

Thrivecast Episode 41: Creating Your Personal Mission Statement

Trish Kritek: Welcome to another episode of the University of Washington's Thrivecast, the podcast designed to help school of medicine faculty thrive. I'm Trish Kritek. And today I'm excited to welcome back Dr. Kemi Doll. Dr. Doll is an associate professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She's a gynecologic oncologist and a health sciences researcher who studies disparities in the care of patients with endometrial cancer.

She's also a career coach, and I've invited her here today wearing that hat because I wanted to talk about this idea of personal mission statements. So first of all, let me say, Kemi, thanks for coming back and joining us in the conversation.

Kemi Doll: Thank you for having me. I love these talks.

Trish Kritek: So I want to talk about personal mission statement.

So I think the first question is. What do you mean by a personal mission statement? Can you tell me a little bit about what is a personal mission statement?

Kemi Doll: Great question. I think this goes by a lot of different terms. I'll just say, [00:01:00] to me, a personal mission statement is a declaration to yourself and to some degree to others about what the goal of your career is and what impact you want it to have.

Trish Kritek: I like that; it's concise. It's focused. This is kind of what the impact is that you want to have in the work world, career part of your life. Does it also include what's going on not at work in your personal mission statement?

Kemi Doll: So, I think if it's a career personal mission statement, then it's related to your career.

I think there are ways in which people integrate things not related and that they put into their personal state mission statement, how they want to accomplish their goal. So they might have as part of their personal mission statement, they might have phrases around, with balance, you know, I want to do these things with balance in pursuing other areas of my life, or, you know, I [00:02:00] want to do these things alongside other pursuits.

So they might have something in there about that. I don't think that's required to have balance, but you can put it in there if it's important for you for it to be stated as part of that.

Trish Kritek: I appreciate that. I like that. So it's clear what the, where the focus is and you might as you craft it say, and this is how it fits into this bigger picture in some ways.

So. Let me ask a kind of step back and say, why do you recommend to folks that you're working with in mentoring or coaching or guidance? Why do you recommend the practice of crafting a personal mission statement?

Kemi Doll: I think they're especially important for people in academic medicine. Especially because we've gone through a training process where we were given what the mission was.

So first in college, your mission was to get into medical school. And so you did all these things to get into medical school. Then you get into medical school and your mission is to graduate and to match [00:03:00] into whatever specialty. So your mission at that point might become, "I want to match into orthopedic surgery."

So then once you get into training for whatever your specialty is, medicine, surgery, psychiatry, whatever your mission becomes completing training. Right? And so, in that sense, I think we should acknowledge that either whether this we think this is the same or different than other fields. It doesn't really matter, but you've probably gone through a minimum of eight years, a minimum of eight, but oftentimes more like 12 to 15 years where your mission was externally imposed happily. Like, it's this is not this is what we choose. Right? But your mission was basically given to you. So it's we should kind of. It's okay to realize that coming out of over a decade of that, you might want to take some time to reestablish.

What do you want to do within said career? Because once we're done with all the training is when all the creativity can open up in terms of [00:04:00] what you do in academic medicine and what kind of impact that you want to have. And I think without having that, it's really easy to kind of do a lot of different things that don't really add up to anything meaningful for you.

And maybe the most important thing, Trish is because I think academic medicine is such an amazing career path because of the potential impact you can have in lots of different ways. And so I think without a personal mission statement, you can miss out on that potential just because there's no intention and direction to your actions, both short and long term.

Trish Kritek: There's so much of that that I really love because I spend a lot of my time talking to people when they get to this point where they're done with their training and now they're entering this next phase. And all of a sudden, it isn't written for you what you're supposed to do.

Kemi Doll: Exactly.

Trish Kritek: And you're like, whoa, this is- maybe great, but also super disconcerting. And so I think this helps give some structure to what feels super unstructured all of a sudden to many, many [00:05:00] people. And I can see how that's very beneficial. And I really like the other part. Of what you said as well, which is I agree. There's so many opportunities in academic medicine, and there's so many different pathways within academic medicine.

And at least personally, there were many of them that were attractive to me, and I couldn't pursue all of them. Correct? And so having some pause to say, okay, where do I see this

going and where do I want to get to? I will add that, and I'm curious your thoughts, it seems to me that my personal mission statement has evolved in the different phases.

