

Local Government
Workplaces Initiative



UNC

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Emotional Labor in Social Services

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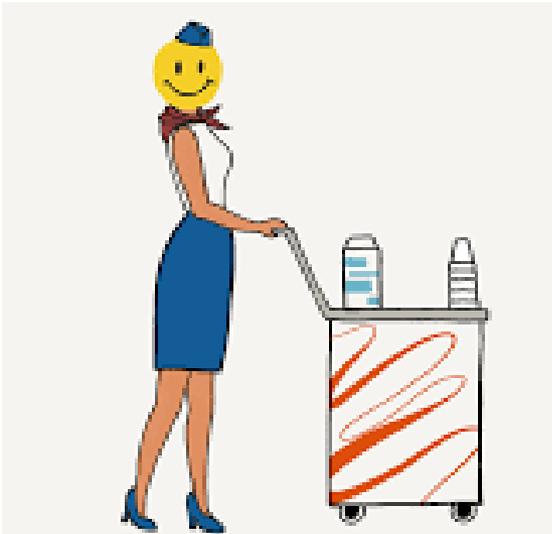
Director, Local Government Workplaces Initiative
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Today



- An interactive session
- Chat (you can chat directly to me, no names named)

Emotional Labor



- Coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild
- Faking, suppressing, altering emotions to do the job as expected
- Demanded by intense interpersonal work
- Managing emotions for a wage

On the Razor's Edge: Emotional Labor and Crisis Response

- Public servants provide *safe harbor*...emotional labor is part of that (Mastracci, Guy and Newman (2011))
- *Intense and unscripted contact between citizens and the state, when lives have been turned upside down by human and natural disasters*

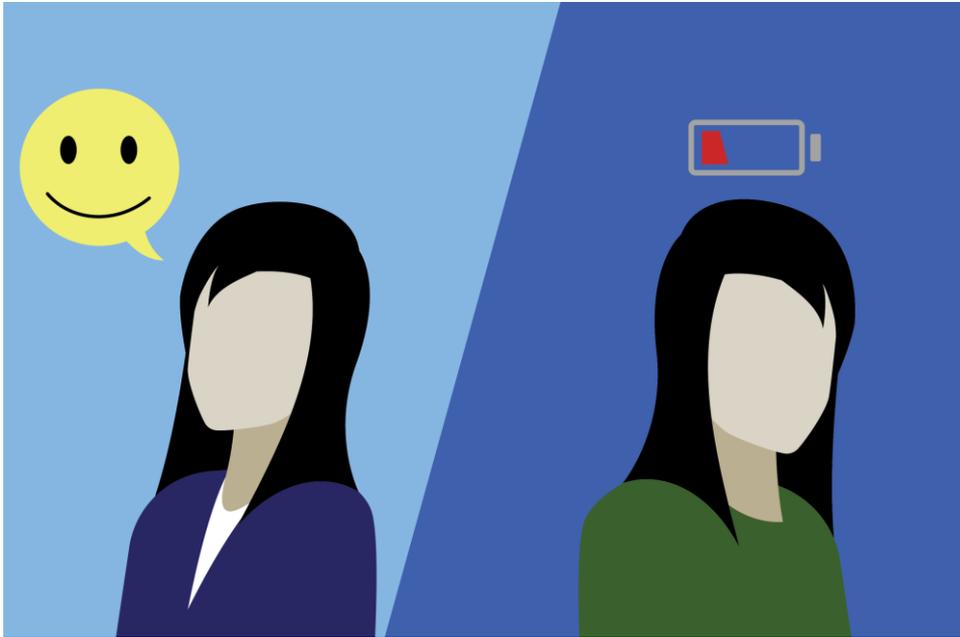


High Emotional Labor Occupations

- “Listening occupations”
- Firefighters
- Police
- Dispatch workers
- Rape crisis counselors
- EMS responders
- Public health professionals
- How are social services a listening occupation?

