

## Chapter 16

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# Compassion Satisfaction: Reconnecting With the Rewards of the Work

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Before starting your workday, take a moment to literally stop in your tracks and ask yourself, “Why am I doing what I am doing?” After you hear your answer, remind yourself, gently, that you are making a choice to do this work. Take a deep breath; breathe in both the responsibility and the freedom in this acknowledgement.

—**Laura van Dernoot Lipsky**  
*Trauma Stewardship*, p. 150

In this chapter you are invited to:

- Reflect on the rewards of your work

In the rush of our days at the office and the many demands of our home lives, we sometimes lose touch with the reasons for which we do this work. We may no longer remember why we chose this field in the first place. In spite of its many challenges, the fact remains that working in the helping field can be a deeply rewarding experience. Many of us knew that this was what we wanted to do from an early age and cannot imagine doing any other type of work. In order to retain this love for our profession, we need to experience compassion satisfaction on a regular basis. As discussed earlier, compassion satisfaction refers to “the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Transforming the Pain*, Saakvitne and Pearlman invite readers to explore the rewards of their work. One of the ways to do this is to reflect on what sustains us and keeps us in the field. During some of our compassion fatigue workshops, we end the day seated in a circle. Each person is asked to name one aspect of their work that they find rewarding. When people are deep in the red

zone, this can be a challenging exercise and some participants will candidly say, "I'm grateful for the paycheck, for my benefits, but I can't think of anything else at the moment." Many others get a smile on their face and speak of the tremendous rewards of watching clients heal, of small victories that can have a lasting impact, of the honor they feel at being trusted with such private stories. Some helpers will mention that what is most rewarding for them is making a difference, helping others, and feeling useful. It is a deeply moving exercise that helps us reconnect with our reasons for staying in this field, after spending a day exploring its challenges.

Now it's your turn. What are the rewards of your work? What keeps you going? Please complete the following exercise.

## Reflection and Writing Exercise<sup>2</sup>

- What made me choose this line of work?
- What keeps me going and sustains me as a person and a professional, given the challenges of my work? (Thank you to Dr. Richard Harrison for this question.)
- What concrete strategies have made a significant difference for me and have allowed me to remain healthy and well in this career?
  - Strategies at work:
  - Strategies at home:
- If I were to do it all over again, is there anything I would do differently?
- Reflecting on successes, how have I made a difference to others?
- Can I think of a particular client whose story has profoundly touched me in a positive way? What was it about that client's story that moved me?
- Is this still the right job for me?

### **MAKING IT PERSONAL HOMEWORK: INTERVIEW ON THE REWARDS OF THE WORK**

Can you think of someone you know, in your field, whom you see as a particularly resilient person? Your homework is to invite this person out for coffee, or ask if you can come to their workplace, and interview them about the rewards of their work. You can use the questions above as a guide.

If you are meeting regularly with a peer support group, share your findings with your colleagues at your next meeting.

## Endnotes

1. Stamm, B.H. (Ed.). (1999). *Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators* (2nd Edition). Lutherville, MD: Sidran Press, p. 12.
2. Some questions adapted from Saakvitne, K.W., Pearlman, L.A., & the staff of the Traumatic Stress Institute (1996). *Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization*. New York: W.W. Norton, pp. 81–85.