

## Cover Story

**A meaningful life for holistic well-being and optimal work performance****Enoka Wickramasinghe**

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 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2129-5496>DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4038/jccpsl.v30i4.8822>

Received on 20 Jan 2025

Accepted on 28 Jan 2025

**Cover Photo** – The cover photo denotes a meditation session conducted for nursing and healthcare professionals by a university academic who is also a meditation facilitator in Sri Lanka

**Photo Credit** – Professor M W Gunathunga

Humans are considered as animals with higher degree of cognitive and social capacities, within which we all have meaning or purpose in life. Meaning in life is a multifaceted concept often discussed in the context of philosophy, psychology, and existentialism (1-2). At its core, it refers to the sense of purpose, coherence and significance that individuals attach to their existence. Meaning can be derived from various sources, including relationships, work, personal values, spiritual beliefs and contributions to society. Finding and maintaining meaning in life is crucial to both mental and physical well-being (1, 3).



Growing body of research has shown that having a sense of meaning in life significantly contributes to mental and physical health. It provides individuals with resilience against stress, aids in coping with adversity and promotes long-term life satisfaction. Furthermore, meaning in life is linked to improved immune function, lower levels of depression, and better cardiovascular health. Individuals with true meaning in life have shown to live longer with health and wellbeing and more happiness (4). Studies have shown that individuals with a high sense of meaning experience better health outcomes, including a reduced risk of chronic diseases. They tend to have better sleep and have healthier lifestyle choices such as exercise and diet as well. As healthcare professionals when we provide services and care for our clients, our personal health and wellbeing play a major role in determining the quality of care we provide. Hence understanding the meaning of our lives is vital.

While we are trying to find meaning in our lives, it is also important to understand that ethics matter. Ethics are values that guide our conduct toward making the choices that contribute to the common good of all.

Hence, the meaning in our life needs to be within boundaries of ethics. Because ethics will guide us to be truthful, keeping promises, being honest and helping someone in need without having ulterior motives of gaining some benefit later. It is clear that ethics play an underlying role in our lives on a daily basis, which help us make decisions that create positive impacts and steering us away from unjust outcomes. Ethics guides us to make the world a better place through the choices we make.

Those who are with a clear sense of meaning are less likely to experience anxiety, depression, and existential crises. Meaning serves as a psychological buffer that helps people navigate life's challenges, providing a framework for interpreting difficult experiences.

Mental wellbeing includes four main characteristics namely, self-awareness, ability to regulate daily stressors, completion of tasks effectively and efficiently and contributing towards societal benefit. When a person is more self-aware, the ability to regulate own emotions and behaviours is more. This, paves path to facing day to day life challenges without building up stress and completing the tasks effectively and efficiently. Contribution towards society becomes an automatic action when a person is happy and contented, which is the forth characteristic feature of mental wellbeing. Hence, when health professionals be it doctors, nurses, nursing sisters, midwives or public health inspectors etc, have a meaning in life and practice maintaining mental wellbeing high quality of service becomes an automatic outcome.

### **Strategies that we can adopt to enhance meaning in life and mental well-being**

To enhance both personal and professional performance, individuals can adopt strategies that foster a sense of meaning and well-being (5).

#### **1. Engage in meaningful work**

Deeper sense of purpose results when work aligns with personal values and passions. Employees who feel their work is meaningful report higher levels of job satisfaction, creativity, and productivity. Leaders, therefore, should promote a sense of meaning by aligning team goals with a greater mission or purpose. Reflecting on meaning in life regularly would help team members to better understand their purpose of life and job.

#### **2. Practice mindfulness**

Mindfulness-based practices help individuals stay in the present, manage stress, and improve emotional regulation. Research shows that practicing mindfulness daily increases positive effects, reduces rumination, and strengthens resilience, all of which are beneficial for both personal well-being and professional performance. Identifying one or two daily activities such as brushing teeth, having breakfast or walking to work, and practicing mindfulness in those identified practices would help to develop the skill of concentrating on the present moment.

#### **3. Cultivate positive relationships**

Having strong social support helps individuals cope with stress and fosters feelings of connection and belonging. Healthy relationships can provide the emotional resources needed to perform effectively in both personal and professional settings.

#### 4. Set and pursue personal goals

Setting clear, achievable goals that are aligned with personal values is a powerful way to create a sense of purpose. This not only contributes to well-being by promoting a sense of accomplishment but also enhances motivation, focus, and performance. Reflecting on achieving personal goals also helps us for sustained growth in our personal lives.

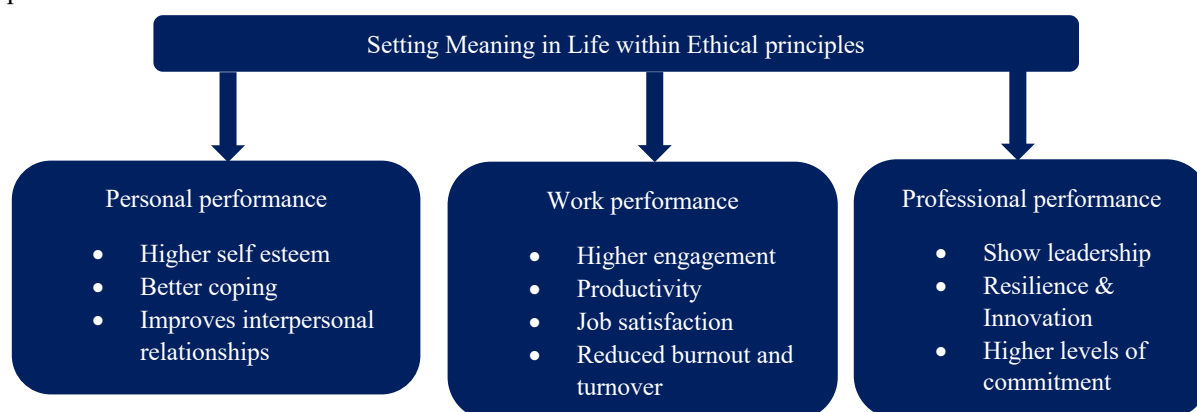
#### 5. Engage in acts of kindness and altruism

To obtain a sense of purpose beyond oneself, can be easily obtained by helping others who are in need, which can increase life satisfaction and well-being. Engaging in altruistic behaviour has been linked to lower levels of depression and higher levels of happiness, which ultimately improve personal and professional life.

#### 6. Foster a growth mindset

Embracing challenges and viewing failures as opportunities for growth can help individuals maintain a positive sense of meaning even in the face of setbacks. A growth mindset encourages continuous learning, adaptability, and resilience, leading to better overall performance in both personal and professional contexts.

Figure below summarizes the interplay between meaning in life, mental and physical health and our performance.



## Conclusion

A sense of meaning in life is fundamental to mental and physical well-being. By fostering meaning through work, relationships, mindfulness, and personal development, individuals can enhance their personal, occupational, and professional performance. In turn, this creates a virtuous cycle of well-being, productivity, and success, leading to a more fulfilling and impactful life.

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