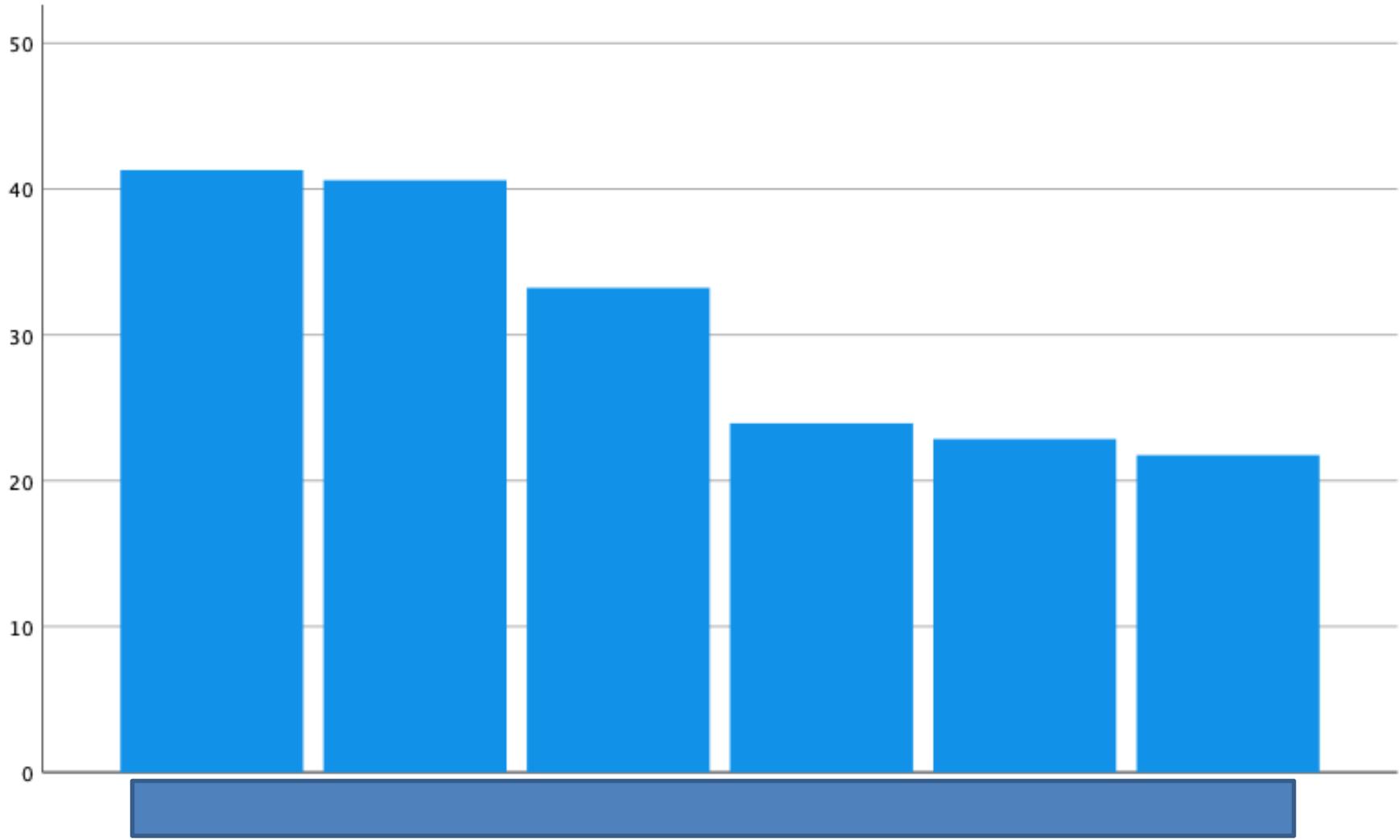


Why Care?



- Emotional labor can
 - Increase or decrease job satisfaction (Lam and Chen 2012)
 - Can lead to burnout (Hsieh, Jin, & Guy, 2011) and self-estrangement (Sloan 2012) if not managed
 - Increase health effects for those not involved in their jobs or not identifying with organizations (Schaubroeck and Jones 2000)
 - Exhaustion, stress and depression, loss of memory, hypertension, heart disease

How does DSS rank in percentage of employees who feel burnt out?



Source: Local Government Workplaces Initiative, Four Counties, n=1,594

Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down

- The “display rules” expected on the job by organization or profession
 - Police: Stern and authoritative
 - Utility billing: Friendly
- What are the display rules for social services?



Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down



- What you feel inside
 - What range of emotions do you feel on the job?

Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down

- Your **process** for reconciling internal emotions with external expectations
 - Creating mental “compartments and closets” that isolate intense memories
 - Becoming “crazy calm” in disastrous situations
 - Using humor and common sense to help cope with the situations experienced
 - Do these resonate with you? Are there others missing?



Emotional Labor Can Be Challenged By

- Unsympathetic supervisors
- Burdensome paperwork
- Resource constraints
- An uninformed unsympathetic public
- Uncooperative clientele
- Other challenges to emotional labor?



Find the Emotional Labor

Every time I train them in emotional survival, I tell the story of the shooting, and I do think the more you discuss something you've been involved with...Every time I discuss it I find new things to deal with that I don't know are there, and I think as a law enforcement officer, I envision my mind as being rooms and rooms and rooms, of rows and rows and rows of filing cabinets where I'm collecting this negative stuff and just putting it back, putting it back. And, so I don't know how it is truly affecting me until I'm talking about it, and ultimately...When I talk about these incidents, or that incident in particular, I find new ways every time, and sometimes there are old things that come up, but I say, you know what, I dealt with that a little bit easier this time. It wasn't as hard to talk about that this time, or now I understand why that was hard to talk about—

Narcotics Task Force Officer



Find the Emotional Labor



- We were collecting in a nice part of town and one house had a busted yard waste bag in front. We didn't pick it up and the man came out. He was walking around me and calling me all kinds of bad names, worthless, no good and lazy. I kept telling him to call my supervisor and he would explain it. It seemed the more I talked, the madder he got, so I just shut up. His sons came out and went around my helper. Then they blocked the door of our truck. I had a helper with me that day cause I was hurt. I kept thinkin', what am I going to do if he lays his hands on me? Am I allowed to defend myself? I could lose my job. I wanted to call my supervisor and ask him. I wasn't scared, I was just thinkin' on what was going to happen next. Finally, one of his sons tossed the bag in the truck and they let us go. I was just glad he didn't put his hands on me. –Sanitation Worker

Find the Emotional Labor

- I can't think of anything I would rather be doing right now other than this. This is me, and most of the people that work in our county, I believe, are the same way. Now, do we bite our tongues a lot? ...Are there things that we would like to say that we don't because we are representing our county, and...I would love to be able to tell that person that shot up heroin, you're just stupid, but I don't. I would love to be able to tell that person that's addicted to an opiate, you're gonna die, you're dumb, you need to get your life cleaned up. But, I don't. -- *EMS Supervisor*



Find the Emotional Labor

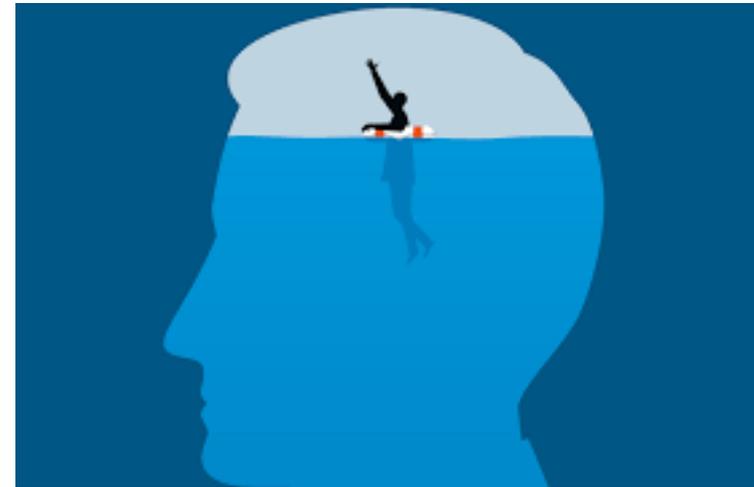
- My mental health at work is totally different than my mental health at home. When I'm at home I'm in momma mode, and I'm...I have a 4-month-old, so I'm totally into my little world, and I honestly don't think about it until I'll be rockin' him at night, and I think...Sometimes it'll go through my mind, and I'm like, he has no clue how loved he is, and he has no clue the life that he's gonna have versus I know what some of these kids have. They don't have a mama and a daddy who jump when he cries, and they don't have an extended family who would do anything for him. So, my morale at home is fine, but I have to separate it. When I walk out the door, I have to.—*K-5 Care Nurse*



