

# DEVELOPING A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR CORRECTIONAL NURSES



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# American Correctional Nurses Association

Educational credit for this one-hour learning activity is provided by the Florida Nurses Association which is an accredited provider of continuing nursing education of the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation

- To receive contact hours nurses must attend 100% of this CNE activity and complete the ten-question post-test
- Neither the speaker nor members of the planning committee have any conflicts of interest related to the content of this activity

The mission of the American Correctional Nurses Association is to advocate for correctional nurses and the patients for whom they care. The American Correctional Nurses Association will be the voice of correctional nursing.



# **American Correctional Nurses Association**

## **Learning Outcome:**

At the end of the session, the participant will be able to:

- Identify healthy work environment benefits
- Identify components for nurse retention
- List factors influencing a positive work environment
- Provide examples of staff recognition

# HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT BENEFITS

- Morale
- Satisfaction
- Retention
- Turnover costs
- Labor costs
- Patient satisfaction
- Quality of care

# Healthy Work Environments Improve Patient Care

- Supportive work environments are positively correlated with quality patient care (Aiken, Clarke, & Sloane, 2002; Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Lake, & Cheney, 2008; Bogaert, Clarke, Vermeyen, Meulemans, & Heyning, 2009; Laschinger, Shamian, & Thomson, 2001; Nantsupawat, et al., 2011; Patrician, Shang, & Lake, 2010)
- Supportive work environments are negatively associated with burnout (Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Lake, & Cheney, 2008; Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Sochalski, & Silber, 2002; Nantsupawat, et al., 2011; )
- Nurses in hospitals with lower numbers of nursing staff more often report nursing care quality as fair or poor (Aiken, Clarke, & Sloane, 2002; Aiken, Clarke, Sloane, Lake, & Cheney, 2008; Nantsupawat, et al., 2011; Solchalski, 2004)

# HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

- Managerial support of nursing care/professional practice (Aiken et al., 2011)
- Physician-nurse collaboration (Aiken et al., 2011)
- Nurse participation in decision-making and organizational priorities on quality of care (Aiken et al., 2011)
- Nurse autonomy in decision making, participation in unit and organizational self-governance, and participative management (Gormley & Kennerly, 2011; Heede et al., 2013; O'Brien-Pallas et al., 2010; Sawartzky & Enns, 2012; Sawartzky et al., 2015)

# HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

- Nurse competence (Sawartzky et al., 2015)
- Teamwork, individually targeted strategies including mentoring, leadership interest and in-depth orientation (Lartey et al., 2014)
- Engaging staff, high expectations with high support, provide data to unit-level staff to measure improvements, professional development of staff and managers (Kooker & Kamikawa, 2009)

# Standards for a Healthy Work Environment

- Communication
  - Skilled (AACN, 2025)
  - Open (ANA, 2024)
  - Effective (Mabona et al., 2022)
- Collaboration
  - True (AACN, 2025)
  - Teamwork (ANA, 2024, Mabona et al., 2022)
- Effective Decision Making (AACN, 2024)
- Appropriate Staffing (AACN, 2025; ANA, 2024)



# Standards for a Healthy Work Environment

- Recognition
  - Meaningful (AACN, 2025)
  - Recognize Value (ANA, 2024)
- Leadership
  - Authentic (AACN, 2025)
  - Effective (Mabona et al., 2022)
- Professional Autonomy (Mabona et al., 2022)

# HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR CORRECTIONAL NURSES

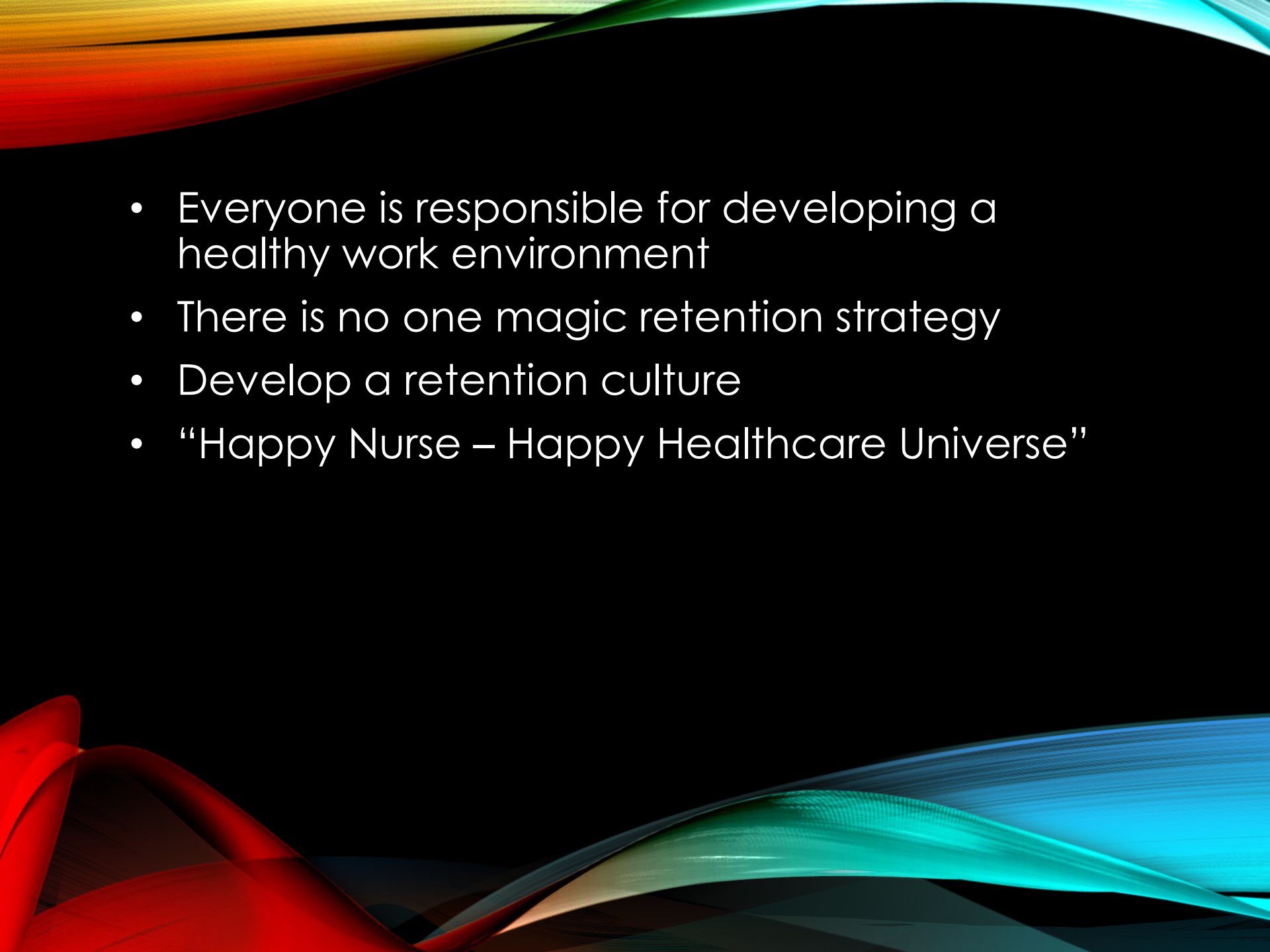
## Factors

- Staffing and Workload
- Ethical and Professional Challenges
  - Equity and Health Equity (ACNA, 2021)
- Physical Safety
  - Duty to Self-Care During a Crisis (ACNA, 2021)
- Mental Well-being
  - Duty to Self-Care During a Crisis (ACNA, 2021)

