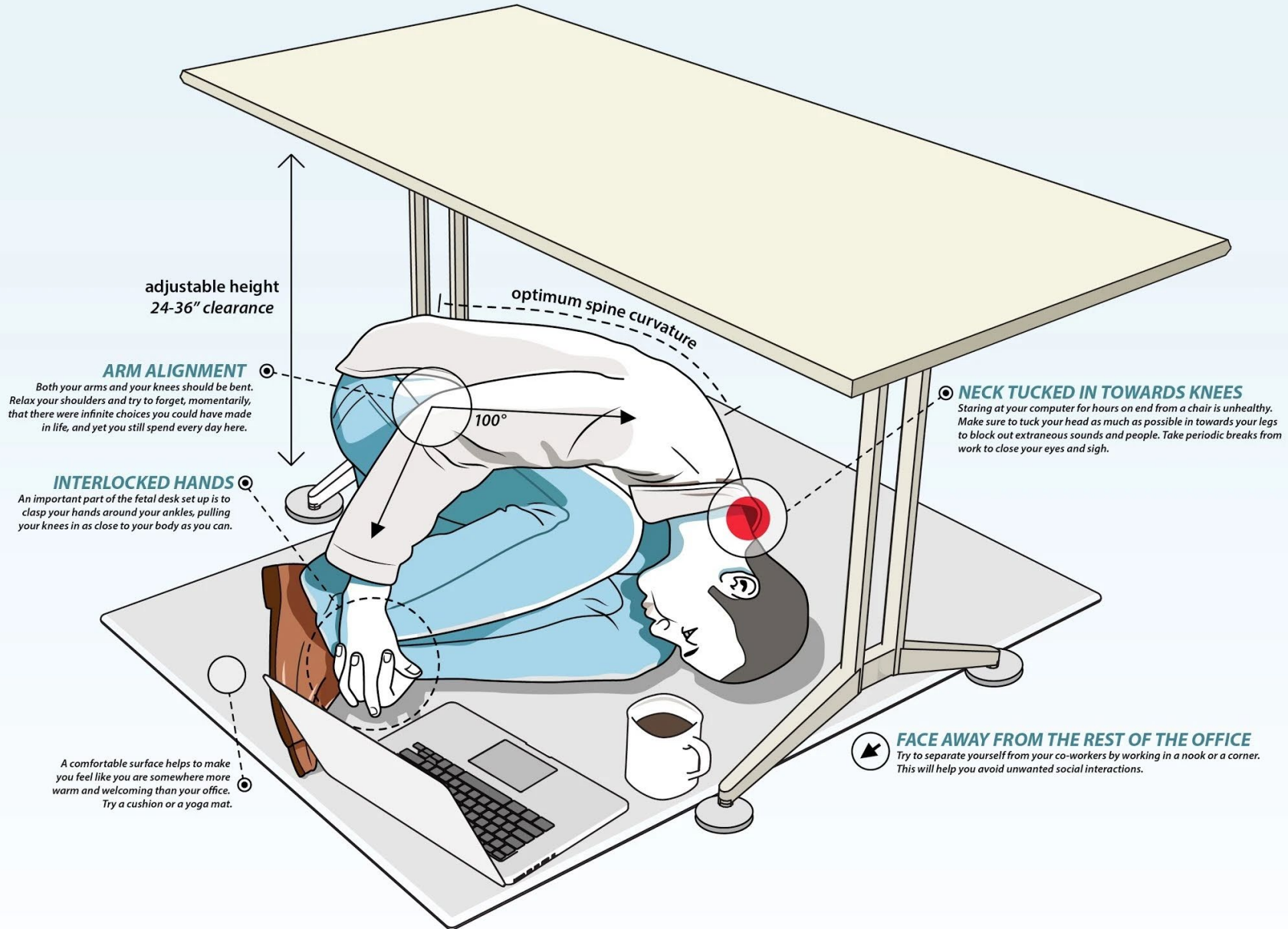
Have you or a loved one been injured by Burnout™?

- Burnout
 - Emotional exhaustion from overload/caring too much for too long;
 - Constant release of neurochemicals in the brain; creates “**stuckness**” due to exposure to situations that activate emotions
 - Decreased sense of autonomy and accomplishment, loss of “efficacy”
- Major Causes of Burnout:
 - “**Human Giver Syndrome**” (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2020)
 - Stuck in giving role *without reciprocity* for receiving
 - *Everyone else is good at it, so I must not be doing enough...!*
 - **Depersonalization**: Going through the motions



OFFICE ERGONOMICS TIPS

FETAL WORK STATION



adjustable height
24-36" clearance

ARM ALIGNMENT

Both your arms and your knees should be bent. Relax your shoulders and try to forget, momentarily, that there were infinite choices you could have made in life, and yet you still spend every day here.