Kemi Doll: Totally. Yes, absolutely. I do think it evolves and I think I think you start to notice when it evolves because you might be engaged in activities or projects or et cetera. And you realize you reached a goal. You're like, oh, but I did what I set out to do. And so there's a point to step back and say, well, what is next for me, or how is this expanded or deepened or even become more [00:06:00] specific. So there's still a lot of space to learn about yourself and what you want. I think sometimes people feel like, well, I can't decide. I can't choose it. I can't write this yet because I have to, like, do more explanation exploration, and I do like to gently remind them.

It's been over a decade. Like, we can have some direction. You've been rotating through things for a long time, but I love that point, though, that, like, it's not a static thing. And I actually think it's worth revisiting at least once a year, even if you're just reading through it to say, does this is this still quite right?

Are there any words that need to be adjusted here?

Trish Kritek: I appreciate that. And I think as folks are listening, that means this is relevant. If you're early in your career, if you're mid midway through your career or later in your career, 100 percent all valuable. So let's get a little bit more nitty gritty. So when you're talking with somebody about writing their personal mission statement, where do you start?

Where do you, where do you suggest folks start? How do you kind of dig into that? And I realize we can't go through the [00:07:00] whole process of writing a personal mission statement in this conversation, but maybe you can give some kind of starting points.

Kemi Doll: Yeah, I think people kind of fall into two camps about what the first thing that kind of sparks them.

So I'll give you both of them. Maybe people listening can choose what makes more sense to them. For some people, it's about actually going back to before they really got started. Maybe like back to what was compelling to them about coming to medical school, maybe back to like the initial decisions that they made around what kind of specialty, what kind of training they wanted to pursue.

And it's going back to that place and asking, like, why, like, why did you why medicine? Why this specialty? Like, there are a lot of people who could do this. Why you why is it you who needs to do this? What are you trying to do? So it's really trying to get back to that early sense of intention and goal and dreams to some extent because I only say that because again, the natural process of [00:08:00] training can cloud a lot of that because you have things to learn.

You have things to do and that's normal. So we sometimes we have to get back to that place to figure out. Oh, well, I really am interested in X within this field. Okay. On the other side, some people, so some people are very motivated by that and they can write their personal statement, their personal mission statement from that.

For other people, it's more about the future. It's more about saying, okay, you've arrived here. Yeah, you're here. And that that is like, wherever you are, your first day on faculty, you just got promoted, like, wherever that is, when you think of your ideal week, you know, in 5 years in 10 years, this isn't like, if you just literally think about what you're doing.

What are you doing with your time and what impact is it having and sometimes I even go as specific as like, what are you doing Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, what are those different activities and why are you doing them? And what impact are they having? That can help people clue into like, oh, this [00:09:00] is this is what I'm trying to create.

This is the future that I'm trying to get to. And then we can use that to work back to like, okay, so let's craft what that mission looks like.

Trish Kritek: That's really interesting. I've never done that second model and I'll just share personally for a second. I think the first model for me personally. Is what I use when I think about doing this and, and I remember very clearly being early career after training at and in back east and a place that was really designed around the path to success as being a physician scientist and somewhere in my heart, I knew that what drew me was the part about being a doctor and being an educator and having to pause and say, who is it that I think I am? When I started this, and when I really started in this pathway, it was that I wanted to be an educator as a priority in addition to being an outstanding clinician.

And that helped me write my personal mission statement, which was [00:10:00] different than what other people would have written for me. So that kind of going back to your roots, or what drove you in this path, or what you kind of had for a vision at the very beginning was super helpful for me personally, particularly when my personal mission statement seem to deviate from what I thought that maybe other people thought my personal mission statement should be.

I like the idea of the other model. I've just never tried that or heard of it. So the first is kind of where I would be anchored as what I've used.

Kemi Doll: I, you know, people are different and I think sometimes because people have had wild departures from who they were when they began or what they thought they wanted to do, sometimes the future one feels more. Accessible to them is what I found and especially some of my, like, mid and senior career faculty that, like, it just it just feels more present for them to be like, okay, this is the mission. I'm trying to work towards, but both are, I think both are equally important.

