Working in a Veterinary environment we are presented with unique situations that require knowledge and skill that we have each spent years working to “master”. I put master in quotes because in the end we are always learning and never really become the “master” of it all. We have years built behind this knowledge base and yet we have only a few minutes to try to share this level of understanding to another human in working to help them care for their pet. Sometimes it is literally seconds and the person is an emotional fire-storm due to the situation, which only makes it that much more challenging. In the past the frustration I felt in not being able to help people through these difficult moments, led me to a place of name, blame, judge. At first it was the client- Clients are stupid and your cant fix stupid. Then it was my support staff- they just don’t care and are useless. Then my superiors (boss)- How can you connect with people when you see so many people. Then it became all of the profession which then included all of society. Finally ending in me, I sucked because I could not do it all.

Over time I have come to understand that this path to name, blame, judge did not work in my favor. I thought it was helping to off set the sinker that pulled me into my ocean of shame. Now I realize that feeding that “Cynical Serpent” as I was drowning in my ocean of shame, only led me to become disconnected and fell even more isolation. I started to fight, and began the path away from name, blame, judge and towards recognize, embrace, connect. During that path I recognized that I had to embrace this place of working with clients who are uninformed, skeptical, and appear unappreciative. I had to learn to not allow their space to become my reality. This is the story of that journey, a journey I know a number of us are on.

People often truly don’t realize the risk involved.
We have the basic knowledge of what is going on with cases and we have the responsibility to protect all those involved. We have the knowledge and capability to often “dissolve” a situation, yet we frequently don’t have the time to explain why we are short or direct during the process. People will then not understand why they are being excluded from the “facts”. They will not have the knowledge of the risk and we as a veterinary team are trying to keep them safe.

In this section of the lecture we will walk through a story which helps to show the value of awareness in understanding the emotions that come related to both the clients and staff in working through clients often not recognizing the risks involved. Taking a path to remembering that it is not about us, but in fact the clients are scared and confused. When they are in this place of fear and confusion, we then become the focus of the source of those emotions, but we are not the cause. It is not that we are to be a door-mat going forward, more about helping us each prepare for the reaction we will receive from people and find a way for ourselves to recover from it. I found that was the first step in working through this space and not jumping to name, blame, judge. Self-forgiveness is the foundation to a sustainable career in this industry and these situations require a large level of both self-awareness and forgiveness.

I didn’t get to say good-bye
I, as suspect many of us, value the human animal bond in many ways. I know that I entered into veterinary medicine related to the concept of zooeyia, the positive influence that animals have on humans. I wanted to support zooeyia and I think a number of you joined the profession with the same thought and drive. I accept that at times I will not like the outcomes of a case. I also accept the fact that sometimes I have to cause pain to the lives I work on to help them. There was one case that shook me to the core and taught me how to understand helping myself recover from those cases. I will walk the audience through this case and how I came to embrace the emotions of fear of the unknown related to a client’s perspective. This led me to begin finding the path to where we can help people through these difficult situations, by allowing us to recognize the impact it has on us as well as the client. Sometimes it really sucks being stuck outside the treatment room watching your loved one being cared for and not to be there to hold their hand. It sucks for the caretakers as much as the clients and pets. We go into emergency mode during those times and put our emotions on the self, what is our recovery for ourselves when that moment has passed? I don’t know about you but I used the suck it up philosophy, and well it didn’t work out so great in the end. Now from this case I learned a new path driven away from name, blame, judge and towards recognize, embrace, connect.

When we are emotional we often do not think straight
The vast majority of us in society are socially capable of interacting in a respectful and successful manner with each other on a daily basis. We read verbal and non verbal cues and respond to work to connect with each other as we go about our daily interactions. Then something traumatic happens and all of sudden we fall into flight/fight/freeze sympathetic dominance and our logic is out the
window. A state which was well received in the past to help us manage the risk and dangers of the world to survive. Without it we would have died off as a species years ago. Although this response has served us well, it can be difficult when we require our brain to be “on line” to work through those situations. At that point the emotions do not tend to serve us well. Both our clients and ourselves can fall into this space and when we both do, it can be a path leading to much sorrow and anger.

