Transcript - Resiliency Foundations: Your Role in a Healthier and Stronger Workplace

Welcome, everyone to the National Criminal Justice Training Center webinar. Our topic today is the Resiliency Foundations-- Your Role in a Healthier and Stronger Workplace. My name is Katie Koleske, and I will be your moderator for today.

Resiliency Foundations-- Your Role in a Healthier and Stronger Workplace is part of NCJTC's two-day program, Organizational Resilience Starts with You, which focuses on strengthening resilience and wellness within the workplace. If you find today's material valuable, consider hosting the full training at your agency or attending the entire course. For more details on hosting, please contact us at info@ncjtc.org. Don't miss these upcoming training offerings. To register or view the most current dates and times, please visit ncjtc.org/contracting.

We are so fortunate to have Melissa and David with us today. With that, I'll turn the time over to Melissa and David.

Thank you, Katie. Good afternoon. Good morning to some on the other side of the country. My name is Melissa Kaiser. I come to you from Florida, where it's a lot warmer than a lot of places. I was just back home in North Dakota, where it was 7 degrees, which is pretty normal this time of year.

But Dave and I are really excited to be here. Love to see the variety of all that are attending. We made sure that this course was applicable to everybody in the audience here in terms of what discipline you come from. So we're really excited to throw a really short snippet of our two-day conference at you to see if this is something of interest and hope that you can also leave with some tools and resources today.

My background is in social work. I've been a social worker for about 15 years. The last decade, I've been in the antihuman trafficking space. I helped start the North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force and was in that role for a really long time and recently transitioned out. I now train and consult on antitrafficking around the country and am a consultant with NCJTC, which I'm really excited about. I've been with them for a little over a year. And with Dave, we've created this organizational resiliency course. And so I'm very excited to be here.

Thank you. And Melissa, I'm glad that you mentioned the weather because for those of us that are cold and up north, this class will give you a little bit of warmth, hopefully, in terms of some of the things that you can do to really improve your own mental health and wellness. I'm Dave Frattare. I had the pleasure of being in law enforcement now for almost 28 years. I spent the last two decades working internet crimes against children. I'm fortunate enough to work for a regional ICAC Task Force Program here in Cleveland, Ohio. And nothing more satisfying than the work that we do to protect children, as most of you on the webinar today can appreciate.

But for the longest time, we didn't really take care of our people. And for all the success that we've had, we really failed in that area of building resiliency and morale and making sure people were taken care in terms of their own mental health and wellness. So a lot of love of labor that went into the creation of this class. It's been a few years since we started really kind of putting our heads together with it. And so, hopefully, you grab something from this very short time that we're together. And, as you heard earlier, there's a two-day class that we hope you'll consider joining if you find today's webinar useful.

As Melissa said, we're going to really just run through this, kind of almost like drinking from a fire hose, if you will. But you're going to get a lot of what we will talk about in this two-day class. What is organizational resiliency? We're going to talk a little bit about being well and, obviously, the concerns of burnout and compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma and, really, the importance of self-care.

There's a reason that the title of the course is Organizational Resiliency Begins with You. We want you to recognize that have the power and some tools and some techniques to really bring about a change within yourself and maybe about your organization as well. And then we'll give you some tools and assessments. Melissa's got a lot of great assessments that can help improve or your organization.

I read this book a long time ago, and we really start off the class with this because I think, for a number of us, myself included, for a long time, I believed that my agency needed to really set the tone for how they were going to take care of me. I did 12 years with a state attorney general's office in Pennsylvania. I've done 14-15 years now with a county prosecutor here in Cleveland. And for the longest time, we didn't have anything.

And so I think if you're waiting for someone else to address this problem, you may be waiting a lot longer than you'd like. So I want you to think about that. We both want you to think about some things that have the power to do, that you have the tools, you have the techniques, you have a thinking mindset, in a sense, to be able to get on that right path and really build that mental health and resilience.