## Strategies

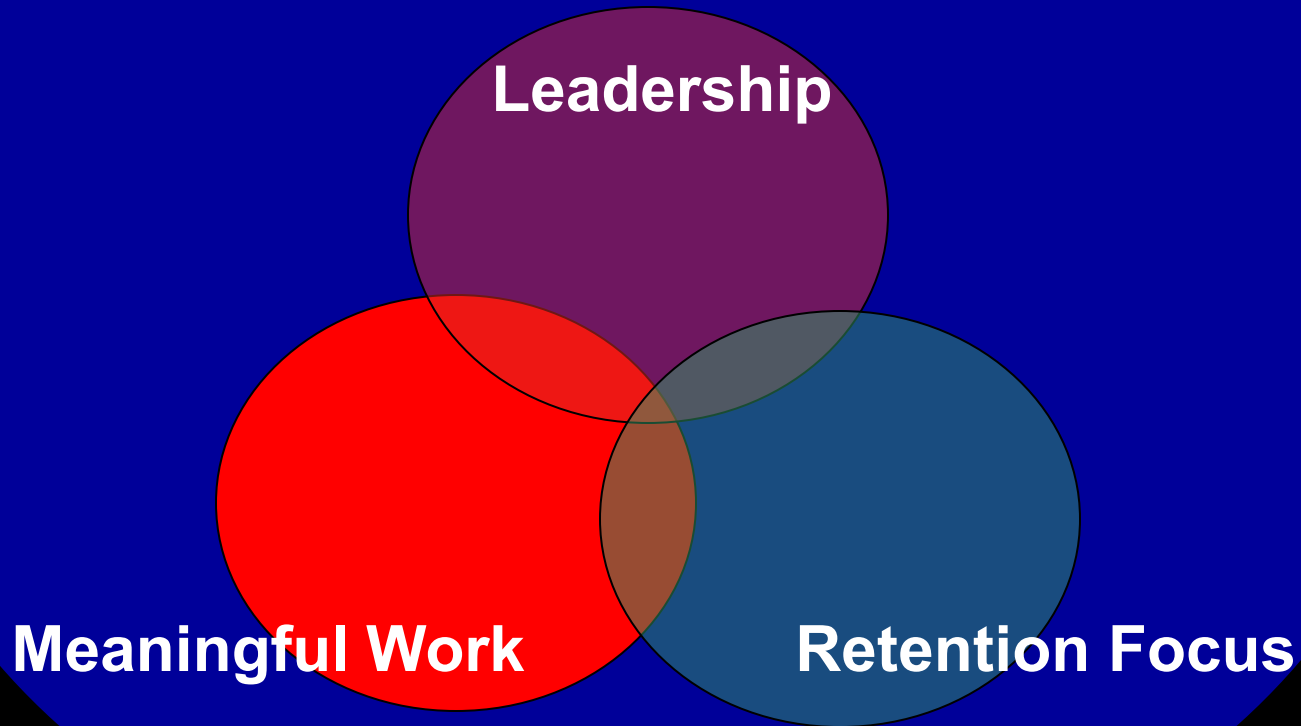
- Leadership Support
- Staff Input & Feedback
- Training and Education
- Work-Life Balance
- Support Systems

(AI Overview, 2025)

- 
- Everyone is responsible for developing a healthy work environment
  - There is no one magic retention strategy
  - Develop a retention culture
  - “Happy Nurse – Happy Healthcare Universe”

# DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF RETENTION

## Nurse Workplace



# MEANINGFUL WORK

- Employee directed care
- Autonomy to make decisions
- Appropriate workload and patient interactions
- Employee safety
- Variety of work
- Work-life balance
- Valued as colleague – as part of the team
- Resources and support
- Opportunity to learn
- Feedback
- Understanding significant contributions



# LEADERSHIP

- Champion change and are open to new ideas
- Inspire a shared vision of organizational direction
- Motivate and recognize contributions
- Develop others
- Model behavior that reflects organization values and staff needs
- Incorporate recruitment, retention, and workforce planning perspective



# RETENTION FOCUS

- Say “Thank you” for a job well done
- Reinforce desired behaviors
- Create an emphasis and focus on retention
- Build self-esteem
- Celebrate success
- Enhance camaraderie and teamwork
- Mentor! Coach! Groom!



