

SECONDARY TRAUMA: RELATIONSHIPS THAT HURT AND RELATIONSHIPS THAT HEAL

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DEGREES OF CONNECTION

- In specialty court, the reason you are successful with a defendant is because you've intimately invested in their welfare.
- You know the details of their life.
- You get into the crevices of how they manage their decisions and you try to coach them, support them, and keep them safe.

YOU

- **You serve** the deep-end defendants who have been unreachable, unteachable, and rejected.
- **You work** with highly mistrustful people who often have misdiagnosed mental health problems.
- **You listen** to traumatized people who have been in and out of addiction programs which have not been trauma-informed.

YOUR DEFENDANT

- Your defendant has lost hope of success, recovery, or life in the mainstream.
- They have compromised or lost their important relationships.
- They have internalized a sense of not just failing but of ‘being’ failures.

EXTREMELY HIGH STAKES

- Failure for your defendant will be very high.
- Jail, prison, or death is a higher stakes outcome than most professionals cope with on a daily basis.
- This is a heavy burden.

VULNERABILITY

- Your work creates an intimate interface with a defendant:
 - You build a relationship with them.
 - You invest in them.
 - You celebrate sobriety with them.
 - You grieve their losses, feel their trauma, and hurt when they hurt.

SECONDARY TRUAMA IS A WORK HAZARD

- Increased absenteeism
- Anxiety/depression/exhaustion
- Job turnover
- Physical illness
- Insomnia
- Hypertension/weight gain, muscle and bone disorder

THE PARADOX

- Our greatest strengths become our greatest weaknesses.
- The capacity to share, connect, empathize, problem-solve, and engage deeply is what makes us good at what we do. It also leaves us vulnerable.

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

- You become the strength they do not have and their substitute family.
- You offer a relationship that holds them accountable.
- You are there when they need you and often when they don't want you.
- **AND YOU DON'T ASK FOR HELP OFTEN**

BOUNDARIES ARE TRICKY

- We are taught to have clear boundaries.
- We have been trained in 'you and me'.
- There becomes an 'us' in the process of the work you do.
- As we give and receive, we become more human, more helpful, more authentic, more available, and **MORE VULNERABLE**.

INTENSITY

- The intensity of the relationship may not be something you were prepared for.
- It is a different way to do business.
- The relationships look and feel different.
- You want to help them, be effective, and still have good statistics for your program.

RELATIONSHIPS ARE AN INVESTMENT

- We work harder for someone who seems invested in our success.
- The relationships we create are the only tool we really have to make a difference.
- Clients always refer to a relationship, not a program.

BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP

- We re-parent these clients in many ways. This can be a reason to succeed and a source of motivation.
- **However, if we don't sustain our own care, we will quickly run out of steam.**
- The challenge is to find the time to connect and still have a life. People in management must see how hard staff work.

BUT WE GET HOOKED

- They need us to support them!!!!
- It our job to hang in there????
- They just need a little more time.....
- At least they are not getting worse@#\$^
- There are no other options for this guy.

- **AND WE ARE HAUNTED BY FAILURES.**

NEW DATA

- It is not how demanding your job is or the level of responsibility, but how much control you have in performing the work.
- The more control or options you have to do your job, the less stress you will feel.

LEARNING FROM SUCCESS

- The most successful professionals, including athletes, surgeons, and scientists, tell us we have to know when we CAN'T help, and learn from that process.

Miller, S., Hubble, M. & Mathieu, F. (2015, May-June). Burnout Reconsidered: What Supershrinks Can Teach Us. *Psychotherapy Networker*, 18-23;42-43.

ACCEPT YOUR LIMITS

- We have to know our limits.
- We can't solve it all, even when others expect us to. Even worse, when we expect to.
- We also need to learn how to admire our capacity.
- We are amazing, we just forget that, almost every single day.

UNMANAGEABLE WORKLOADS

Too tired to work
Too much work to sleep



MICRO SELF-CARE

- Micro self-care is about making small changes with reliable frequency.
- Neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to reorganize itself with new neural networks) happens with brief, repetitive experiences.
- Small and frequent works better than big and seldom.

I simply don't have time
at the end of my day for
my good intentions.



“What fits your busy schedule better, exercising one hour a day or being dead 24 hours a day?”

FIND A MANTRA

- This work is very important.
- I make a difference.
- I contribute to the greater good.
- Everyone deserves another chance.

THE PLAN

- One-minute meditation by Martin Boroson (**relax**)
- Tense major muscles, breathe, and relax for 5 seconds. Repeat 3 times. (**energize**)
- Sit still, look at a loved photo or object, and repeat your mantra about connectedness to others. (**grounding**)

MOVE YOUR BODY

- The lack of exercise and immobility of our work lives is creating an epidemic of physical and mental health problems that is as serious to our generation as chronic smoking.
- It is the new national health care crisis.