And when Dave talks about resilience, one thing we really want you to take back is the idea of how do we bounce back. How do we have the capacity to recover from the high stress, high traumatic spaces that you all work in and normalize that? So not only within ourselves and understand that sometimes it's OK when we're not OK, but also to normalize that within your organization because the more we can normalize that and find tools and openly talk about resilience, the more we'll have it right, the more we have support for one another, the more we forgive ourselves and give ourselves grace in these moments.

And one thing I always say is that therapists have therapists. And I know, for some of us, we feel like those of us in these positions can't ask for help or shouldn't need help. That is not the case here. The people that we literally go to for therapy also go to therapists themselves, just like Tiger Woods has his own golf coach. Even the best of the best need support. And so thinking about it that way, how can we have the capacity to bounce back through our social, emotional, physical, spiritual senses as well and utilizing those when we talk about and think about our own resilience and what we can offer to others.

And the way I visualize this is, I guess, in my day and time, we had those clowns that would literally bounce up, and you could punch them. They were like punching bags, and they'd fall to the ground and bounce right back up. Those of you that remember that toy, that's what I like to think about in terms of envisioning resilience and how we can utilize that moving forward.

And I think that capacity piece is important as well-- I mean, how much of something we can deal with or we can take at any given time. I think we build that capacity over time. Before we had a mental health and wellness program in our office, I was a lot more susceptible to some of the issues that we're going to talk about. And so now, having built up that resiliency, that's also built my capacity to take on more to deal with more, but also, like Melissa's analogy, to be able to bounce back from some of the things that we're experiencing.

You don't need a slide like this to tell you why this class is important. But, I mean, we're all under a lot of stress. I can almost guarantee that without having met any of you, you're dealing with some sort of stress in your life. Maybe it's not chronic stress, but it's something that you have to deal with every day. On top of that, you may be dealing with some bad management practices or issues with your boss or your boss's boss.

Regardless, we're seeing a lot of research that's coming out, especially as we start to move further and further from COVID-- we saw some trends early on in those days of COVID where companies were taking care of their employees. And then, as we get further in from that, we start to see going, we're going back to that old way of doing things. So we're going to talk a lot about research too in terms of some of the stuff that we talk about because I think that's important to understand the idea from a greater good.

Again, I read this book a long time ago. And I think this is true. I mean, we are in very stressful jobs, most of us who are in law enforcement and social work and child advocacy. And we have a passion for what we do. But we need to make sure that our jobs are not affecting us physically and mentally and emotionally. We talk a lot about how it used to be.

In our class that we did a few months ago, the first class that we were able to do in person, we had an individual in law enforcement say, hey, we used to be told to bury it and just deal with it. And so, obviously, we want to move from that. We want to normalize, as Melissa said, the conversation and reduce the stigma that surrounds being able to talk about mental health and wellness.

And just to piggyback off of Dave's point here, looking at what we already know, if not us-- because a lot of times I hear, well, I'm fine. And then I talk to those people and say, well, do you know someone who wasn't? And, unfortunately, for a lot of us, we know someone where it was too late. And so if not us needing the help, wouldn't we want to know the questions or be supportive to our colleague before they horrifically take their life? Because, in our professions, this is what's happening. And our jobs should never literally kill us or get us to the brink of feeling like we want another way out.

And so, again, thinking of the goal of not only resilience, but we could be saving people's lives by just normalizing the conversation and start to talk about the taboo piece of this, which is we are losing lives of those of us that choose these fields, and how do we take care of each other.

And so why is it important? I think number one, we want to remember what it was like when we started in whatever line of work that we're in. Why do we do this job? Why do we continue to deal with the issues and the stresses of the things that we do? Hopefully, it's because, at some point, you recognized a reason that you wanted to get into this in the first place.

And I think, a lot of times, as we go through life, we go through our careers, the thoughts that we had early on, the passions that we had early on, the feelings, they start to diminish. So we'll talk a little bit about that why and that mission statement that you may have that may continue to help you move forward.