Often when in this place of emotions, I found myself being driven from a place of shame and when I felt shame I needed someone to blame. We will again walk through a situation where this very emotional challenge presented itself for myself. We will break down the path and then the emotional acceptance that needed to be present to allow moving back to logic and toward the path of connection. We are all humans and have emotions, learning to embrace them and recognize that we cant be composed and under control all the time is a giant step forward to finding sustainability in this profession.

We do this everyday
The concept that we do this everyday is nothing new. We can speak in “doctor talk” or “client talk”. Often when fresh out of school we have to relearn how to speak as we will talk over a client’s head with all the “-ologies” and “-ities”. In starting 1 Life Connected I began to recognize the many things that I do not do everyday that others do and I developed a new awareness to how the other side feels. I hated it. NO, let me make it clear, I loathed it. The anger I would disperse to the other individual working in their “we do this everyday” space was shocking. It was truly eye opening.

Yet the frustration I saw from them, when really they were just trying to help me and really wanted to help me, was just as emotional. We will walk through this space looking at the perspective from both the client and our own in learning how to navigate the frustration of coming from different “we do this everyday” spaces. This is not just frustrating to the client, this is equally emotionally draining to us and our teams. Finding what is our path to ensure staying out of name, blame, judge when we enter into this emotion and instead find presence with recognize, embrace, connect.

Time
Everyone doesn’t want to wait and let’s just be real, the concept of not having enough time in the day sucks! Our interactions with the support of technology are causing life to be getting faster and faster, and people don’t have “time” to sit still. This is the culture that we live in not just within our industry but our society as a whole. We might not like it, but it is the path we are going as we become more and more reliant on technology. Think about it, when was the last time you used an actual physical map to get somewhere, not one on your phone or the map provide by your GPS, but a paper map. Exactly.

This could be a lecture in itself when diving into the emotions related to feeling we never have enough time. Time is such a large sinker in our daily tasks within the hospital. It can feel like the “to do” list is never ending and always growing. I honestly don’t have an answer to this sinker, it is one I fight with daily myself. What I have begun to understand is that the lack of time can drive strong tendencies towards the path of name, blame, judge. Almost like a direct IV line to feeding the cynical serpent. We are normal in going there, and recognizing we are there is the first step. In the end I have found that self-forgiveness is at the core in working to find a path towards recognize, embrace and connect with the emotions related to time. For each of us that is unique. We will discuss some key pieces that help along the way, and in the end the largest piece in creating the space is to recognize that we are not inadequate from what we don’t get done, instead we are adequate in what we are able to achieve each day.

The beast of burden of the profession
Finally there is one large piece to cover in helping to embrace the space of our personal frustration in this industry. I call it the beast of burden for the profession. The human animal bond drives much of our conviction to help animal and commonly a foundation in the desire to be in this industry. That same human animal bond driving us is what drives clients and society to put us as veterinarians up on an unrealistic, unsustainable pedestal. I don’t like it, and it angers me that this pressure is placed on me, you know the that I must love all things about animals all the time. That I must constantly want to talk about animals. That I would want to hear a strangers most horrible loss of a pet in first meeting them. That is not what I want. However I need that bond to be present, for if society does not honor my profession, I cannot do what I desperately want to do, help animals.

That is our beast of burden, and I have no easy answer on how to embrace it. All I am trying to do is create the space to recognize it. Each of us then can start the path to our unique journey in finding how to “see” the beast and embrace it. Without it owning us. Without it defining our value. We can honor that beast of burden without losing ourselves in the profession and the first step is moving away from name, blame, judge. I want to yell at society too, for putting so much pressure on us, for making us feel like we are never are giving enough. When I did take that path, it almost ended in the loss of myself both mentally and physical.

Today to embrace the beast we each elect to connect with the sinkers and see them as the situation that they are, a situation and not a representation of our value or worthiness. Connecting with these emotions of frustration and anger and disappointment, is a hard journey to take. Let’s start the process one step at a time, because we are each unique and deserve to have our lives spoken for.
As most veterinarians, I struggle with hyper-achievement syndrome which is a form of perfectionism. Wikipedia defines perfectionism as “a personality trait characterized by a person's striving for flawlessness and setting excessively high performance standards, accompanied by overly critical self-evaluations and concerns regarding others' evaluations.[1][2] It is best conceptualized as a multidimensional characteristic, as psychologists agree that there are many positive and negative aspects.[3] In its maladaptive form, perfectionism drives people to attempt to achieve an unattainable ideal, and their adaptive perfectionism can sometimes motivate them to reach their goals. In the end, they derive pleasure from doing so. When perfectionists do not reach their goals, they often fall into depression.”