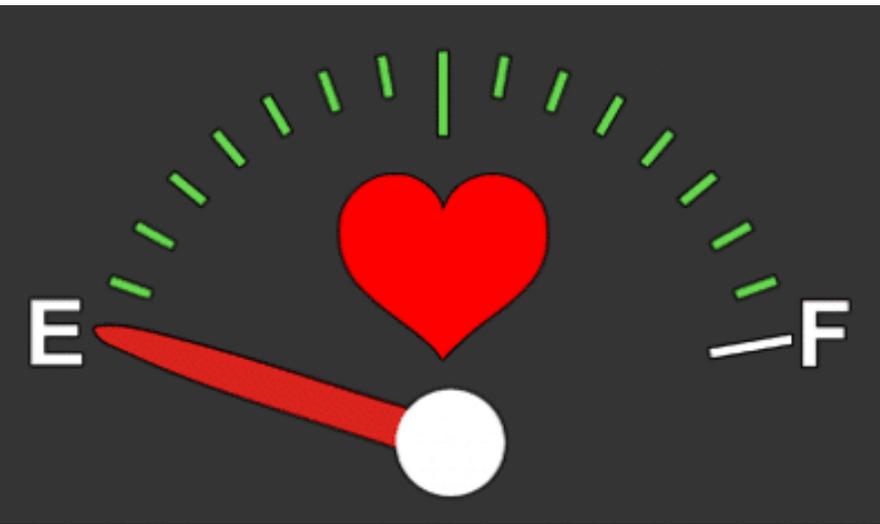
Emotional Toll

What is emotional toll

- An umbrella term for the psychological consequences of high-stress public service work
 - Workplace stress: when work demands exceed real/perceived capacity to cope;
 - Burnout: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, reduced self-efficacy
 - Secondary trauma: mimics PTSD, intrusive thoughts, avoidance, hypervigilance (startling easily)



What is emotional toll



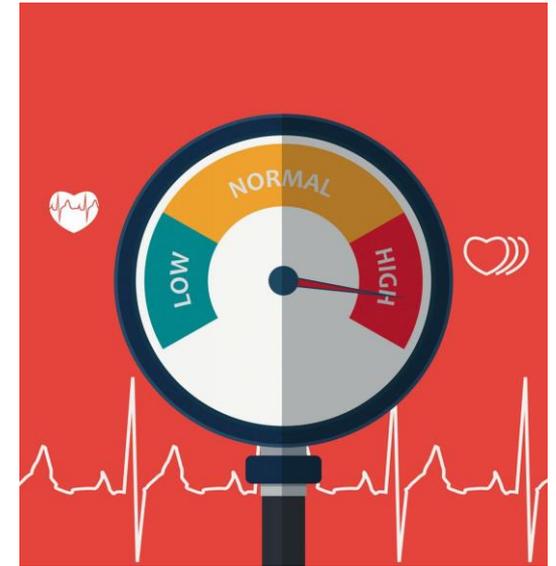
- Compassion Fatigue
 - Burnout and Secondary Trauma
- Compassion Satisfaction
 - The emotional benefits of helping, offsets compassion fatigue
- Vicarious trauma: changes in thinking about the world (safety, control, spirituality)

Poll

- Over the course of your career, how often have you felt that your job was hardening you emotionally?
 - Never sometimes
 - About half the time
 - Most of the time
 - Almost always

Consequences of Emotional Toll

- Physical (heart disease, high blood pressure, immune system, sleep disruptions)
- Mental (depression, anxiety)
- Higher insurance costs
- Reduced organizational performance
- Absenteeism, sick leave, insurance use, workers comp
- Others?