RETENTION IS  
THE BEST  
RECRUITMENT  
STRATEGY!

Dennis Sherrod





# POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

- Interact in a positive manner
- Verbally encourage colleagues
- Send emails to new colleagues
- Email messages from an inspirational book every few weeks
- Post motivational and inspirational quotes on your unit




# POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS


- Look for positive behaviors and email or talk to them as soon as possible to acknowledge and encourage the behavior
- Praise five (5) a day! Set a goal to identify and acknowledge five positive behaviors each day
- Correct behaviors that need improvement, but encourage at the same time

# POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

- End staff meeting by sharing a recent positive unit experience
- Be creative
  - Peppermint patties - “You’re worth a mint!”
  - Almond Joy – “A joy to work with”
  - Hershey’s Treasures – “Positive attitude is a national treasure”

- 
- Lead by example. Be a unit leader and groom other staff to be leaders
  - Provide a “we can do” attitude with decisions and difficult issues affecting the unit
  - Create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect
  - Communicate all information with all team members all of the time


## EMPOWER COLLEAGUES

- 
- Establish a council for patient care excellence that meets monthly to address patient satisfaction issues
  - Establish a unit retention council to discuss and develop strategies for addressing workflow issues and staff retention
  - Establish a cost-cutter committee to look at ways to better utilize resources


## NURSE-DIRECTED CARE

- Establish a communication committee to identify ways to improve communications and relationships
- Establish a scheduling committee to coordinate planning of work, holiday, and vacation schedules in a fair and equitable manner
- Encourage team members to provide input on decisions

## NURSE-DIRECTED CARE


- 
- Delegate jobs or projects according to a person's interests, skills, and talents
  - Participate in hiring interviews

NURSE-DIRECTED CARE

- 
- Ensure flexible scheduling – be willing to negotiate a win-win
  - Make the scheduling request book visible and available on each unit. Encourage staff to make written schedule requests months in advance

**FLEXIBILITY**



- 
- Participate in in-service monthly. Provide input to make sure they meet your development needs
  - Attend seminars outside your organization and ask to present to other staff
  - Self-assess competencies and attend needed in-services


MEANINGFUL CE

- 
- Provide team-building seminars
  - Offer workshops that develop team spirit and communication
  - Hold unit retreats to address evolving issues and provide strategic planning


MEANINGFUL CE

- 
- Begin retention efforts during the hiring process – if significant other needs employment ask human resources about openings
  - Display “Welcome!” banners
  - Address social needs in orientation process. Ask new staff to join you for lunch. Assist to develop social links in the community


## STAFF INTEGRATION

- 
- Use the Platinum Rule
  - Be visible
  - Call in when you're off, to see how things are going
  - Listen to colleagues' concerns
  - Cook for staff or order food for meetings


VALUE YOUR COLLEAGUES

- 
- Leave surprises in staff mailboxes every few weeks (randomly), such as a small bottle of scented lotion or another useful gift
  - Place a suggestion box on your unit and discuss issues and resolutions at staff meetings
  - Follow up on suggestions

VALUE YOUR COLLEAGUES

- 
- Schedule an “agenda-less” meeting twice a year with the topic, “What’s on your mind?”
  - Hold colleagues accountable and discuss issues as needed
  - Address issues with physicians and ancillary departments in a timely manner

VALUE YOUR COLLEAGUES


- 
- Hold a monthly birthday party with cake and a banner highlighting the names of all staff celebrating birthdays that month. Provide cards with signatures and personalized messages from staff
  - Display a birthday bulletin board and include staff pictures and birth date, but not the year
  - Hold a baby-picture-guessing contest

