

Principal Name: Joshua Emily
School Name: Utica Elementary School
Principal's Email Contact: jemily@gccschools.com

Rediscovering My Passion: Lessons from Phase Harmonizer

Throughout my entire career, I have always loved my work in education. Being a teacher was, without a doubt, the best job. Each day brought a new and exciting adventure. When I transitioned into administration, I found fulfillment in being able to support teachers in meaningful ways, helping them positively impact their students. Though I never considered education a perfect field, it always felt deeply rewarding.

Last spring, shortly after being named district administrator of the year, I was presented with a challenging decision: to choose between two schools to lead the following year. Both schools were appealing, but I faced the difficult task of leaving a school and team I loved. The community had become an integral part of my life, and I was saddened by the thought of leaving. Ultimately, I chose to return to the school where I had taught for 15 years, believing it would be the best transition for my family. However, I quickly realized the challenges that came with this decision. The school was twice the size of my previous school, and I found myself overwhelmed with the responsibility of managing a much larger staff and student body. On top of that, I had to leave behind a trusted team, which left me feeling disconnected and unsupported. As the first semester passed, I struggled to keep my head above water. Despite working long nights and weekends, I felt guilty for neglecting my own children and unappreciated in my role. I began to fear that if I didn't make significant changes, I wouldn't be able to continue in this position for long.

This realization prompted me to undertake an action inquiry with the goal of finding a way to organize my daily tasks more efficiently. I needed a system that wouldn't consume my entire life while allowing me to stay focused on what truly mattered both at school and at home.

The guiding question of my inquiry was simple but crucial: How can I manage my day to promote a healthy work-life balance while still accomplishing work tasks and nurturing positive relationships? My ultimate goal was to extend my career, reignite my passion for the job, and support my "Phase Harmonizer" — a concept that represents the part of me that thrives on positive engagement and purpose.

I knew something needed to change, but the study of the Phase Change Model (PCM) provided clarity. It helped me identify the types of activities that would increase my job

satisfaction. I realized that in my previous roles, these activities had occurred more naturally, and I now needed to be more intentional about incorporating them into my daily routine.

A key challenge for me was organization, which became even more apparent with the increased workload. To address this, I created a triaged “To-Do List” based on my Mini-Action Research (Mini-AR) plan. I identified four primary tasks that I aimed to accomplish every day, with the goal of completing them four out of five days a week:

1. Reaching out positively to build connections (via green form calls or staff notes)
2. Completing 75% of daily tasks from my “must do” and “should do” checklists.
3. Spending 30 minutes dedicated to my children
4. Walking for 60 minutes (often with colleagues, which served as both social time and a health benefit)

To measure my success, I asked myself:

- Could I change my habits to meet these four goals 80% of the time each week?
- What impact would meeting these goals have on my stress levels and job frustration?
- Was there a clear connection between my habits and my emotional state?

I used a spreadsheet to track my progress, noting any days I didn't meet my goals. At the end of each week, I rated my job frustration on a scale of 1 to 10 and wrote brief reflections on how I was feeling about the job. This provided valuable insight into my emotional well-being and the factors that contributed to my job satisfaction.

As I graphed the data, I converted my frustration ratings to percentages for clarity. I also included a "Week 0" to show where I stood at the beginning of the project. Trends began to emerge: there was a clear inverse correlation between the percentage of goals I achieved and my job frustration over time.

However, the weekly data was more fluctuating. External factors played a significant role in influencing my weekly numbers, such as state testing and unexpected changes (like the district allowing me to hire an assistant principal). These external influences affected my mood and job satisfaction in ways I couldn't always control, but focusing on

my goals and positive habits allowed me to maintain a sense of direction despite these challenges.

As I consistently met most of my goals, my job frustration decreased to a more manageable level. This confirmed that while external factors would always influence my work, focusing on my personal priorities made a significant difference in my overall happiness. It became clear that it was okay not to complete every task each week. The key was making a concerted effort to focus on the positives, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and prioritize what mattered most to me — especially my family.