INTERLOCKED HANDS

An important part of the fetal desk set up is to clasp your hands around your ankles, pulling your knees in as close to your body as you can.

A comfortable surface helps to make you feel like you are somewhere more warm and welcoming than your office. Try a cushion or a yoga mat.

optimum spine curvature

100°

NECK TUCKED IN TOWARDS KNEES

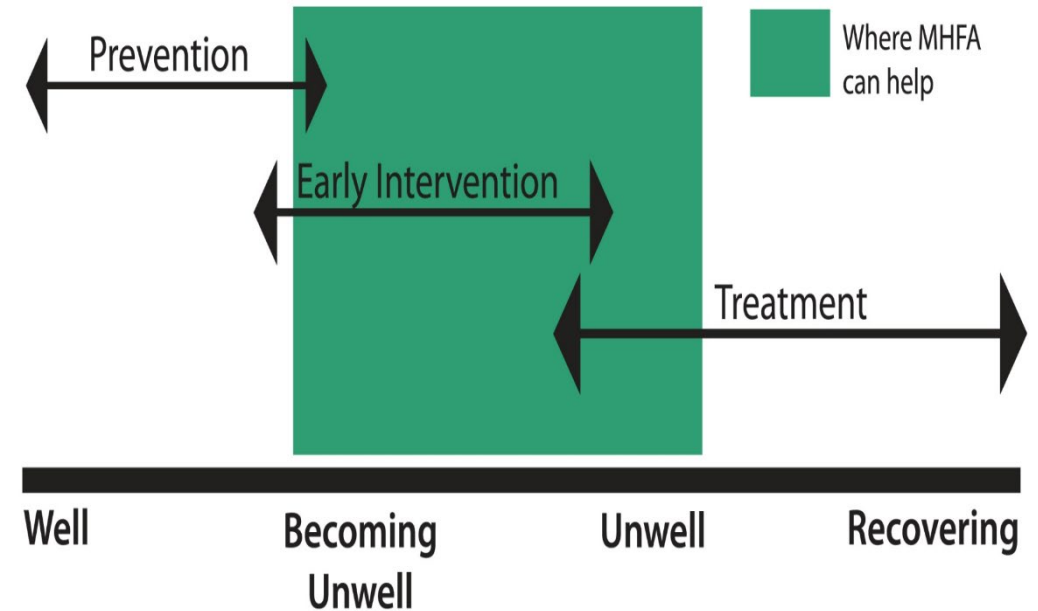
Staring at your computer for hours on end from a chair is unhealthy. Make sure to tuck your head as much as possible in towards your legs to block out extraneous sounds and people. Take periodic breaks from work to close your eyes and sigh.

FACE AWAY FROM THE REST OF THE OFFICE

Try to separate yourself from your co-workers by working in a nook or a corner. This will help you avoid unwanted social interactions.

So... what can we do about this?

- ***Being aware of stress and mental health issues increases the chance for early intervention.***
- Requires:
 - Understand the impact of chronic stress and the stress overload process.
 - Being aware of the signs of anxiety, depression, and *acute crisis*.
 - Being *respectful* of those who are struggling.
 - ***Everyone*** doing *something*...



extension.okstate.edu/farmstress

extension.okstate.edu/programs/farm-stress/index.html

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FARM STRESS

Mental Health Issues for
Farmers, Their Families

You CAN do something!