In the end I found that having this drive for unattainable results was great in getting me into and through veterinary school, but it has not been so great in supporting a sustainable career in the veterinary profession. When you add in other core characteristics in which I, and most veterinarians have, such as being an introvert, having a type A personality, being more analytical in approaches to problems, have a strong ability for compassion, and being a people pleaser with workaholic tendencies, I have found it to be a recipe for disaster. Therefore I wanted to share my story in hopes to help others along their personal journey.

The backdrop for wanting to share comes from the concern that suicide and burn out is high within our profession. The AVMA released information about a survey they conducted looking into the mental health of the US veterinary professionals’ wellbeing and one finding from this review was that 1 in 6 veterinarians have considered suicide post veterinary school. [4]. At this point honestly I could spend the remainder of this presentation referencing suicide cases and depression/burn out statistics in our profession, but in the end, I very easily could have been one of those statistics. I clearly remember the moment I had serious thoughts of suicide at one point in my life and I made the conscious decision that I wanted to live and recognized the need for help. The biggest part I want to share is that you are not alone in this journey. It is hard and continues to be hard, that is why the title to this presentation is “I Am a RecoverING perfectionist” Not “I Am a RecoverED Perfectionist”. This is an active decision I have to make the majority of most days and I know that this will probably be the case for the rest of my life.

The core basics I have learned through my journey I broke down into a few areas in which I cover in this presentation. At the center of it all being SHAME and the struggle I have in managing my personal shaming I do to myself each day. In helping me to understand shame I have studied the work of Brene Brown Ph.D., LMSW. She is a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work. She has been featured on multiple TED talks, including one that went viral which covered the topic of shame and vulnerability. She also has a number of books on the subject and was a focus of a PBS special. In the end shame is defined by Brene as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging”. No one likes to talk about shame, but in order for me, as a veterinarian, to start recovering from my perfectionism; I needed to confront my personal shaming head on.

I feel that the primary feelings which almost led me to a drastic decision lived in the shame I felt in my hatred of being a veterinarian and thinking I made a mistake. How could I feel that way? I worked so hard to get here and yet I hate what I do? What is wrong with me, I must be a horrible person. That was the thought process I followed in shaming myself and so producing my own feelings of unworthy of acceptance and belonging. In addition the thought of all the people I would have disappointed and the pressure to support my debt and bills added to the spiral down. I still work on this every day, and I want to share the tools I have found to help me along the way.

Below are the 10 key points I have recognized in my personal journey and I will share in this presentation. They are not presented in the order in which I recognized them in my journey, in addition none of them I feel I have truly conquered.

I would like to note that with that last statement, as a recovering perfectionist, I am OKAY with that.

1. Accepting that I will disappoint someone every day, and that someone may include myself.
2. Becoming comfortable with the unknown and learning the great things in life will come my way when I don’t “Plan” everything.
3. Showing vulnerability, especially in front of others.
4. Learning and accepting my limitations.
5. Accepting my mistakes as learning moments and understanding that they do not define me.
7. Shifting from things to experiences, and people not social media.
8. Accepting that emotions are okay and never to be judged.
9. My judgment of others is only me attempting to hide my personal shame.
10. Recognizing that I am not alone.

   The final piece I would share that I have learned in this journey is that I am nothing if I don’t take care of myself. If I do not put my health and wellbeing first in my life, I cannot be there for others.

   In conclusion; I truly believe that self-forgiveness is the foundation to a sustainable career in veterinary medicine. I strive for that each and every day. I am a work in progress and learning to love and enjoy every moment and honestly some days are easier than others.

   Life is beautiful and I hope you work to find your own connection to its beauty.

