

## **Priority-driven wellness: How software engineering and a fish market can help to minimize burnout**

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**Background:** Gandhi once stated, “Action expresses priorities”. Given physician suicide has reached epidemic proportions, this may suggest that these physicians arrived at a point where the notion to end their life exceeded everything else in it. Somehow along the way we have distorted our priorities, lost sight of why we entered into medicine in the first place, and undermined what matters most in life. When software engineers are presented with a defect, or “bug”, their approach is to assign a *priority* and *severity* such that tasks most integral to proper system functioning are addressed immediately and with the utmost attention, while lower priority defects with less critical consequences are addressed at a later time. Thus, we can extrapolate from this methodology to ensure that we devote sufficient time to the highest priority items with the highest severity of consequences if neglected. To help accomplish this, we can draw from the Fish! Philosophy. After observing the energy and collegiality of the Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle, WA, John Christensen was motivated to share the fishmonger’s philosophy with the world. He summarized this into four principles: (i) play, (ii) be there, (iii) make their day, and (iv) choose your attitude. These principles have been taught and practiced throughout the world with several Fortune 500 companies adopting the Fish! Philosophy as their vehicle to engage employees and improve workplace morale.

**Objectives:** By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to (1) apply the process of assigning priority/severity to their life items, (2) list the four Fish! principles and state the meaning of each, and (3) describe how they can implement the Fish! Philosophy to maximize meaningful time spent with every priority item.

**Description:** We will begin this workshop by forming four groups, and each group will start by generating 8-12 work-related items in either clinical (group 1), educational (group 2), academic/research (group 3), or administrative (group 4) aspects of their careers in medicine (6 minutes). Next, there will be a brief introductory discussion describing defect tracking methodology and assigning priority and severity (5 minutes). To practice this methodology, the groups will take their 8-12 work items and assign them a priority and severity (7 minutes). Each group will present their reasoning and we will all discuss the nuances as to how we go about making the priority/severity determination as well as the issues that can make this determination difficult (12 minutes). This exercise will provide the participants the opportunity to apply priority/severity assigning to real-life items so that they will be able to utilize this methodology in other aspects of their lives. Next, there will be an introductory presentation describing the Fish! Philosophy (5 minutes). The ability to implement this philosophy creates an infectious positive energy and can facilitate maximizing time spent with each priority item. To practice implementing the Fish! Philosophy each group will be assigned one of the four principles. The groups will be asked to list all of the reasons why their assigned Fish! principle could *not be implemented* in the workplace. Each group will be asked to share these obstacles to implementation (10 minutes). By addressing all of the barriers to implementation, we can then explore ideas for overcoming these barriers. To accomplish this, the groups will pass their “principle” to the next group. The groups will then refute the barriers and describe mechanisms by which the principle can in fact be implemented in the workplace. Again, each group will share their rebuttals and ideas for successful implementation (10 minutes). The last portion will allow for questions and/or open discussion (5 minutes).

**Evaluation:** Feedback will be actively solicited from participants regarding priority/severity assignment and the utilization of the Fish! Philosophy after each respective exercise. Given there are no right or wrong answers within these exercises, participants will undoubtedly have differing opinions. Hence, spirited discussion between participants will illustrate that they are engaged and actively thinking through the processes of applying priority/severity and utilizing Fish! principles. To gather quantitative feedback for workshop efficacy/improvement, a completely de-identified, 5-question, Likert-scaled survey will be distributed to participants at the end of the workshop.

**Reflection:** This workshop will help build a culture of wellness by generating a grassroots mindset that not only permits, but also encourages physicians to have life items that can be a higher priority than their work/job/career. Practicing the Fish! Philosophy can not only help energize the workplace, but by practicing these principles within our personal lives we may also find that we are more highly engaged in all of our life items (i.e. faith, family, friends, hobbies, etc.). All participants will be encouraged to share the idea of prioritizing life items and utilizing the Fish! Philosophy with their colleagues and trainees. More formal resources regarding the Fish! Philosophy can be found on their website: [www.fishphilosophy.com](http://www.fishphilosophy.com).