And I will share that. I do. I do land more on the side for myself of early, like, the [00:11:00] early on intentions and that is because what you said about your environment is that we are, we are very vulnerable appropriately to the very strong messaging that comes through our training years and even into early faculty about what is success.

Like, what success is defined as what it should look like, what you should be doing. And what I like to remind people of is those are really strong and I get it, but also there was some reason that you decided to embark on this forever long training path to begin with. And maybe we should think that that is also equally as strong because it got you this.

I mean, this is not an easy journey. And so we can tap into that again.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I appreciate it. I also often have this conversation with people when they - it might be as deciding that what they primarily want to do is take care of patients. And at the end of the day, I think the vast majority of us who are physicians now went to medical school with the intent of becoming somebody who takes care of patients.

And I think that's a [00:12:00] noble goal and sometimes we lose track of that. So anyway, that all resonates. I want to go back to the day by day thing because I said, that's not how I naturally would do it. So let's just talk about that for a minute more. So do you, would you recommend people actually write down, like, here's how I'd be spending my time, or here's how my Monday would look, or here's how my Tuesday would look.

Is that a, a tangible write it out kind of thing? Is that helpful?

Kemi Doll: Yeah, I mean, I think, first of all, I am very proponent of writing because I think, I think when you put it down on a page, you really see like what you're talking about. And yeah, I really do mean like, what are you, because again, sometimes it's hard for people to access it.

Like, what do you mean? What am I doing in five years? I'm doing what I'm doing now. Like it's so when we can ground it very specifically, like the year is 2030. You know what I mean? You are sometimes I have people think, how old are you going to be? Okay. I am 47 years old. It's the year 2030. You know, maybe my kids are this old.

These are like, think about the other circumstances and then ask yourself, [00:13:00] what am I doing on Monday? What am I doing? And from there, it's really interesting what comes out of like, you know, I would love, I actually would love this setup. Or I would love to be doing this kind of work or be, you know, and so it can just, it can help to find some of those maybe dormant desires sometimes that don't have space to rise to the surface when we're just like closing epic charts.

Trish Kritek: I love that. I'm going to give it a try. So, okay, so this is how we get started. And then how, how does someone know they're on the right track as they're kind of starting to

do this work, moving towards their personal mission statement? Do they start putting words to that? Do they have a vision? Like, how do I know that I'm moving in the right direction?

Kemi Doll: So this is where I go woo woo. But I have to say that first of all, you can feel it. This is why it's important to write it because you start to be like, oh my gosh, this is amazing This actually feels really good. There's this part of you that's like, yes, that is it, that is exactly right. That feels very [00:14:00] inspired very almost like wow, are you sure I get to do this? There's a part of you that gets so inspired and motivated by what you've written. That's part of the way that you know you're on the right track. I say that because again, because of all of our years and because of the environment and the socialization, it's not uncommon to start with what you think it should look like.

Yeah. So, it's like, oh, it has a teaching component. It has a research component. It has this component. It's like, oh, it's like perfectly put together, but I feel nothing.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I get that completely.

Kemi Doll: That's why I emphasize, like, you'll know. Okay, so the second way you know you're on track is that there's probably a little part of you that wonders if you really get to have it.

And I say that because that means that that's what you really want. And we're pretty used to write like, ooh, I don't know if I, you really can have what you really want. And so there's that, there's like that question that can come up. And I think that that's an exciting place too, because creativity can take over.

And then maybe the last part is just, it's something that you're proud of, you know, that you read [00:15:00] and you're like, yeah, that's, that's a noble and exciting thing to do.

Trish Kritek: I like all of those. And I think they're great checkpoints for people. And I appreciate that. Like sometimes the people in our worlds want to be like, well, what box gets checked to say this is right and it's kind of a feeling and I think there's a lot of different aspects of the feeling. Yeah, I think inherent in what we've been talking about is that this is a lot of self work that you're doing this on your own. And I guess as we think about reading it and maybe being like, whoa, am I pushing the boundaries with this?

Which I think the answer would be yes. Hopefully you are pushing the boundaries with this. Yes. When do you share it with others and with whom do you share and how do you figure that part out? Or don't you, is it just for you?