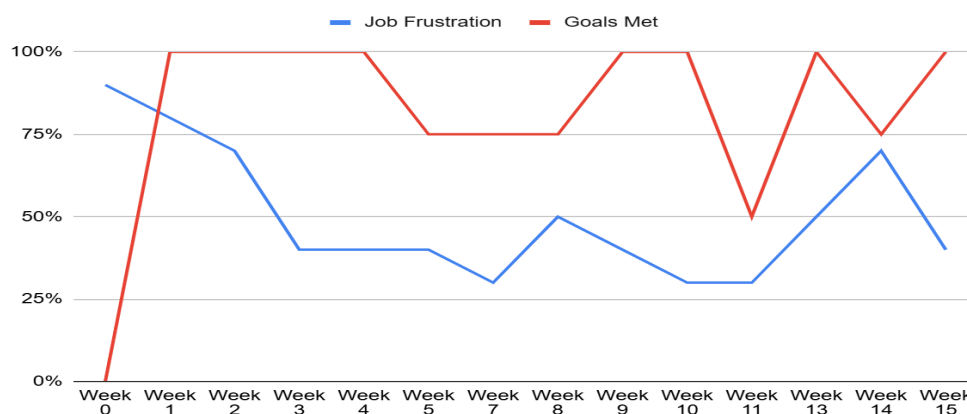
In addition, I realized that the process of triaging my to-do list and completing it with a high success rate was crucial to my sense of accomplishment and well-being. This will likely remain the most challenging habit to maintain, but I believe it's an essential part of the happiness puzzle.

Finally, I learned that I must continue to feed my Phase Harmonizer by making time for activities that nourish me and reinforce the positive aspects of my work. The positive office referrals at our school have become an important part of our culture, and I now understand that granting myself permission to prioritize both my children and my own well-being is vital.

This project has provided me with valuable insights into how I can rediscover my passion for a job that I once loved. While outside factors will always play a role in shaping my work life, I now have the tools and mindset needed to continue moving forward in a positive direction. By prioritizing my well-being, staying organized, and focusing on building positive relationships, I believe I can continue to thrive as an educator and leader for years to come.

Bibliography


Regier, N. (2020). Seeing People Through: Unleash Your Leadership Potential. Penguin Random House





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Joshua Emily
jemily@gccschools.com



Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Background

- Switched schools over the summer
- Doubled size and staff/left behind a trusted team
- Felt overwhelmed daily/could not get my head above water
- After a career of loving what I do, I was not struggling to find my joy
- The massive time commitment after hours prevented me from being there for own children.
- I was in a funk, and knew that I wouldn't be able to continue in my current position for very long if I did not make some significant changes.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Purpose

- Therefore, the purpose of my action inquiry was to discover a way to organize and complete daily tasks in a way that did not occupy my entire life, and focus on the things that I needed to do at school and at home to feel fulfilled.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Wondering

- With this purpose, we wondered how can I manage my day to promote a healthy work/life balance while still accomplishing work tasks and reinforcing positive relationships in an effort to help prolong my career, feed my Phase Harmonizer, and find my passion again?

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Actions

- I knew something needed to change, but our study of the PCM helped me understand that type of activities that I needed to focus on to increase job satisfaction. I learned that these types of activities were happening more naturally in previous positions, and I needed to seek them out in order to stay fulfilled.
- Organization had been a weakness that really became apparent with the increased workload. A triaged “To Do List” from my Mini-AR provided guidance there.
- I targeted four tasks that I wanted to accomplish each day. I set a goal of completing each task four out of five days a week.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Actions

Sub Questions: Did I complete the following at least four days each week?

- reaching out positively (green form call/staff note)
- accomplishing 75% of daily tasks on checklist
- 30 minutes dedicated to my own children
- 60 minutes of walking (most of these were done with colleagues that served as a social time/therapy session in addition to a health benefit)

Can I change habits to meet each of the four goals 80% of the time each week?

What happens to my stress level/job frustration each week?

Is there a connection?