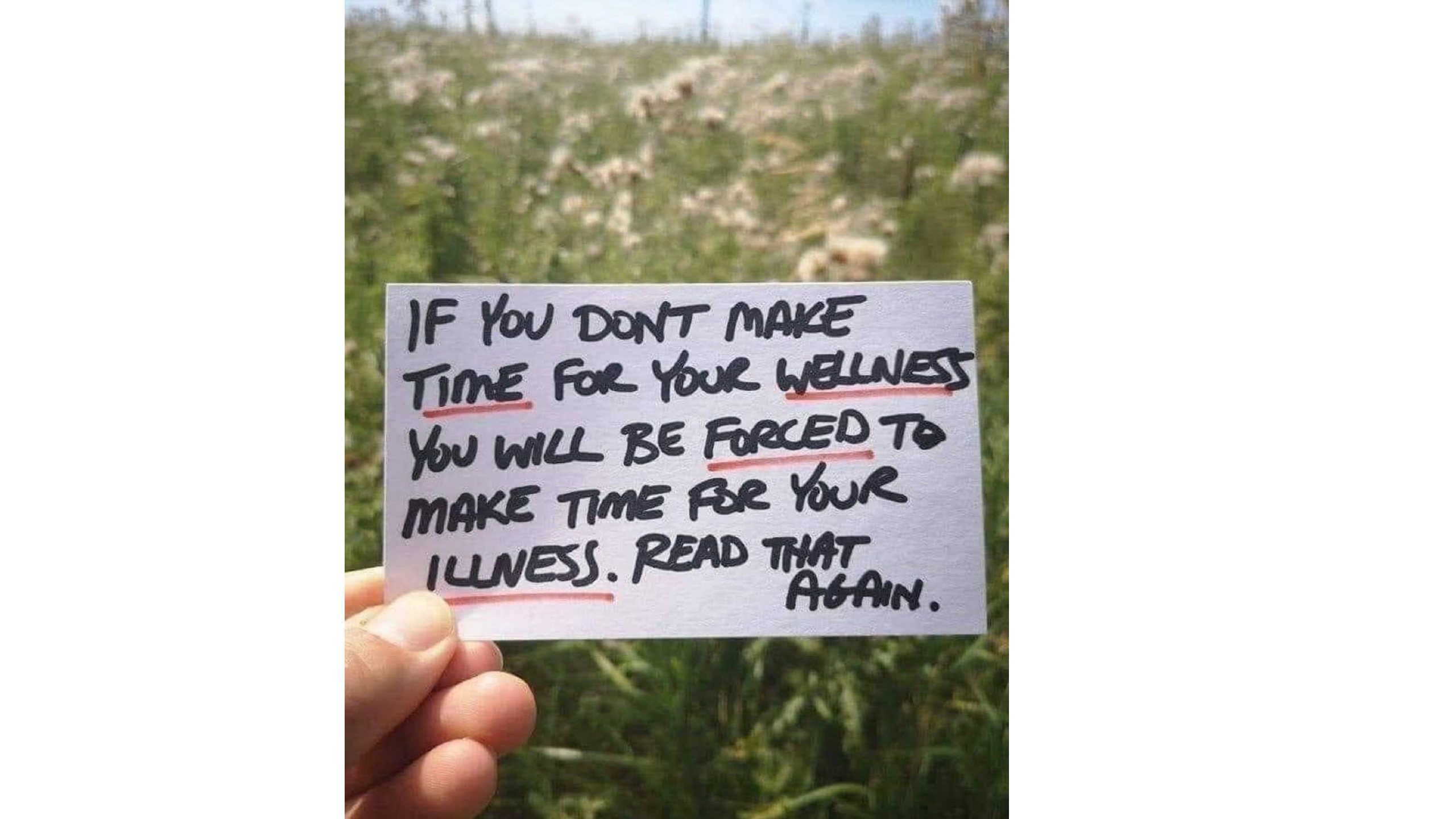
Mental Health FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MENTAL WELLBEING

[mentalhealthfirstaid.org](https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org)



[qprinstitute.com](https://www.qprinstitute.com)

A hand is holding a white rectangular card in the foreground. The card has handwritten text in black ink. The background is a blurred field of green grass and white flowers under a clear blue sky. The text on the card is: "IF YOU DONT MAKE TIME FOR YOUR WELLNESS YOU WILL BE FORCED TO MAKE TIME FOR YOUR ILLNESS. READ THAT AGAIN." The words "WELLNESS" and "ILLNESS" are underlined with a red line. The word "AGAIN." is written on a new line, indented to the right.

IF YOU DONT MAKE
TIME FOR YOUR WELLNESS
YOU WILL BE FORCED TO
MAKE TIME FOR YOUR
ILLNESS. READ THAT
AGAIN.

We work hard for our families, to improve our communities, and create jobs for others because it is good work. We don't do it to go viral on the internet or get a pat on the back from a politician or media outlet someday (if we do, that's the wrong reason). **It is enough to pursue good goals because they are good and important.** Bilbro wrote that even if our noble pursuits are never noticed in the world, "*such fallen realities don't change who we are or what our high calling is.*" He concluded his essay with a sequence that I found deeply powerful in a way that helped me see past the feelings of overwhelmed:

*"If we allow our own experiences of despair to sharpen our loves and longings for eternal goods—friendship, fellowship, flourishing—then we too can be redeemed even if our circumstances are not transformed. If our loves are rightly ordered, purified by despair of idolatrous temptations, then the possibility of good, redemptive work is at hand. **Freed of the false god of efficacy, we can rightly tend the goods we are given to enjoy.**"*

