

Small changes can make a big difference

tips to help feel more useful



Being useful matters

Every one of us needs a reason to get up in the morning. We need a sense that something we do matters and if we don't have that, it can have an impact on our mental wellbeing, our confidence and self-esteem. The COVID19 pandemic created many challenges, lockdown, being furloughed, possibly facing insecurity around work in the near, or not so distant future. We may feel our life is being overtaken by events. Even if finances weren't an issue many people find it hard not to be doing and having a sense of purpose. It may be ill health means changes to what we usually do, and we are trying to find ways to adjust to that.

Used and useful are not the same thing

Sometimes we can get mixed up between being used and being useful. We use a tool, we have no consideration for how that tool feels, its used to serve our purpose. When we feel used, we don't feel respected, sometimes we don't even feel what we do is acknowledged, just taken for granted. This is not good for our overall life satisfaction, or wellbeing. However, when we feel useful, its often because we are doing something we have chosen to do, we have something to offer which we feel others value and appreciate. Now sometimes this can get all muddled up. Perhaps we use our skills for something useful, but don't feel its been appreciated, or it maybe we receive empty noises of appreciation and respect where really, we are being used! Being Mindful of the relationships we have with others can help us explore, how valued and respected we feel and whether or not, this is another area for attention.

Being useful can help define who we are



How often when we first meet someone, they ask what we do? Now depending on what you do, can determine how comfortable you are with this question. Some people who may not be working, be retired, be unable to work through ill health may hate this question, it makes them feel they have no purpose, as it feels the only useful activity is work. Maybe because we get paid to work and money has a value? However, if we become more aware of how we spend our time and the difference that makes, it can help us define who we are when asked that question, and realise value is more much than money. Responses maybe, *"I seek to bring smiles to people who are living alone by touching base with my elderly neighbours". "I am learning about the universe to help my son with his homework". "I am making a bracelet to share with a friend who is going through a hard time"*

Being useful offers purpose

While we may find, having to do something is a chore, if it is taken away from us, we miss it. Perhaps because that activity, whatever it was, gave us purpose. Now its important to make the distinction between being 'used' by other people and ourselves doing something which makes us feel useful. Often, we think what has the world or anyone done for me, turning that around we can ask, what am I doing for the world or anyone else?

Be creative

Being creative can help us feel useful. It may be a piece we write for a website on our experiences to inspire others, or it maybe we bake a cake and share it, or make our own card and send it to someone by post rather than an email. Being creative can make us feel useful and be good for our own mental health. This piece maybe useful www.cope-scotland.org/index.php/latest-blog/ideas-for-how-creativity-can-improve-our-mental-health



Being helpful offers purpose and can bring meaning to our lives



We often get caught up in the pursuit of happiness, thinking we will be happy when.... we have more money, better holidays, promotion, bigger cars, houses, kitchens, the list goes on. It's amazing though how often even when this is achieved people can still feel something is missing. The pursuit of what 'I' think I need to be happy can often be long and pretty empty. However, if we revisit this with a view to how we relate to others and the quality of relationships we have, we may find happiness can be achieved in other ways.

Takers, Givers, and you owe me as I did for you, I owe you as you did for me

For whatever reason, some of us may see the world as quite competitive, be in it for number one, take as much as you can and other people's problems, well they are their problems not ours. The starting point always being '*what's in it for me*'. Others may want to be helpful, but now they see the person they helped as owing them, or if you did them a favour, they think they are indebted to you. This way of relating to others is all about give and take being in balance and if they don't feel they are getting enough back from what they give, they may walk away. Then there are givers who don't look for anything in return and generously share what they have, as they look for meaning in what they do. A risk for givers is takers see this and take, take, take, perhaps in a work environment taking credit for work the giver did, which they had little hand in. A balanced path to walk is to find a way to give more than you take, and genuinely try and help others succeed. Balancing the act of giving helps you not be taken advantage of. We can find purpose and joy in being helpful, doing something expecting nothing in return. Just make sure you don't give so much you have nothing left for you.



How can I be more useful?

There are so many ways we can increase how useful we feel. We can volunteer our time to help someone or a group. We can become a random acts of kindness person, who does wee things aimed at encouraging a smile in others. This can be making a cup of tea, paying a compliment, and meaning it, listening when someone wants to talk. This wee piece has some tips on listening, sometimes listening to someone is one of the most valuable things you can do for that person. www.cope-scotland.org/index.php/latest-blog/the-art-of-conversation

What we say can be as useful as what we do

Most of us have issues with our confidence at times. Someone offering genuine support and encouragement can make a huge difference. We can find ways to be more useful to others by being a positive influence. By offering hope and ideas and working with the person to help find solutions when challenges present themselves. If there is no immediate solution, offering some comfort, or emotional support. Helping the person believe in themselves and their ability to cope. This can also make us feel useful as we have helped empower the other person, rather than make them dependent on us, which long term isn't good for either party. Even in a caring role, seek always to promote someone's options to feel they have some control in their own lives.