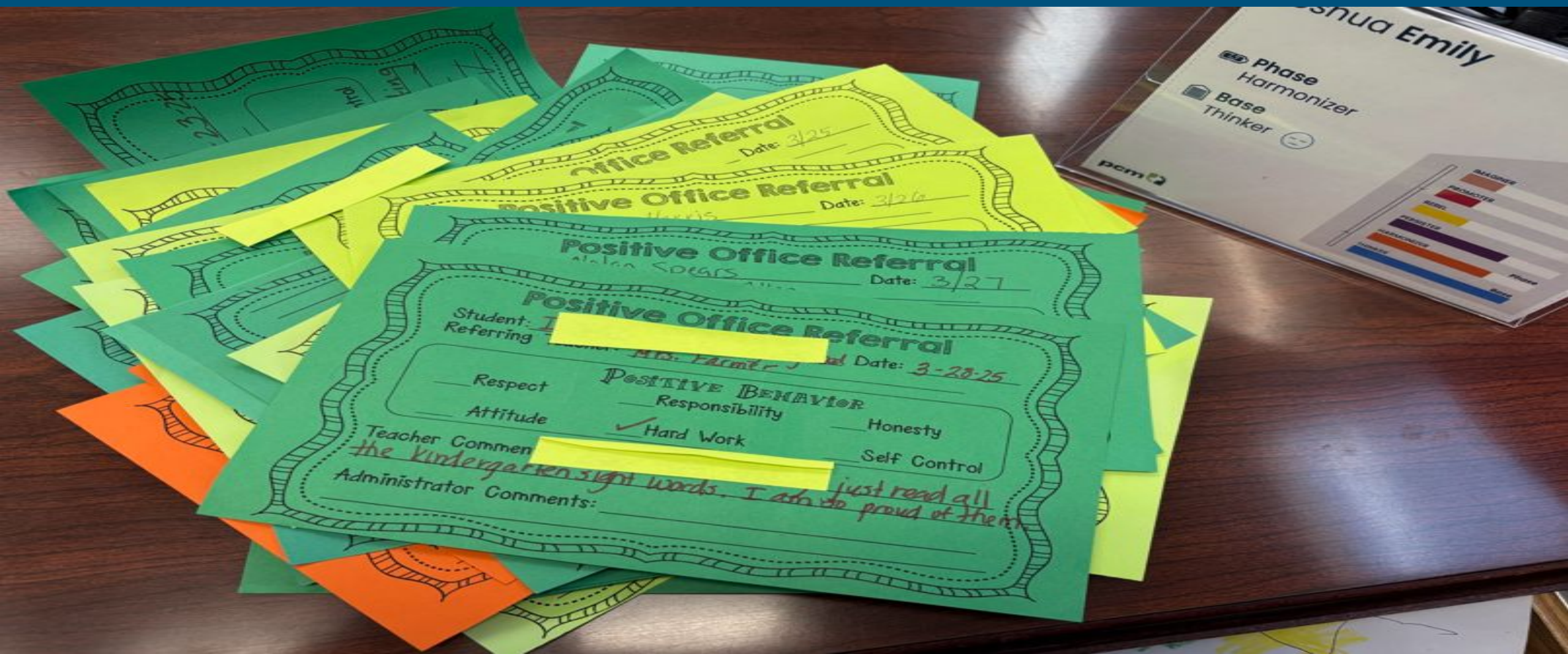
Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Data Collection

I used a spreadsheet to track my progress toward goals. At the end of each week, I filled in any days that I did not answer. I also ended each week by rating my job frustration on a scale of 1-10. Additionally, I wrote a few anecdotal notes about how I was feeling about the job that week and tried to note any obvious outliers that may have skewed the data.