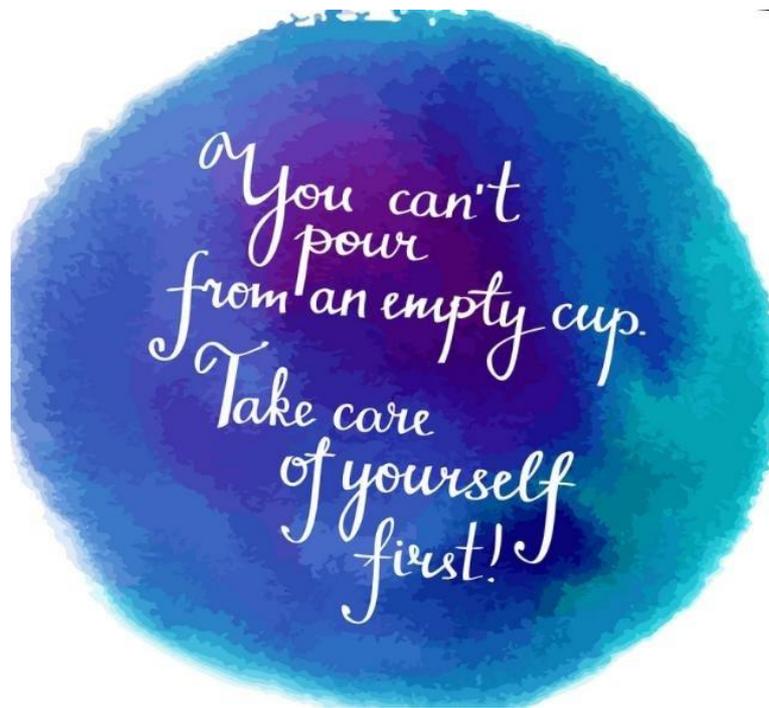
1. Jeung, Kim and Chang 2018; 2. Shirom and Eizrachi 2003 3. Jackson and Manning 1995; Manning and Jackson 1996; 4. Taris 2006; 5. Golembiewski 1987

Managing Emotional Labor and Emotional Toll

- “If you can’t take care of yourself, you can’t take care of the victim.” – Cathy Phelps, executive director of the Center for Trauma and Resilience in Denver

The Center For
Trauma &
Resilience
Formerly known as The Denver Center for Crime Victims

Managing Emotional Labor and Emotional Toll



- If you can't take care of yourself, you can't take care of _____.

Managing Emotional Labor

- Individual strategies
- Organizational Strategies



Individual Strategies



Managing Emotional Labor



- Recognize when you are experiencing emotional labor
- Breathe
- Remind yourself
 - That the stress will pass, typically in a few minutes
 - Of the big picture of the work
 - Concentrate on what the other person is trying to convey (emphathize)

Taking Care of Yourself

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Relaxation/Meditation
- Prayer/Spirituality

**SELF-CARE
ISN'T SELFISH**

Exercise



- Mental health benefits (Mikkelsen et al 2017)
 - improves anxiety, stress, depression
 - decreases inflammation
 - Improves psychological, physiological and immunological functions.
- Optimal: between 30 and 60 minutes 3 to 5 times a week (Chekroud et al 2018)

Nutrition



- More anxiety/depression with Western style diet, less with Mediterranean style diet (Owen and Corfe 2017)
 - Mediterranean diet: vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains
 - Western diet: processed foods and refined sugar

Relaxation/Meditation

- Preserves aging brain (Luders et al 2015)
- Minimizes “me” center in brain (Brewer et al 2011)
- Reduces anxiety (Zeidan 2013)
- Minimum duration for benefits: 7-8 minutes a day (Reb et al 2020)



Prayer/Spirituality



- Young adults who prayed daily tended to have fewer depressive symptoms, and higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and positive affect, in comparison to those who never prayed (Chen and VanderWeele 2018)

Do you do at least one of these?

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Relaxation/Meditation
- Prayer/Spirituality