Kemi Doll: I think initially it can be just for you, but it's going to be more powerful if you share it with others.

Cause it's going to make it more tangible out in the world. You have people you can talk about it with, et cetera. So, people, I feel like people run the range. I can tell you in my

experience, I have people who they literally lift it and put it directly into personal statements. It goes into their grant applications.

It's on their bio sketches. It goes into their bios [00:16:00] that appear like - once they get it, they realize this is a perfect distillation of what I'm doing here in my career. If you want to know, and so it's a very public thing. And for others, it is, it is more internal private thing and that's okay. And so who they share it with might end up being people that they are.

They trust to help guide them. In what they're trying to do. So it might be that you're sharing it with a career mentor so that they get real clarity on what you're trying to do. You know, you're sharing it with people who help you make decisions about your career so that they have the right lens to look through because otherwise they really don't know.

Right? They can tell you like, this is best or that's best. But I find that once I understand somebody's personal mission, I am so much better at helping them. Yes. I would, then I can tell them like, well, I mean, maybe this is a great opportunity in general, but what this has nothing to do with your mission.

So like maybe, and then that that's a place where we can start doing some of that nuanced work about how do you choose what to do? How do you choose what order? Like, where do you put your energy? [00:17:00] Well, when we have this, we've got a lot more. Um, structure to make literally make those decisions.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I completely agree with you because I feel like sometimes when I meet with folks who I might be mentoring or advising, I spend a lot of time asking the questions that are trying to help me understand what their personal mission statement is and exactly if they could just hand it to me, I would be happy to accept it.

And there's a risk in that. And there's a risk in and taking it forward. I said, trusted. Yeah. Yeah. I said, trust me. And I think that that's important nuance to the conversation, but I certainly think I can help guide people better when I know where they want to go. So I would encourage people. Where it feels like you can do that to share with those people who are partners with you and thinking about the next steps of your career.

Kemi Doll: Yes. Can I say something else?

Trish Kritek: Yes.

Kemi Doll: The other thing is because where we started with is this is personal. Like, it really needs to seem for you. So there's a way in which you might be really good with it, but it feels so personal that you don't want - it's just not something you would ever [00:18:00] share with a career mentor.

Like, it just feels too personal. Yes, but you can still share the theme, right? You can still get the idea across, which is like, listen, this is what I realized is that I really want to make an

impact on. I don't know how we treat this certain disease through transform transforming how we train trainees to think about it.

Like, you know, you can still communicate the essence of the desire. Even if you're not like, I want to copy paste this into an email and send it to you.

Trish Kritek: Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense because. Yeah. All the work to get to that point of the personal mission statement. You can paraphrase it in a way that helps people understand where you want to go, right?

And it might not feel quite as audacious to people to share it paraphrased, which is fine. I think it's okay. It's fine. Yeah. I have one more question. And this is something I think people struggle with. You craft this personal mission statement. You have clarity about kind of who you want to be and where you're going and you're part of a community, which, [00:19:00] you know, you're a citizen in your division, your department, your research group. Yes, your profession and I do believe that we all have some obligations to support the environments in which we work, and there's value in being part of a community. So how do you reconcile those responsibilities of being part of a community with being true to kind of your personal mission statement?

What's your guidance on that?

Kemi Doll: My first guidance on this is that we are wildly distorted in this tension because what I think what most commonly happens is that people feel like they can have no desires, no preferences, or else they're terrible citizens to the community. And I just do not find that. I think people who decide to be academic medicine.

Like faculty, it's a very deliberate choice. And oftentimes it's a harder choice. And again, this is not about judgment, better or worse. I'm just saying, it's usually a very deliberate choice. Are people who want to be part of [00:20:00] the community, like part of what draws us to academics is being a part of journal clubs and teaching and, and, you know, not doing it alone essentially.

So I just think it's important to emphasize that. We are already bought into that side. That's actually not the problem. The problem isn't you're a terrible department citizen and you don't help anybody and, you know, you don't get it. Our problem is usually we've really underdeveloped trying to figure out what is your, what is that 20 percent uniqueness that you're bringing that will add to our whole that makes the whole group better and that we can think about how to help you you know, develop and strengthen for the rest of us.