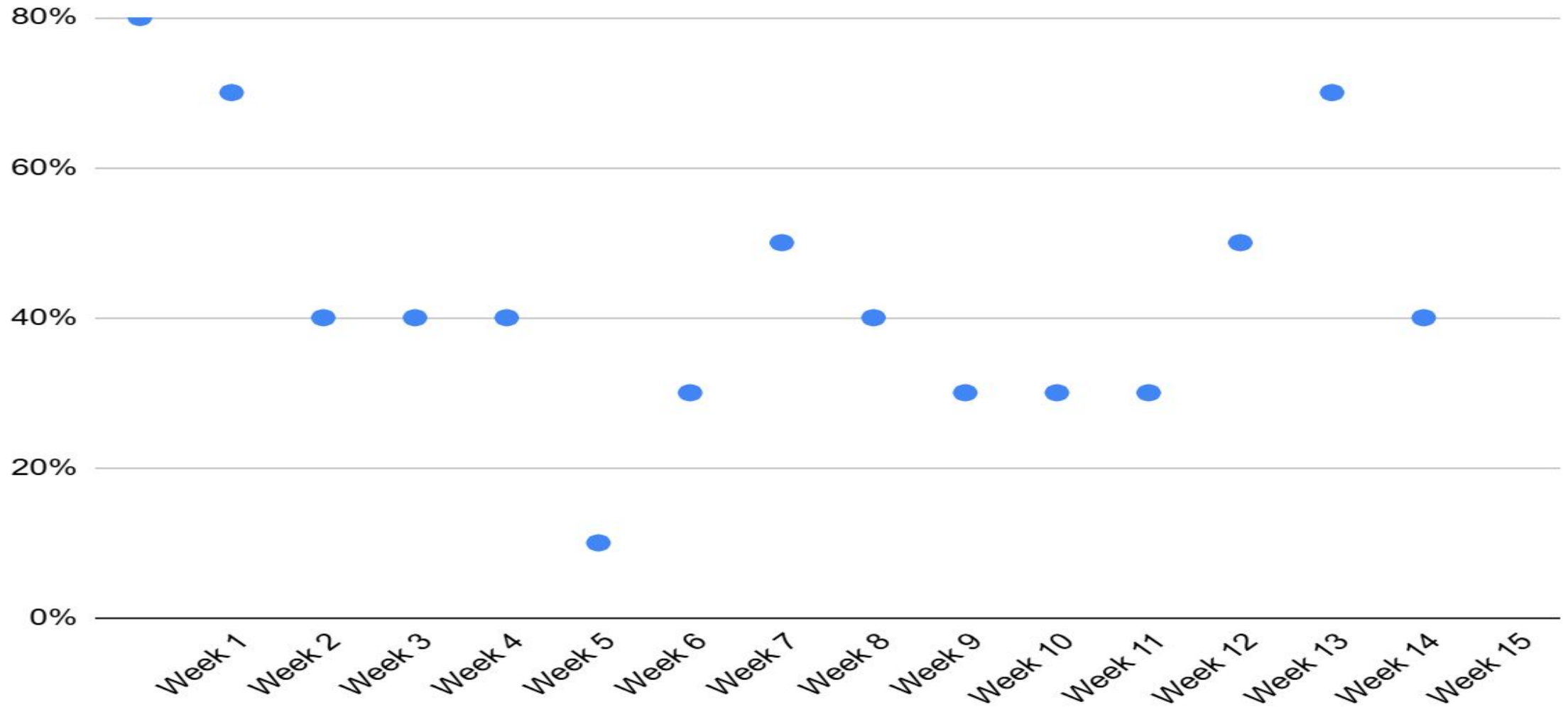
When graphing the data, I took my original 1-10 scale and converted it to a percentage of 10%-100% to clean up the graphs.

I retroactively added a week 0 to show where I was when the project began.