Organizational Strategies

Managing Emotional Labor and Emotional Toll

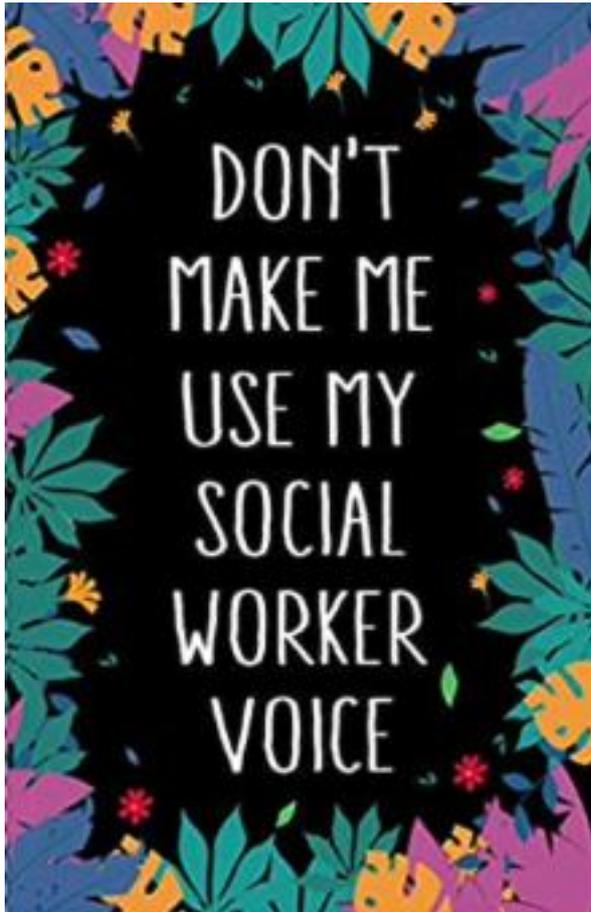
- Workplace redesign
- Health Oriented Leadership
- Critical incident stress management
- Supervisory support
- Peer-to-peer support programs



Workplace Redesign

- Many workplace stressors are preventable and changeable
 - Micromanagement
 - Absence of voice
 - Workplace incivility
 - Lack of communications
 - Perceived favoritism
 - Toxic workplace culture
- Survey department employees to pinpoint problems, focus groups to identify solutions, management commitment to responding.

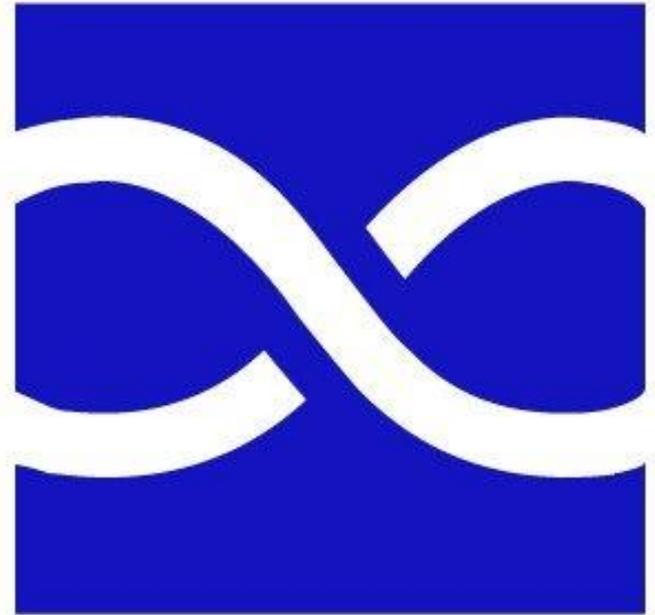




Upper management rarely gets input from those doing the job on how the job can be done better. Upper management (program managers, division directors, directors) forms a very tight "clique", and thoughts and ideas from outsiders are not taken into consideration very often. – Social Work Supervisor

Health-Oriented Leadership

- Leaders:
 - Are attentive and sensitive to emotional/physical health of workers
 - Promote health-related activities among workers
 - Prioritize physical/emotional health in workplace
 - Considered a competency in social work leadership (Hussain and Ashcroft 2020)



Supervisory Support



- When supervisors are trained to provide professional support to employees
- Supervisory support entails
 - Training to understand emotional labor and toll
 - Goal setting to reach out to employees periodically
 - Evaluation to measure the effects of supervisory support

Peer Support

- When co-workers provide support
- **Guidelines (Creamer, et al, 2012)**
 - **Clarify goals** to (a) provide an empathetic, **listening ear**; (b) provide **low level psychological intervention**; (c) identify **colleagues** who may be **at risk** to themselves or others; and (d) **facilitate** pathways to **professional help**
 - **Formal training** for peer supporters
 - **Mental health professional** involvement
 - Peer support should be **routine**
 - Peer support programs should be **evaluated**



Other Strategies

- Fitness on duty-Burlington, NC
- Recreational activities on duty (yoga, cooking, pottery, meditation, fitness) Morganton, WV
- Gym memberships
- Counselor on staff (or contracted out)
- Shift work changes
- Others?



Small Group Discussion

- How is your agency doing with managing emotional health of employees?
- What more could your agency be doing?

Questions? Comments?