We don't let our emotions get the best of us. I know that's easier said than done. Working in government for almost 30 years now, it's very easy to be dealing with things and have to deal with your emotions as well. And, sometimes, that gets us into trouble. But I think also too, we want to be able to show up for those that we care about.

I've often said to my folks, if you're not feeling well today, I'd rather you take some time and improve yourself, do a little self-care because if you're going to come out on a warrant, if you have to go out and interview a child and you're not at your best, then that interview may suffer. That search warrant, that arrest, that operation, or that investigation that we do, that may suffer.

So it's kind of like when you get a good night's sleep and you eat a great breakfast and you feel great coming in as opposed to staying up all night and doing some things we used to do when we were young, and we're not feeling so well the next day. So it's about showing up as well.

And then bottom line, too, the community, your staff help, client satisfaction, whatever it is you work in, you improving yourself is going to pay dividends for the people that are also a part of what you do on a daily basis.

And just before we really dig into some of the tools, we don't get compassion fatigue, we don't get vicarious trauma because you did something wrong. You get it because you care. And it's surprising to me at the same time as it's not in our professions how many people just need to hear that. Before you are your profession, you are a human first. All of us are, obviously.

And so thinking about we are going to be impacted by other people's pain, by seeing the worst things in the world, that people outside of our professions just don't always know or understand or can't grasp. And so just understanding that, as people, we will absolutely be affected by what we see and the pain and the pressure and the stress and the trauma of the work that we do. So understanding you develop compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma because you care-- and we'll dig into more of those terms in a little bit in terms of what they really mean.

And I think it's important, too, to understand that, everything is interconnected. I mean, we talk a little bit in the class about this idea of work-life balance. But, to me, it's not about I'm not going to worry about work when I'm at home, and I'm not going to bring my personal life to the office. I think, for me, work-life balance is this idea that I feel safe. I feel safe enough at work to be able to talk about the things that are going on in my personal life. And I also feel safe enough at home to talk about some of the things that I'm dealing with when I'm in a professional environment.

So I think all of these things are really interconnected in the sense that our career may drive how we act socially, financial issues that we're dealing with, our physical health, having the energy to get things done. Like, when we're physically fit, our careers flourish and our social lives flourish. And maybe we're more involved in the community, and we like where we live. And so I think all of those things are important to look at as one larger group as opposed to trying to isolate your career from your social life or your professional from your personal life. So we're going to talk about that a little bit as well.

I think, at some point, we've all felt burned out. I know there's been times where, when I look at this list of really the six causes, I can check off at one time or another or a reason why I felt burned out. The workload is obviously getting more than we can handle at times. We often will say, there's no reward, or the public reward is we'd like a little bit of notoriety. None of us got into this job, at least from a law enforcement standpoint, I think, for the reward and the notoriety of it. But every so often, that is helpful when you're recognized for the good work that you do.

We know that our system is not always fair, and we know that, especially in a law enforcement standpoint, public's not necessarily on our side all the time. Society has taken a different view of how we operate. So it's easy to see why these are the reasons that they are for burnout. And we saw a lot of that during the COVID era, or during the pandemic when people were isolated and they were home alone and we saw increases of burnout. Melissa, do you have anything to add for this?

No I think to your point, looking at this and kind of using it almost as a reassessment to check in once in a while, whether you're in leadership to say, OK, what do we see some of the issues that people are burning out, or you personally to say, what am I struggling with and what can I do with it? If I'm struggling with reward, is that something I feel comfortable going to my team or my supervisor or what have you? So I think even utilizing this list ongoing as a resource to you to check in with your team or with yourself is really helpful.

And then just something else kind of food for thought. And this is something I've struggled with myself as a social worker and being very passionate about what I do, especially in the trafficking space-- wanting to talk about it, wanting to educate people. And frankly, I don't know how I would introduce myself without talking about my career.

And so thinking about for you, again, what else is important in life outside of what your job is because a lot of us, when we meet someone new, that's immediately what we talk about or a big point of conversation is our jobs-- but just to challenge yourself to think about how would I introduce myself without mentioning career? What would that look like? What's important to me? What would I want people to know? What do I value in myself if it's not just solely about career? And I think a lot of us struggle with that because our careers become a lifestyle, and some of us get addicted to the work.