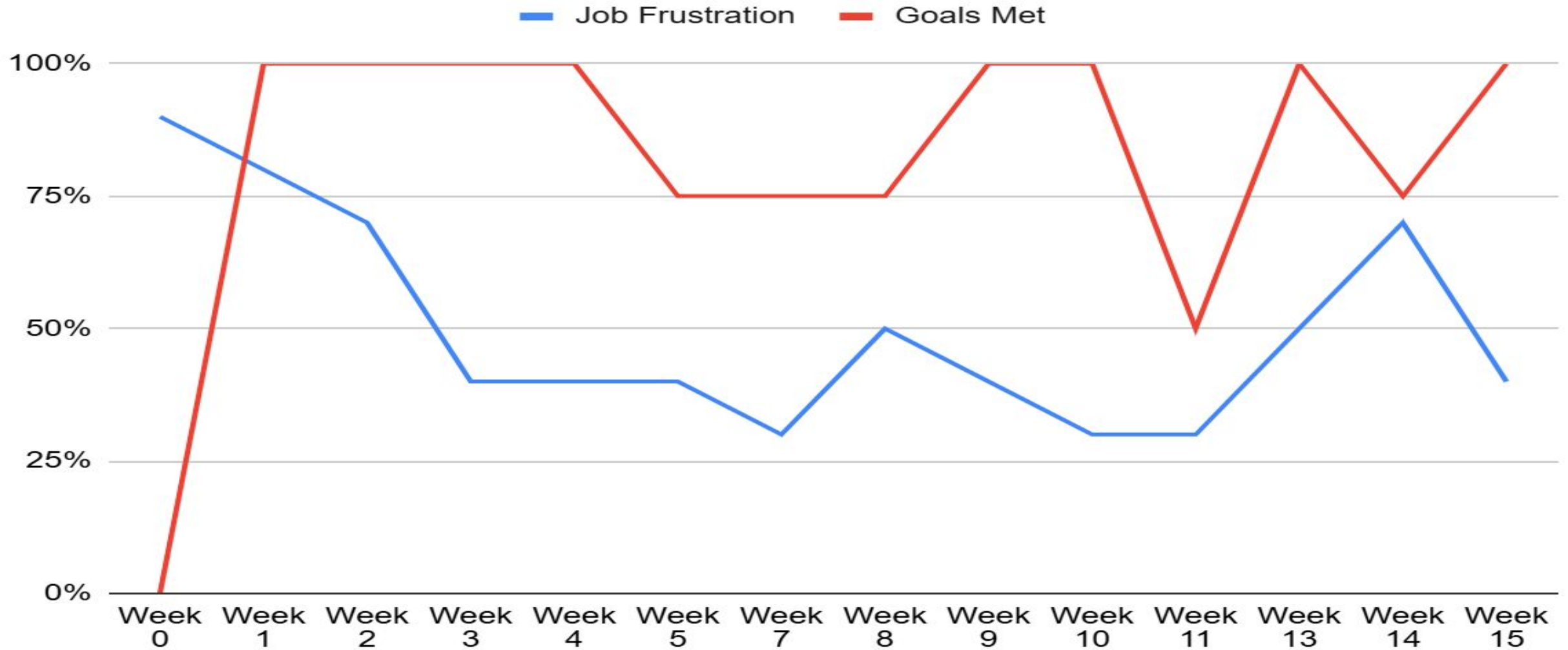
Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: My Data



Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: My Data



Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: My Data



Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: My Data

	11/4	11/5	11/6	11/7	11/8	Week 1
Each week 4 days of reaching out positively (green form call/staff note)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Each week 4 days of accomplishing 75% of daily tasks on checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Each week 4 days of 30 minutes dedicated to my own children	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Each week 4 days of 60 minutes of walking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Job Frustration	Goals Met
80%	100%

	12/2	12/3	12/4	12/5	12/6	Week 4
Each week 4 days of reaching out positively (green form call/staff note)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Each week 4 days of accomplishing 75% of daily tasks on checklist	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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40%	100%
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Feel like I have been at a breaking point at work. Trying to focus on some positives helped bring me back a bit.

Hosting a brand new event at our school, Holidays Around the World, casued extra stress, but lots of positive feelings as well.

Parent emailed complimeting on how the school feels different now and the incredible positive impact that I am having.

[IPLI AR Linked Data](#)

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Discoveries

- Trends were certainly identifiable. There is a clear inverse correlation between the percentage of goals being met over time and my job frustration.
- Week to week numbers did not show this strong inverse correlation.
- While outside factors certainly skewed the numbers, it seems as though I keyed in on a few ways to help find happiness in a job that I once loved.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Discoveries

- Trends were certainly identifiable. There is a clear inverse correlation between the percentage of goals being met over time and my job frustration.

As I repeatedly met most of my targets at a high percentage, job frustration lowered to a manageable level.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Discoveries

- Week to week numbers did not show this strong inverse correlation.

It seems as though it is okay to not complete all of my tasks each week. As long as I am making a concerted effort to focus on positives, take time for myself, triage my to do list, and keep my children as a priority then I can handle the frustrations that come with our job.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Discoveries

- While outside factors certainly skewed the numbers, it seems as though I keyed in on a few ways to help find happiness in a job that I once loved.

Major outside factors were at play during this study. Some I should have predicted (state testing) and some I could not have (district agreeing to let me hire an AP). There will always be outside factors, but if I key in on what I need to do, I can continue to move in a positive direction even if there are some weeks that are better or worse than others.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: What's Next

I need to continue to feed my Phase Harmonizer. I think our school has established the positive office referrals as an important part of our culture. This project has given me the opportunity to grant myself permission to prioritize my children and myself. Triaging my to do list and completing it at a high success rate will be the most challenging habit to continue, but I believe it is an important piece of the happiness puzzle for me.

Harmonizer-Rediscover Passion: Bibliography

Regier, N. (2020). Seeing People Through: Unleash Your Leadership Potential. Penguin Random House