So I want to start there because I think we're distorted. Anyway. Number two is like, anything that we do, we're going to be doing it in an environment where there's like, tension and of resources and time and all of that. And if your goal was to make that kind of impact in academic medicine, then part of the work is the creativity of figuring [00:21:00] out how to do that.

And part of that is. Speaking with leaders and thinking about what is the micro environment and macro environment of the institution? Where are the needs are? Where are the flexible points? Where are the rigid points? And then how do I creatively move what I want to move forward? So, I just want to frame it as, like, that's not a problem.

That's part of the journey. And I think anything worth doing has that tension. Anything worth doing has the tension of how do I create while, like, working within a larger system or structure and the system is better for that creativity. So I just like us to, like, embrace the fact that the tension is there.

So that's the 2nd thing. And then the 3rd thing I would say is. Be really clear about what are the needs and what are the expectations of this citizenship of the department. And this maybe I would, um, I mean, okay, I'm going to address it both to, like, people, maybe on the lower power dynamic and the leaders.

Right? So, for the people on the lower [00:22:00] power dynamic, I like to clarify to them. How do you define being a good department citizen? In what ways do you contribute? You know, like, Okay. Instead of just using the words, let's look at the actions. What do you, what do you do to support? How do you support? So let's look at that.

And then what do you feel would be enough for you to feel like you do enough? And Trish, I can't tell you how often I hear like, "nothing. There's never, there's not, I can never do enough. There's always more." So once we identify that that's the case, then we can stop saying that that's a goal. And then maybe we can say what makes sense that you can do that's balanced with your other things to leaders.

I would say, I think we just have a lot of room to do more differentiation of responsibilities and things to match people's interests in a way that is a little disruptive and academics right now. I think a lot of the approach is like, everybody got to do the same thing. And everybody got to pitch in the same level.

And yet we know, listen, for some people, this work is, it's their wheelhouse. For other people, it's a slog and the [00:23:00] more we can think maybe, you know, more creatively about matching people's interests with some of those citizenship work, the better. And I also acknowledge that that doesn't mean that people get to take a pass and you can't say, I don't like anything here because then why are you in academics?

Like, we all are contributing in some way. So that's what I would say kind of on the leadership side is I think when we really take an interest, we can also be creative about that. It's like, you're telling me you have this interest. I have this need. How can we adapt both? So that there's synergy here.

Trish Kritek: I'll dig in on that last point a little bit, which is, I think, again, that's why maybe sharing what your personal mission statement with folks is helpful because I agree with you. There's more than enough stuff for everybody to do and catering and strategizing about

where people bring their unique interest, but also their unique strengths and their ability to advance things makes a lot of sense on the leadership side sometimes.

Kemi Doll: Also, I think that we as leaders sometimes [00:24:00] don't realize that people don't. No, their own strengths. People are pretty hard on themselves. And I think sometimes you don't realize that even just telling somebody, you know, you are, you are exceptional at problem solving or motivating people or connecting with this staff or whatever.

This is an area that you are really helping the whole. Because you are really good at this allows people to see like, oh, I really am making contributions and allows them to better modulate. So they don't feel like I have to do everything. I don't know. I just wanted to say that out loud. It goes a long way for people to be able to see how they're contributing and be able to be appreciated in that way.

Trish Kritek: Yeah. I mean, I think it speaks to acknowledging and appreciating people's contributions and what they uniquely can do to make the space a better place. And we probably don't spend enough time expressing our gratitude for the great things that people bring to the table. So I think that's a good encouragement for all of us to remember to do.

I agree with everything you said, and I think people probably. [00:25:00] Do often feel like they could never do enough. I don't think that's everybody. I think there are some people who feel like I've done enough and, and that's sufficient and I think it's natural for you and for me to meet more of the people who feel like they need to do everything.

That's true. And so I do want to say it's a spectrum of folks out there and sometimes delineating all the stuff that you're doing in support of your community or communities is a valuable thing because sometimes those of us who are more inclined to say yes to those things accumulate a really long list.

Kemi Doll: That's a really great point and again, I think it kind of goes back to where I started, though, about the distortion. It's like, you don't even realize how much you are doing. So, before you have this, I can never share my personal mission, first of all, can we write down all the ways in which you do support your division department, all the ways that you are a good citizen?