And this is a great slide. I hang this up, and this constant reminder of this because I think we need to practice this. We need to practice having conversations where we put ourselves first. We've always said that self-care is selfish in a sense. But you need to make time for yourself. You need to have things that define you other than the work that you do.

And just to go back to my point earlier, I love this quote. A lot of people use this quote, and I I'm glad because it's something to remind ourselves too. "The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet." So whether this is something you take with you or, again, bring back to the workplace to talk about how we normalize the experience because our jobs come with a lot of high pressure and high trauma, and we get into the norm of that, and we kind of forget how much we see every day and how that's actually impacting us internally. And we stuff a lot of it away.

So talking about the different terms you have all heard us-- myself and Dave mention so far. Just a real quick recap about what each one of these is. For the five terms listed here, you can have all of these at once. You can have one at a time, and they can come and go. I think what we tend to do is umbrella everything under the term burnout.

But burnout can happen in any type of profession. It does not have to be specific to the type of high stress, high trauma positions that we're in. It's the high workload, low pay. Maybe you just don't like the job. Maybe you're not passionate about the type of work. You're frustrated. There's not really purpose. Maybe you don't get along with your supervisor.

So, really, the cure for burnout in any profession is just to get a new job where we are valued or we found a job that we're passionate about. So, again, burnout happens in any profession, kind of like overworked, underpaid type of mentality. You're just kind of over it. You're exhausted of it.

Post-traumatic stress disorder-- of course, not surprising to anybody to hear that term on here. But it's really when all of these terms on here start to be so recurrent, like you have tons of stress and anxiety. Maybe you start to avoid Places, people, things. You have invasive thoughts or flashbacks. And PTSD is obviously a mental health diagnosis.

So, really, when you think about is the work impacting my day-to-day functioning, which might be I'm avoiding certain places, or I have invasive thoughts, or I have night terrors every night and I can't go to sleep, that's now going to be looked at as a mental health diagnosis, that post-traumatic stress disorder, which can be very common in our types of work.

Moral suffering-- there's a difference between moral injury, which came out of the military, and moral distress, which came out of health care. And just for sake of time, the way I like to use these as examples is obviously within our jobs, we're going to have some moral conflicts at times of, like, what I believe as a person should happen versus the policies or ethics of my job.

So for me, in social work, the moral distress might come from I finally build up trust and rapport with somebody, and then they tell me something that's reportable, and we know that that's going to shatter all of their trust, all of the progress we've made, and it's going to impact that client a lot in terms of the confidentiality guidelines that myself as a social worker have to follow.

So maybe I feel morally that it's not something that needs to be reported when we're making all this progress and things are going great. But I know, ethically, I have to write because my social work licensure tells me so. And so, morally, you get some conflict, which can add to that burnout.

And then moral injury might be let's say you're in law enforcement, and you and your partner respond to a scene and your partner engages in physical force, or your supervisor tells you to, and it's not something you agree with. So morally, you feel like this situation is wrong. I don't want to physically intervene. I don't think that's the right approach, but yet the job tells you have to or your partner is doing so. So, again, just thinking of examples where, morally, maybe you're conflicting with what your work or your ethics or licensure would tell you.

Secondary trauma and vicarious trauma-- that's really where you start to see a worldview shift. You get intrusive thoughts. You have repeated exposure to trauma. It maybe starts to impact your sense of self, and also thinking about when you work with victims of trauma, which each and every one of you do and have, thinking of the impacts or the effects trauma has on them.

So thinking about some of your clients, and you might say, oh yeah, those with high trauma, they experience this or they displayed this or they behaved a certain way. We also are going to behave experience in the same way. So thinking about maybe some of the symptoms or side effects your clients or the victims work with or the cases experience, we might also have very similar reactions to trauma that you would see in the individuals we work with every day.