Suicide and wellness resources
https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Pages/default.aspx
http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/

References
Training for the Marathon We Call a Career in Veterinary Medicine
Kimberly Pope-Robinson, DVM, CCFP
1 Life Connected Consulting
San Clemente, CA

We enter into this profession making a large investment of time and money into our education. This education covers the space related to medical knowledge, in both learning the physical skills and the science behind the practice of medicine. Hours and hours are dedicated to these areas as we start on this career. In fact years are committed to for all that enter into the profession to have not only the license to work as a veterinarian or technician, but to truly grasp the ideas and skill sets to perform the job. Along the way emotions develop with a variety of situations, we are expected to inherently learn how to cope through these. We stumble through in the process some of us falling into a resiliency, yet many left to flounder and struggle with staying connected to our passion and life.

Just as in training for a marathon, we cannot just focus on the medical knowledge and technical skills. If we want to look at sustainability in this industry, we have to start working to train for the mental piece as well. Marathoners will work to find ways to help with the emotions and mental struggles that will come along during that 26 mile running event. Now is the time for us to also find that path in veterinary medicine. In going through my CCFP certification, the program shared 5 key points that can be utilized to help manage the risk of compassion fatigue. Although an individual’s journey may not be “exactly” compassion fatigue, these tools are supportive in helping to find training for the emotions and mental struggles that will present themselves in this career for a number of reasons.

Before we dig into the 5 areas recognized for resiliency in our marathon of a career, one concept should be addressed and that is the idea that this is an individualized journey for each person. Therefore what brings each person to the place of struggle and discontentment can be different from another. In that same thought process, what works for one person may be different than for another. There is no “one fix it recipe” for the overall struggle. The overall theme of moving from Name, Blame, Judge and towards Recognize, Embrace, Connect is where resiliency lies for all aspects of the struggle within the veterinary industry.

Self regulation
This is simply the ability to shift from the sympathetic to parasympathetic state while staying fully engaged in the activities of daily living. Perceived threats are often triggered from an attachment trauma or the feeling of not living up to a certain idealistic vision. Self regulation takes us to the place of learning to recognize when these triggers have occurred and move from the reactive state of Name, Blame, Judge and towards the acceptance place of Recognize, Embrace, Connect. The sympathetic system is important to us, it is not about turning it off and walking around as perfectly run status stable machines. Learning to find the tools to move from the fight/flight/freeze mode first requires to acceptance that we are not flawed in being there.

This is shared in an earlier lecture through the brown gauze moment with the group. That time in practice where you have that day where so many things don’t go right and you never get a break. Where you are on constant “emergency mode” and work a full 12 hour day without, drinking, eating or even going pee. This can lead to a state of chronic sympathetic dominance.

Let’s stop here and talk a bit about chronic sympathetic dominance. This can be looked at as pain versus suffering, which can be seen as acute versus chronic sympathetic response. Suffering is when we perceive the pain signal as a threat. In our world we cannot avoid the “pain” negativity of work, what we strive to do is work to prevent suffering. This is not a quick fix, but there are many ideas of how to break the cycle of chronic sympathetic dominance (suffering). Without accepting that we are normal for feeling the “pain” it can make it hard to leave the Name, Blame, Judge game. The Blame/Judge game can be towards ourselves or others. Breaking the cycle starts with recognizing that we are normal for feeling the “pain” and falling into the fight/flight/freeze response.

Once we recognize we are in the sympathetic response, the next step is to embrace the space we are in. For a number of individuals this can be brought on how in learning how to bring ourselves into the physical moment and relax our body. Thereby allowing the pre frontal cortex to come back on line. This can be achieved in learning to put energy onto things that are within our control. This is not the space to dig deeply into the techniques, but a few will be discussed at a high level to provide insight. The goal will be to find what resource works best for the individual on their unique journey.

Intentionality
Choice versus demand. This is truly the place of where intentionality shows up and can be very difficult to find the path to moving from fear to choice is a true challenge. We will dive into a scenario where we walk through one such situation, where the individual moves from demand to choice. This is learning to see that there are real demands and perceived demands. Recognizing the fact that demands are present is a reality we cannot ignore. We cannot just put on a pair of rosy glasses and look at the world as all unicorns and rainbows, the reality is that there are real demands and risks. Not recognizing those can have consequences and that is a fact. Learning to embrace the demand and then recognize the perceived demands we are placing in addition to the reality is where intentionality comes in. Is it a demand or a choice. Do you have to go to work today? Or do you choose to?
Intentionality does not let us be the victim. Living in chronic sympathetic stimulation can lead us to feeling that the environment has control over us and defines our options. This does not mean we go the path of entitlement and avoid responsibility, that is not intentionality. It is moving from Naming, Blaming, Judging our environment as the only source to the pain. Recognizing the pain and Embracing our choices related to it, fully understanding the consequences will lead to the journey of allowing intentionality back into our career. The 1 Life Connected message helps to make this connection to intentionality by encouraging individuals to find their why, and then connect that why with what they are choosing to support each day.