BE WHERE YOU ARE

- This is mindfulness.
- Take a seat, take a breath, and simply commit to being aware of the present moment.

HAVE A SUPPORT SYSTEM

- You need as much support as you need.
- Having someone to share your ups and downs with on a regular basis, even for short periods of time, can make the difference between depletion and sustenance.
- **IT IS OK TO BE OFF-TASK!**

COMPARTMENTALIZE

- When we get too focused on the long list in front of us, we can be demoralized and overwhelmed.
- One meeting at a time, one day at a time, one challenge at a time. **Hey, does that ring a bell?**
- If we teach it, we need to reach it.

LEARN TO SAY NO

- Learn to MEAN IT when you say it.
- Learn not to feel guilty about saying it.
- Learn to let others take over.
- Be a 2-year-old again, they say “NO” a lot.
- Review Step #1.

UNPLUG

- We have fewer “real” boundaries or limits around our personal time.
- We use email/voicemail/laptops/iPhones as a convenience but have trained people to think we are always accessible.
- How many portals of entry into your life do you tolerate or want?

LACK OF SLEEP

‘Getting too little sleep can have serious health consequences, including depression, weight gain, heart disease and probably mortality.’

-Steven Feinsilver, director of the Center for Sleep Medicine at Mount Sinai School of Medicine

McDonald, J. (2015). Sleep Like a Pro. *TIME: The Science of Sleep*, 56-65.

SLEEP AND LEARNING

- Sleep helps build long-term memories and fully incorporating the day's lessons requires a full night's sleep.
- “If you don't sleep the night after training, then even if you sleep the next night or the next night, you never learn.”
 - Charles Czeisler, director of sleep medicine at Harvard Medical School and consultant to NASA, the Secret Service, and the NBA

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

- Every one of us has a weak point. The body compensates, but only when it has to.
- Our organ systems are all interrelated. Some are more susceptible to stress than others.
- What hurts first? The early warning signs...
- **This is true on a larger agency scale as well.**

GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

- We need to pay attention to the symptoms we develop, our family history, and our level of distress/impairment.
- We need to trust that getting help is good.
- Identify our barriers (shame, guilt, fear).

BREAK THE RULES

Play before work—the work is never done.

Have dessert before the veggies—your stomach can't hold all the food.

Sleep as late as your teenager—make it a contest.

NEVER TOO LATE

- Success is relationship-based.
- They deserve and need services.
- Their brain is **experience-dependent**. It will use whatever comes its way to manage the world—it will compensate.
- So will YOURS!



IT IS ALL CONNECTED

- The greatest predictor of positive outcomes for our clients is the manner in which we interact with each other.
- Positive relationships and care in the work environment directly impact our ability to extend this to our client system.

HOPE AND CONNECTION

- One of the greatest things we do to improve our defendants' lives is offer hope.
- Every opportunity we have to form a connection, however brief, is an opportunity to make a difference.

PROMOTE HEALING

Healing happens in the context of a relationship:

- Harmful and unreliable relationships caused the problem.
- Safe, predictable relationships will restore hope and a context for learning what was never mastered.
- Be the hand the rocks their cradle.

MICRO MOMENTS

- “Micro-moments” of connection (e.g. sharing a smile or expressing concern):
 - Improve emotional resilience
 - Boost immune system
 - Reduce susceptibility to depression and anxiety

Barbara Frederickson, as cited by E. Millard (“The Power of Kindness”; ExperienceLife.com)

THE GIFT OF YOU

- If you could not feel their pain, you would not feel their joy.
- If you did not grieve their relapse, you could not celebrate their sobriety.
- If you could not understand their losses, you would not strive to help them make gains.





BELIEVE

Believe that you make a difference every day.

Believe in the power of the human spirit.

Believe in yourself and what you bring to the
process.

PUT YOUR HAND ON YOUR HEART

- Our physiology is hardwired to recognize this as a self-soothing gesture.
- **BE WHERE YOU ARE!**

EARNED ATTACHMENT

- This is the reason we keep trying.
- Humans are biologically-driven to crave connection and companionship.
- There is always the opportunity to feel loved and love others.
- The need for recovery and connection is greater than the hurt that has been done.

COURAGE AND DETERMINATION

- If you can't be courageous, be determined.
You will end up in the same place.

THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE FOR CHANGE

- People can and do overcome the negative effects of insecure attachment under the right circumstances.
- The hill is less steep when we're with a buddy.
- The backpack is lighter when we hold hands.