So that we're talking about the same things. It's not easy, but it is the responsibility to have [00:26:00] leaders to decide what is that threshold that everybody has contributed meaningfully. And we do have to be honest and people are not. And so they can, you can clarify with those people. Listen, everybody is doing at least A, B, C, and D.

So, like, where does that fit for you on the other side? But I will acknowledge like you, yes, I'm mostly talking to people who are doing a lot already. They really are. And I want them to be able to use some of that energy towards some of their unique interests and strengths, because that, that is the difference between long term satisfaction and burnout.

That's the difference.

Trish Kritek: I totally agree. And I think the value of like, delineating all the different things you're doing is super powerful. And if you have 2 things on your list, well, then you might pause and say, yes, go back to what you said a second ago, which I really liked, which is you chose to be in academic medicine because you're part of this community.

So being a part of a community, you got to invest in it. And if that list is 100 things, You [00:27:00] need to pare that back.

Kemi Doll: You need to pair it back. That's exactly right.

Trish Kritek: And so I think everything I do is I experience a spectrum of folks. And so I would say there's a spectrum of folks.

Kemi Doll: Can I bring it back to the personal mission statement though?

Trish Kritek: Yeah

Kemi Doll: Because I think another just maybe valence I will say of this is that when you're used to over functioning when you're when you're used to a default of, like, doing a million things at a time all the time, it can be really hard to cut back for the purpose of nothing. And that's the other reason why the personal mission statement is so helpful.

Because it gives you something to put in that space. When you realize, I'm overstretched, but like, it's so hard for me not to do something. It's like, okay, well let's go back and think about what you want to do. And it's almost, it's a more positive way to think about the no's. It's like, no, I have to say no to this because I'm going to be creating this other thing.

Or because I'm going to be more focused. Focused on teaching over here.

Trish Kritek: For many people, including me at times, saying no is like, you [00:28:00] know, you don't want to not help not disappoint people. Don't you have a natural inclination to be helpful?

Kemi Doll: Exactly. Yeah, exactly.

Trish Kritek: And that's why a lot of us chose careers in healthcare.

Kemi Doll: Exactly. Exactly.

Trish Kritek: As always, you and I could keep talking for forever. So in the spirit of keeping it listenable, I'm wondering if you have one last pearl you want to share with the folks who are listening today.

Kemi Doll: You know, I think that most of us and maybe especially people who are listening recognize that when we think about patient care, there are these like, really tangible ways you can measure what you've done for somebody, maybe you operated on them. Maybe you change their medication. Like, maybe you figured out the diagnosis because you ordered the right test. And yet, at the same time, when we do patient care, we, we feel all the time every day ways in which we've had some insight or made some difference for a patient in a major way.

That is not tangible. That is not something you can document. Is not something maybe you sat by the bedside. Maybe [00:29:00] they had an insight that they just haven't had before, but we've all experienced that across any specialty. Right? So we understand there's this tangible way to measure what we do. And then there's this intangible way to measure.

And I just remind people that the same thing exists in your career and your progress and in creating a direction for yourself. And I think one of the hardest things for us to do is to take space for the intangible for our own career direction. And so when it feels uncomfortable to take an hour to sit down and think about what we've talked about today and like, write down, like, why am I really here?

Why did I start? Why does she want me to actually write it down? Like, why do I do all this stuff? I want to tell you that this is that intangible that is just as important and that actually will result on the other side of decisions that you make differently. That will change your experience, but you have to be willing to take the space to do the stuff before it looks like that you're actually doing anything.

And that's the pearl I would leave you with.

Trish Kritek: And I love that pearl. And I hope that this [00:30:00] conversation inspires people to find space, that chunk of time, that freedom to do some of this thinking and to craft their own personal mission statement. Kemi, thank you so much. I think there's so much here for people to learn from and I really appreciate the conversation.

Kemi Doll: You are so welcome. Thank you for having me. I hope everybody has a wonderful day and a wonderful week.

Trish Kritek: As do I, and I want to say thanks to them for joining us on Thrivecast. If they want to listen to more episodes of Thrivecast, you can find them at Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

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