Viktor Frankl, Holocaust survivor, captures this concept beautiful in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* when we stated: “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

**Perceptual maturation**
This can be referred to as moving from burn out to burn through, in that we correct our perception on what we are truly experiencing in our career. Let’s walk through this progression as a caregiver in the world of the veterinary profession. First we start at the stage of fact that the outcomes of our work are all of who we are, and we aim for positive outcomes and goals only to realize that they are out of our control. The flaw being we place our sole worth based on those outcomes. We begin to embrace our powerless state and do the best that we can and begin to fall into the belief that others evaluation of our outcomes, doesn’t mean anything about our worth. Next as we begin to try to come to grips with the powerless place we feel within our profession, we start to find that our workplace is just a place to practice our internal conviction and vision through our code of honor and commitment to life. Nothing more, nothing less.

This then leads into the final stage of recognizing that our career is always going to ask more of us than we can give. The demands will never be satisfied with what we offer. We then move into a place were our value is not solely focused on outcomes, we become resilient to judgment of others and find a balance in our humility. In the end our worth is intrinsic not extrinsic. We begin to except that what we are capable of doing is enough and find peace in our actions and our level of commitment. Sounds super easy right?

As you can imagine this is not as easy as it sounds. This is where the concept of filling balloons that the 1 Life Connected message shares in helping to offset the sinkers that come into play in the struggle to stay content in our veterinary career. We cannot stop the sinkers, they do not however define us, and we have the peace to recognize and embrace the place to allow us to stay connected to our values and dedication to the profession. When the outcome of our cases no longer solely defines our value to the profession or this world, that is perceptual maturation. This often can fall into the space of filling a spiritual wellbeing balloons, however that may appear for each of us.

**Connection**
This simply means having a community in which we feel safe. A group of individuals that we can go to provide us inclusion and acceptance, but that which will also hold us accountable and challenge us in a way that we feel continually accepted. They help to identify shame within us and then show up with empathy to help diminish the shame and move out of the Name, Blame, Judge space and begin to travel towards the Recognize, Embrace, Connect journey to our authentic sustainable careers. These individuals are available to us within 48 hours and are a small group of people who may or may not know each other. These are the individuals that we know will answer that text or call late at night, but that are also not the ones to feed the “drama” or “pain” but in fact embrace us and then help us move forward instead of swimming in the ocean of shame with us.

We empower these individuals to tell on ourselves and to keep us true to our authentic self. They help us resolve that attachment trauma that is taking us to the place of perceived threats and so our sympathetic response. They listen and don’t interrupt, however don’t agree with all our points and thoughts and will push back with our best interest at heart. The goal is to define 5 of these individuals and approach them. Let them know you would like for them to be a part of the lifeline team you have developed for your self and what being in that space would look like. If they accept that commitment to you, then you set up check in and calls as you feel are appropriate. In the end you may actually be that same person for them.

These individuals help to fill a number of emotional and mental balloons. The goal is not to develop a group of people that commiserate the pain, but instead help us each move towards Recognize, Embrace, and then Connect!