GET PERSONAL

- 
- Take impromptu photos of staff and post on the unit. When you take them down, keep them in a photo album
  - Establish a “Mom knows best” group to meet quarterly and invite new mothers back during maternity leave
  - Hold a covered dish lunch for staff leaving the unit (be supportive and stay in touch – they may just want to come back)

GET PERSONAL




- 
- Recognize staff for a job well done in front of their peers daily. Do not ask them to speak in front of a group
  - Send thank-you notes
  - Suggest to physicians that they compliment staff (share them your “praise 5 a day rule”)
  - Hand out movie tickets for two when someone needs encouragement and include a note that says: “Look at the big picture and know you are appreciated!”


# RECOGNITION

- Display banners with staff members' years of service. Provide a tally to demonstrate the total years of service on your unit
- Order pizza with a "Thanks for all you do!" when things are hectic and not hectic on your unit
- Buy candy, doughnuts, or healthy treats and place them around the unit with a thank-you note


# RECOGNITION

- 
- Write notes randomly to three to five staff members every couple of weeks thanking them for all they do
  - Point out what a great team your unit members make
  - Send an email complimenting staff on great patient satisfaction scores and suggest areas of improvement


# RECOGNITION

- 
- Display an “Employee of the Month” bulletin board
  - Nominate and submit applications to recognize staff through your formal recognition committee
  - Ask colleagues to post cards they received that name a specific accomplishment
  - Place a journal on your unit dedicated to staff members. Ask them to record when coworkers do something above and beyond expectations

## RECOGNITION

- 
- Share and display unit patient satisfaction scores, compliments, notes, and letters from families. Provide a small gift
  - Begin staff meetings with recognition of staff members mentioned on patient satisfaction surveys or thank-you cards from patients
  - Recognize staff with perfect attendance on a quarterly basis

## RECOGNITION

- 
- Celebrate Nurses Week, National Heart Week, and other healthcare holidays with heart-healthy food for all shifts
  - Encourage staff to email about co-worker achievements
  - Provide a recognition breakfast, lunch, and dinner for NAs, LPNs, and RNs advancing their skills to higher certification and/or licensed levels

# RECOGNITION


- Prominently place plaques on your unit with names of all staff who have certification(s)
- Provide a quarterly unit “Spirit Award.” Each recipient should be eligible for an annual prize
- Develop an “Extra Mile Award” for extraordinary accomplishments outside your staff’s normal job requirements
- Have stickers made that say: “I made a difference today!” and make them available to team members to hand out to colleagues when they go above and beyond

## RECOGNITION


- Create a “Pass-Along Award”, a trophy or stuffed animal with special meaning. Maybe a “Stuffed Monkey Award” to recognize quality performance with a theme of “No monkey business here!”
- Give staff members their own day. Recognize achievements or actions by declaring a work date as their day. Announce “Next Tuesday is Chris Smith Day” and ask staff to contribute to the celebration
- Recognize good performers by addressing problems of poor performers