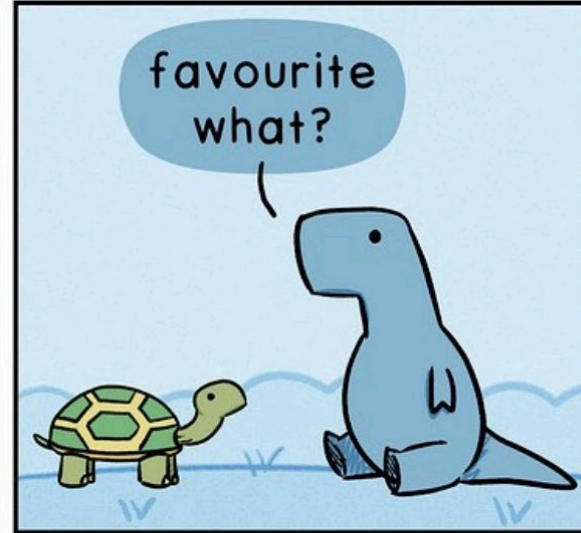
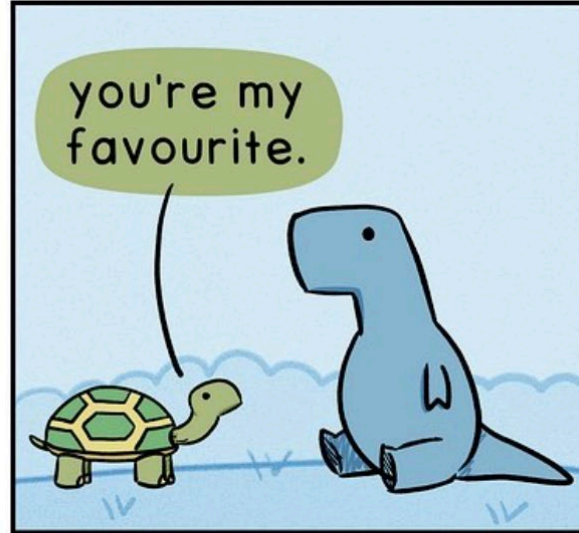
Friends, I don't know your stories or where you might be struggling, but if you are facing any level of despair about life or the world at large, I see you. I get it. If you feel on the edge, or if you need to talk to someone, please reach out to a professional or loved one. Do not let despair drive you out of this world. If you are struggling with whether it is "worth it" to make a difference, don't despair at the difficulty of the task. **If we never change the world, that is okay. Let's free ourselves of that idol and its path that leads to frustration, burnout, and despair.**

Instead, remember that we are called to do good work whether it impacts one person or 1 million people. Our despair can sharpen us and push us toward the things that truly matter. Purified by that, we will flourish.

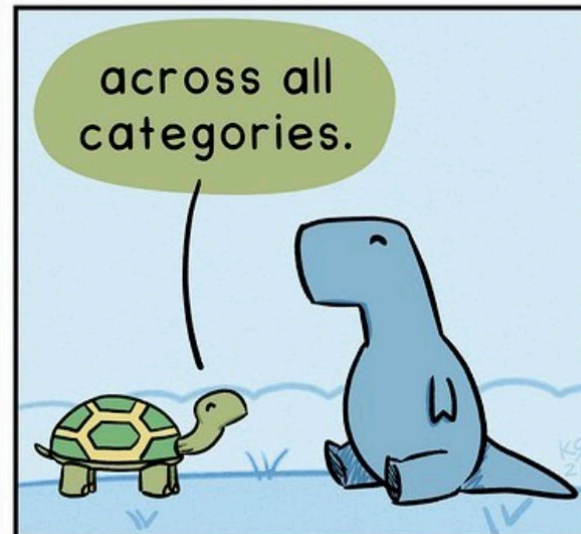
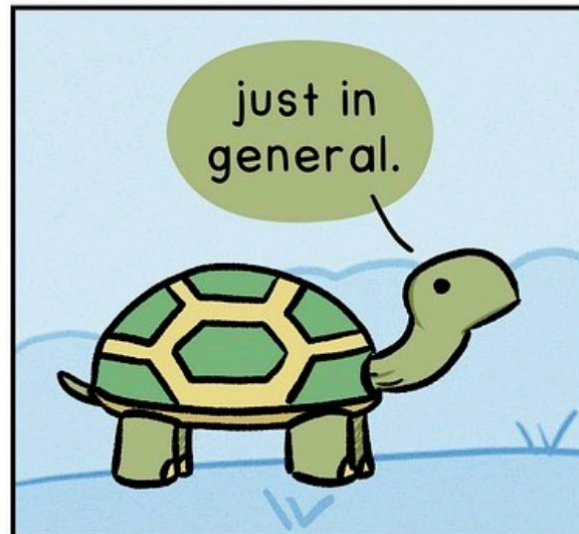
*let whatever
you do today
be enough*



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Thank you!

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