**Self care**
Finally self care. Self care is probably the most discussed area we hear related to “combating” Compassion Fatigue and the struggles of this career. What the lecturer has found is that it is easy to say, we should exercise, meditate, eat healthy, have decent sleep, enjoy yoga, enjoy a “hobby” etc. etc. etc. But actually starting on this path to truly including self care really starts at that step of moving from Name, Blame, Judge in relationship to ourselves. There is always going to be someone that needs something from us, or a task that needs to be completed. Stopping and allowing the self care acts to occur starts with forgiving ourselves in that we cannot do it all. These self care acts fill all 4 types of balloons, mental, spiritual, physical, and emotional. It gets us out and being active instead of passive.
Yet we will continue to find every reason to not move forward with our self care. Justifying every reason why everything else is more important. Remember Recognize, Embrace, Connect. It isn’t easy, it is the path to sustainability in this profession. How do you find the time and space to develop self care in your routine? The answer to that question is – YES! This lecture will not provide that answer as it is already inside of you. What you do have now is permission to find your unique balloons and then fill then. What ever it is. Running, yoga, meditation, playing with your kids at the playground, taking a walk for 20 minutes in the middle of the day around the clinic, coloring, dancing, singing, painting, spending time in nature, snuggling with your pets at the end of a day, again what ever that is. These are the “fuel” that keep us going and stop us from sinking into that ocean of shame and falling into the fear and demand space. Finding any kind of aerobic activity for 15-20 minutes 3 times a week alone can have profound positive effects.

There are so many resources out there to help you find a way to stay on course with these self care dedications. We each have permission to go find them and allow them to be present. What balloons do you commit to filling?
Fear is imaginary, where as danger is a reality. Some where along the way we start to switch in seeing fear as the reality, when in fact it is something our mind produces. Perceived threats are something common in the profession, and can feel as real as a true threat. These perceived threats can trigger the fear response and move us away from a place of choice and towards a feeling of demand.

We enter this profession with a passion that drives us to sustain many sacrifices and struggles, and at some point the resiliency to move forward becomes extremely challenging. The fear of not doing enough, not being enough, not knowing enough, not working enough, not caring enough becomes our reality and the feeling of “appearing to be” a failure is no longer our fear of failing, but replaced with our danger of the truth that we in fact failing. This lecture takes a look at fear and danger and how it presents in the profession and then teaches the audience how to recognize the difference and direct our minds towards the reality of fear versus danger. Learning a path to embrace the risk and provide a road map in managing the ever-present unknown in this industry.

There are number of decisions that are required to be made day in and day out for a veterinarian team. In addition there are a number of technical skills that must be utilized in executing many of the treatment plans needed for the patients we work with. The other piece to consider for the environment of the veterinary team is the constant space of unknown. We never know when that patient will not respond well to a certain medication, have a reaction to a vaccine, fight compliance of care, or with no reason just not follow the books in their development and progression of disease and/or medical condition. It is no wonder that every day “mistakes”, “judgment errors” and “failures” occur. It is really the space that all teams live within daily. Some of these situations as many of us have learned, can lead to devastating consequences. These repeated consequences tell our brain that the risks are a reality and then the path to the feeling of true danger takes the place of risk.

Therefore it is safe to say that dealing with “perceived threats” and “failure” is a constant environment we live in as we enter into this profession. When you add in that many of us have perfectionist tendencies and are high achievers, this can be a recipe for much pain and suffering. In working to “cope” with this constant state of unknown and feeling of powerlessness, we can start to fall into the pattern of looking for who to blame. The shame that we can feel with these situations, often will drive us to a path of name, blame, judge. This path does not make as bad people, we are in fact normal that we go there. Often this is driven by the fear of being seen as weak or unworthy. We then look to vilify others to justify the outcome and then the real danger can come when we become the villain within our own minds.

Sustainability in this industry comes from learning how to adjust that path from name, blame, judge, and move towards recognize, embrace, connect. To help illustrate this concept, we are going to go on a journey related to a rather public event. Many of us heard of this event where a commercial airliner lost both engines on take off due to bird strike and the Captain and his co pilot landed the plane on the Hudson River. My sister’s dog (now my dog) actually had a front row seat to watch the plane land on the river. Using this story let’s take a look at the various aspect of dealing with risk and danger.

**When there are no risks, intentionality**

How easy is it to receive feedback and direction when learning how to play a new instrument, or play a new sport? Why is it we can laugh at ourselves as we fall over and over trying snowboarding for the first time, yet when it comes to a surgery we have never performed, it can elicit an anxiety attack? Often the risks that are involved with the situation at hand can influence how we embrace the idea of failure. This is not a bad place and in fact is a place that drives our success and continued pursuit of achievement. Recognizing that our intensions in both scenarios are the same can help provide comfort. We don’t walk into the “fun” new space with the idea of not wanting to influence on our self worth and value if we do not.