# RECOGNITION

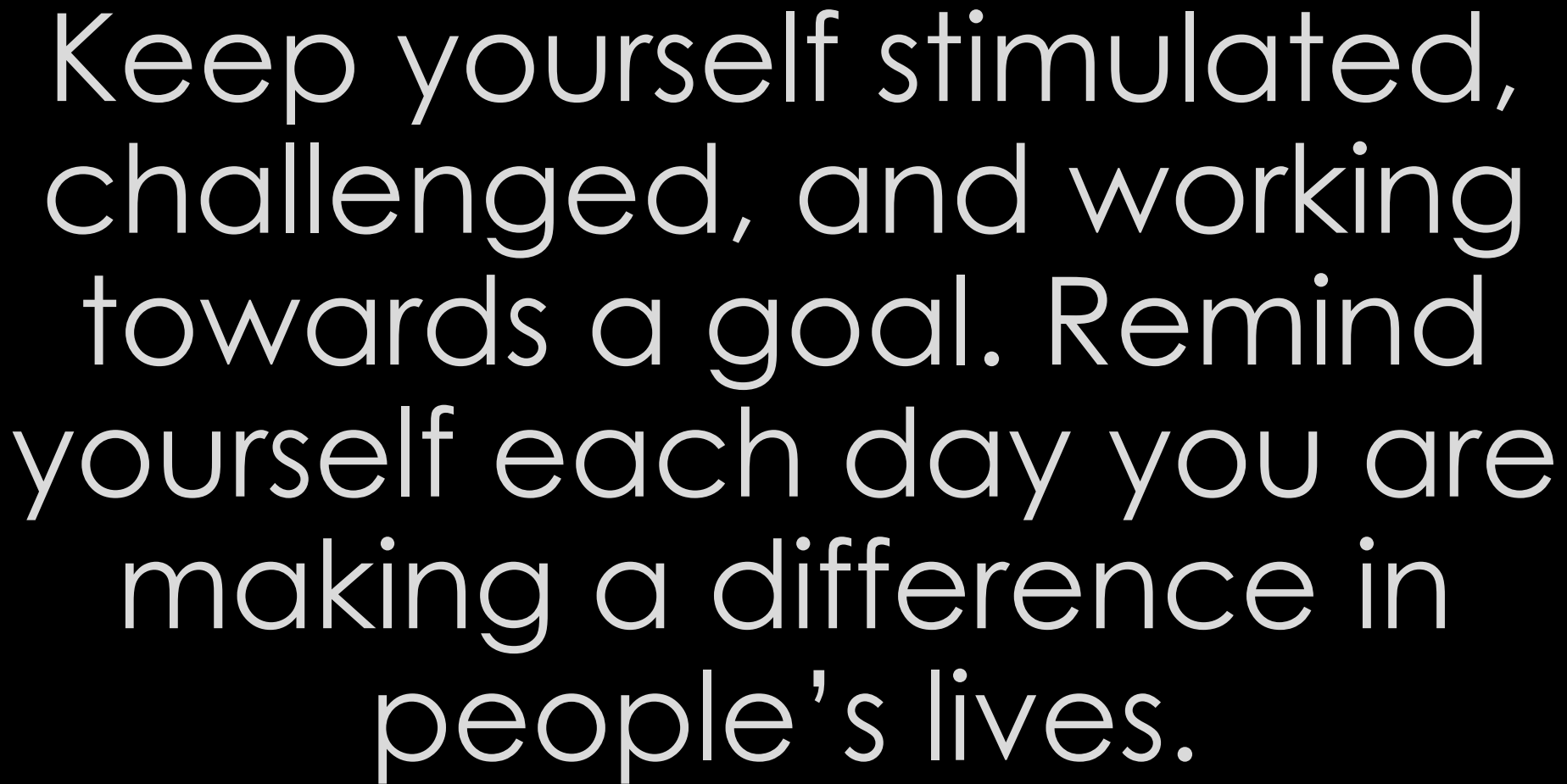


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- Celebrate holidays in a meaningful way
  - Establish a Celebration Council to plan parties and activities – recognize diversity
  - Plan some silly things, such as blowing bubbles or asking staff to wear a “Policy Police” badge prior to accreditation or quality review visits
  - Schedule “fun time” at each staff meeting

# CELEBRATE

- 
- Establish a walking trail and encourage healthy activities
  - Plan physical activities outside of work, such as bowling or miniature golf
  - Have a picnic or eat out together, for special occasions
  - Plan a Super Bowl Party
  - Schedule quarterly social gatherings

CELEBRATE



Keep yourself stimulated,  
challenged, and working  
towards a goal. Remind  
yourself each day you are  
making a difference in  
people's lives.

Dennis Sherrod

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