



# Building Our Capacity for Better Health

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**W**hat does it mean to maximize our personal capacity? Building capacity means that we increase the probability that we will successfully navigate the challenges we face. It means that we are more likely to achieve our goals and will probably feel more satisfied with our lives.

Before we proceed, two things must be in order: attitude and motivation. We must believe that increasing our capacity is important and worth the effort; and, we must have a personal motive for doing the work and staying committed to achieving results. Without both, we are likely to never start the process or to give up long before we reach our destination.

## How do we build capacity?

Each of us starts at a different level. Our combined capacity for each aspect of health (physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual, financial) makes our personal quotient unique. However, no matter where we start, we have the ability to increase our capacity for overall well-being. For example, following an injury we may have a limited capacity for movement but we know that with the appropriate supports and exercises we can increase that range of motion. To succeed we must have access to knowledge, the right resources and the motivation to do what is required.

To build capacity we do things that put us in a better position to deal with the everyday, and the exceptional, circumstances that we face in our lives. We plan and prepare for things that we would not otherwise experience. More specifically, we encourage awareness, increase knowledge, enhance skills and collect resources. We develop an action plan and routinely evaluate our progress and revise our efforts in meeting our ongoing needs.

## What needs should we address?

There are many situations in our personal and professional lives for which the needs are quite predictable. Look at what we already know about our needs. We know that during report card time we will focus much of our time and energy on school work. We

know that during flu season if our immune system is already compromised by fatigue, we are in for a prolonged recovery from any illness we contract. We know that we interact with others who have values and behaviours contrary to our own; this conflict will challenge our commitment and tolerance. The actions required to meet these needs are somewhat clear: protect our use of time; get extra rest; learn and practice positive interpersonal skills; and stay true to our personal beliefs.

We have also experienced the consequences of not being prepared and of functioning at less than optimal capacity. Facing unexpected situations, like a challenge to our integrity from a surprising source, will cause mental and physical distress which could leave us temporarily incapacitated. If we are already handling other significant stressors, this impact will be even greater and could last much longer. By definition, these challenges are unexpected and, maybe even, unpredictable. This increases the rationale for ensuring that we seek and maintain a level of health which puts us in the best physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and financial health to face the routine and the unexpected.

## How do we increase our capacity for really living?

To live with zest and enthusiasm takes more than wishful thinking! It requires personal insight and concrete action. It is when we build supports into our daily lives that we develop increased capacity to fully experience life and withstand the inherent negativity which dwells in our surroundings. To really live, not just survive or exist, we need to participate in the world around us. Beginning with our inner needs and progressing to environmental supports, we must:

- understand and prepare for personal essentials such as solitude, reflection, self-awareness, social connection, space, quiet, activity, sleep, emotional balance...
- These things give us the necessary foundations from which to build meaningful lives and reciprocal relationships.
- understand and improve relationships with family

and friends. Take the time to share and enhance the quality and value of those relationships. Through interactions with others, we improve our well-being and are able to contribute to the lives of others. Beside the immediate value, we are also collecting resources and building our personal reserves.

- incorporate hobbies or activities that bring enjoyment and offer the opportunity for learning. These enhance our current health status, allow us to continue to grow and add to our future capacity.
- develop skills that enhance personal performance and quality of life such as: time mastery; communications; relaxation; goal setting; priority sensitivity; conflict control; and, decision-making. This is particularly important in areas where we notice that we are lacking.

Including psychological processes such as: attitude adjustment and cognitive restructuring can also be extremely beneficial in learning to eliminate negativity and boost confidence in creating a positive personal climate.

### **How do we increase our capacity for healthy working?**

To work with pleasure and leave school with joy necessitates that first we are satisfied with our job responsibilities and performance, our work environment and our work relationships.

- responsibilities and performance ... we accept a contract which brings with it a variety of defined and undefined responsibilities. How we perform these duties depends on our qualifications, desire and current capacity. Assuming that our qualifications are matched to the position we accept and that we have a desire to do our best, how then do we ensure that we perform to our potential? This has an easy answer. We have to be in the best health that we can obtain! If any health component is out of sync, we cannot achieve maximum work potential. Explore each area of health and make the necessary adjustments! Easy to say – difficult to follow though. Keep in mind that performing to our potential does not entail meeting the unreasonable demands of others.

- work environment ... Exposure to unhealthy facilities, excessive workload and inadequate materials are often beyond our direct control but we still need an avenue to voice our related health issues. Whether the approach is through the Occupational Health and Safety Committee, the NLTA representative or a Board review process, there are ways to make concerns known. We must never quit trying to improve the environment and conditions under which we work. Although many aspects of our work environment affect our health, the most profound tends

to be the work atmosphere and culture. Each of us contributes to our work atmosphere. Whether it is positive or negative depends on us! If we absorb and transfer negative energy, we tend to infect others with the same feelings. However, if we bring a positive outlook and remain solution-focused, even in the most resistant environment, we will encourage others to share in that hope and effort to improve.

- work relationships with administrators, colleagues, parents and students... These can be a genuine source of joy or distress! Many of the skills we use to build personal relationships are needed in the workplace. To further boost the likelihood of successfully managing work relationships, add the following: a clear understanding of roles, expectations, personalities, unique characteristics and needs, hierarchical structure and political influence; the decision to practice and uphold respectful workplace guidelines; and, an acceptance that everyone in the mixture doesn't have to be a friend! It is also necessary to know what to do when relationships just aren't working. Despite the best efforts, if relationships are detrimental to health, it is time to seek an outside perspective and additional supports. That could include direction and assistance in changing the situation or decisions on changing our personal skills.

Knowing what to expect and being prepared for obstacles means that we can often find an alternate route, or we have the resources to make it past an unexpected barrier. Being prepared is a good motto to adopt, as long as we don't take it to the extreme!

### **Where do we stop?**

When playing Scrabble, we might keep that "U" or "blank" tile just in case we end up with the "Q". Well, this strategy becomes dysfunctional if we also hold those extra vowels to spell "AQUA" or "QUIET". Sure it is a bonus, if we get the "Q" but otherwise, we have spent the game playing with only four letters! Let's be realistic. Where do we draw the line with using our current resources to prepare for a potential future need? In real life, there are some critical preparations we should consider. These can be covered by regularly monitoring and assessing our health status, then incorporating necessary 'upgrades'. We can benefit in our daily living, while also being reasonably prepared for whatever comes our way.

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