This is not an easy shift, recognizing our intensions can be the first step in this shift away from Name, Blame, Judge and towards Recognize, Embrace, Connect. We challenge ourselves to go and do things that many would never. For example, anesthesia is such an unknown every day, yet we walk into case knowing that the benefits outweigh the risks. It doesn’t mean we don’t critic our actions and learn from them, we should look at and hold ourselves and others accountable. The point is in remembering our intensions, especially when things go wrong. Lean on those intensions to help embrace the pieces that are difficult to review after the incident. Do you think that when Captain Sully and his co-pilot got on that plane that day they wanted to try something new and land the plane full of people, on the Hudson River? No, they were doing what they always did and making people lives better by helping them move around the country quickly. In addition, what were their intensions when they landed that plan on the river? To save lives! Even if it had not gone as well as it had, that didn’t change their intension of wanting to save lives.
Planning and being prepared feels really good
If I can just control everything, and I mean EVERYTHING, I can prevent all failures and remove all fear. This trap is such a common path we try. We throw ourselves into trying to control all variables and factors, to the point of it almost becoming an all consuming focus in our lives. Yes- check lists help prevent disasters and this could not be more evident then in the events that happened with the plane landing on the Hudson River.

Captain Sully and his co-pilot leaned on checklists and training to help navigate through a potential disaster. They went into response mode and because of their training could keep the emotions in check through the events that unfolded. Captain Sully saved the lives of everyone on that plane that day, despite losing both engines at the lowest altitude then any other commercial airliner in history. Training and preparing along with checklist had their place that day. However this also bring up an important point, there will be times and situations we cannot train for. Like it was just noted, the plane lost both engines at the lowest altitude then any other commercial airliner. This is not an exact situation that either Captain Sully or his co-pilot had ever trained for. This leads us to the next point, the human factor.

The human factor-
There is one factor we cannot control and that is the human factor and the emotions that will present along with the brains perception and processing of the senses and the cues that present during each situation. There was a movie that was shared to tell the story of the events from that day Captain Sully landed the plane on the river and then the movie shared the events of the investigation that followed. Although all lives were saved, a multi million dollar plane was lost, in addition a question had to be examined, was the risk of landing on the Hudson the best course of action?

The movie is emotional and there is a point where other pilots are working through simulators to show that time and time again how they could get back to an airfield and land without taking the risk of landing on the Hudson. However, at that point Captain Sully shares one key factor- the human factor. In all the simulations, the pilots knew that they were going to have a bird strike and lose both engines. They calmly immediately turn the plane and head back. They were prepared and they were able to practice. Captain Sully was prepared as well, in that he followed a checklist as the incident happened, the key piece he did not have though was the knowledge of what he had left in his plane after the encounter with the birds. He and his co-pilot had never practiced for this situation. They needed at least 30-40 seconds to determine what they had and then make the decision with still limited information on how to minimize the consequences.

The pilots in the simulators were given multiple attempts to allow the positive results of landing at an airfield; Sully did not have that luxury as he had one shot. In addition when the pilot simulators where required to take the time for that critical evaluation and processing that occurred post fallout from the bird strike, which was essential in the success of that day for the crews and all the passengers on the plane, the simulator pilots were unable to make it back to any airfield. In fact it was clear that Captain Sully made the right decision.

Believe in your decision, yet learn from them
The instruments in the data collected post water landing did not confirm that both engines were destroyed, it actually suggested that one engine was still functional. However Captain Sully stated, he felt it go and was very confident that from his years of experience that he did not have either engine. For the outsiders it is easy to see options with having the benefit of time and data spread out clearly for them. For Captain Sully and his crew, all they had was the information in front of them. In addition, they have their body’s response to the apparent threat that absolutely can effect some logical processing, referring back to the human factor.

Captain Sully stood by his decision, however he also allowed the information to be reviewed and took the time to question his decision and ensure to learn from what they were sharing. He allowed the feedback to be shared, but did not stray from the fact that he knew what he felt. He did question his actions; he did not question his motivation and self-value with the decisions he did make. Later when the engines were both found it was confirmed indeed that the instruments were incorrect and in fact the Captain was correct, both engines were gone.

The emotional after effect-
In the time of critical decision-making we often go into response mode. Leaning on training and skills we practice for years, we put our emotions in check and dive in. In some situations that approach can be harder to do than others, but in the end in almost every situation our brain does what we need it to do. Put the emotions on hold and get through the situation. This also happened for Captain Sully and his co-pilot that day. You see them walking the plane after the evacuation to ensure that no one is left on the plane. Then you see Sully grab his pilot coat and flight clipboard as he is the last to leave the plane. During the next hours that followed, Sully and his co-pilot are determined to get a head count to ensure all lives were saved.

The issues that made this difficult is that people went out either side of the plane onto each wing, often splitting families and loved one up. As boats in the area scrambled to get to the plane to save the people, as this was in the dead of winter and now hypothermia was a large threat, people were taken to various places and no head count was made. People were then triaged and taken to a number
of hospitals spread throughout New York and New Jersey. It was not until late into the evening that they were able to confirm that all souls were accounted for and alive. In that moment you see in the movie, Tom Hanks, who played Captain Sully, relax and the emotion washes over him. I can almost feel the emotion that overcomes him, because I remember having those hit me post events too.

During the incident we put our emotions on hold, there will be a point sometime after that those emotions will come to us. This is not a weakness nor a place for name, blame, judge to show up. We want to embrace these emotions and work through them. It may be difficult, no let me re-phase that, it will be difficult. It is a step in working through embracing the situation as it is, a situation and not a representation of our worthiness or value. We have a right to those emotions, as our emotions are our internal passion connecting with our physical self. We deserve to let them happen and give them their space.

**Protect your time to recover**

During the Hudson incident, there was a hotel that worked hard to hide Captain Sully and the entire crew from the media and public to allow them the time to recoup. To give them the space to let go and allow the emotions and feelings from the day work through them before having to answer to anyone, or discuss the situation in which they too had just lived through. We don’t always have the ability to do this as the crew did that day; I mean I don’t think we could just lock ourselves away for 12 hours with every incident that presents itself. I will challenge us to each allow ourselves to take a moment, or a few to step away. Let the emotions hit. Step into a room alone to just be. Or take the time to call a close friend or loved one to reconnect and provide that acceptance we need to remind us that this situation does not define who we are. We often don’t feel we have the time for this as the day still has requirements. What I am saying is that it is not only normal to allow embracing our emotions, it keeps us connected and is required for our personal wellbeing and sustainability in this profession.

Often it will be implied that you just have to get back on that horse again after a traumatic incident so that you don’t let it take hold of you. Maybe we need to let it take hold of us, then move through it. It might mean that someone might have to wait, or people might be upset that you are not there for them. Well many of those people on that plane, missed their meetings and family events they were headed to. The crew was set to have a day full of travel and this caused delays and reschedules to occur. I don’t think anyone judged them for taking time to recover and if they did, well that is on those individuals that judged the crew.

You have a right to your emotions and have permission to work through them. “Mistakes”, “failures”, “judgment errors”, what ever you want to call them are going to happen, for our entire lifetime in this career. We cannot avoid them. You might be saying well Captain Sully did not “make a mistake” everyone lived. Yes this is true, but just because everyone lived does not mean his actions were the only option. Plus often after critical events, regardless of the outcome, we will start to evaluate if we could have avoided the situation with planning and preparing. Having our judgment of failure present on the front side of the event not the actual event itself.

In this profession we too will have cases that have unexpected outcomes, often these are not much different than that day on the Hudson. Sure some pieces could be preventable when we have all the facts. Sure we can learn from them when we review them after the fact. Sure there may have been other paths to take. But in the end our intentions were solid and from a positive place, we worked with what we had in front of us, we utilized our training and checklists where appropriate, and then we leaned on the human factor when appropriate. Finally we can start to recognize that each situation will have emotions that follow, and begin to allow us time to recognize those emotions, embrace them, and then stay connected with life. This path is imperative for our sustainability in this industry.

Our actions do not define our value and this is the underlying theme in learning to move from fear and stay within the place of risk. Moving away from name, blame, judge, and towards recognize, embrace, connect is a difficult path but it is one worth fighting for. You may have had opportunity to have a better approach to that client communication or surgery or whatever situation that presented itself during that day. The key point to take away is that YOU however are NOT a failure.