Some things for me that are new-- becoming a mom. I've got an almost two-year-old daughter. And so now, I have noticed when I change her diaper, I have a lot of invasive thoughts about the human trafficking cases I've had of, yes, children and babies that young.

I know other colleagues in the work that have had similar experiences or just massive trust issues with men, where that's kind of that worldview shift of, boy, I see tons and tons of male offenders every day in the trafficking space. Therefore, I have a really hard time trusting men. So that's a worldview shift about how you see the world. And then those intrusive thoughts, again, like for me and my daughter, a lot of us have those, and we kind of stuff them away versus processing through them and really digging into what that is.

And then, lastly, compassion fatigue-- I call this the "eye roll" effect. It's like when someone calls you and you want to put it on mute and type your notes or write up your case or what have you. It's where you start to predetermine cases because you're literally just fatigued of giving compassion all the time. So another way or another word for this is empathic strain, so same idea. We're just so exhausted of giving empathy and compassion all day, every day that now we start to decrease our empathy, and we kind of forget why we signed up for the work.

And this is where a lot of clients or victims or survivors that we work with will say they feel we were impatient or disrespectful or kind of rushed them out the door, didn't really listen to them because we start to clump everyone together and just try to get through the day versus remembering why we signed up for the work because we're so depleted all the time.

Dave, anything you would add?

Yeah, I would agree in terms of compassion fatigue, compassion fatigue as we, especially in the internet crimes world, I mean, we've seen a huge shift from the traditional offender to child offenders. And I say child offenders, but more like child victims, where they're doing things, they're making irresponsible decisions. They're not aware of the power and the capacity of the internet. And so a lot of our cases now are where we're going out and we're interacting with kids to make sure they're on the right path, to tell their parents that they've done something wrong.

And so I find myself, at times, wishing we could work more of the true exploitation cases on horrible offenders. And, in a lot of cases, we're going out and playing babysitter to a population of kids who really don't understand the dangers of what they're doing. And I find myself, at times, doing that eye roll or being impatient and irritable, and it's really usually a light bulb moment where I remind myself of why I got into this in the first place.

And I have it at home, too. I mean, when I think about the bad days that I have, and then I talk to my adult son or my wife about their day, I really need to remind myself that even though my wife's bad day looks nothing like mine, I still want to be able to empathize with her and be there and listen and not roll my eyes or sigh like I did in the past.

Thank you for those examples. And I certainly can relate. And my significant other is in law enforcement. So some people think that that's probably a really great thing. But when we both bring compassion fatigue home, and we both bring secondary trauma home, it isn't always great-- and so having to be very purposeful about the conversations we have at home and also be very self-aware about what we bring through the door on a bad day.

So risk factors just individually-- what are your personal vulnerabilities to getting compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma? So this could be maybe you're a victim or survivor yourself. Me now, again, as a parent, a new mom, that's a new vulnerability that adds to my inability to bounce back at times or to be more sensitive to some of the work and things I see.

Do you identify with a marginalized population-- those types of things, thinking about what personally makes me vulnerable in this work. In the midst of working 60-70 hour weeks in the trafficking space, I went through a divorce. And it was really eye-opening for me to see how much my lack of trust in men now in the workplace started to trickle into my personal life because in the world of trying to date again or are these men safe people? What's their criminal background? I'm going to look up their social media. And so I could not really separate the two, which burnt me out even more and added to some of that secondary trauma I was already experiencing.

Work-related grief and loss-- like we mentioned in the beginning, we lose people in these lines of work, which is extremely tragic. We lose clients, people that we work with. And, sometimes, the grief and loss can be your favorite coworker or a trusted supervisor leaves that place of work. So thinking about those types of grief and losses that add to maybe our secondary trauma.

Indirect trauma-- again, we hear about people's trauma all the time, indirectly. Those of you in law enforcement or medical-- directly, you're seeing the trauma. And then system failures would be another risk factor for us. Again, a lot of us feel the pain of maybe we report something, but there isn't enough for anyone to move forward with removing a child from a home or what have you. And that doesn't mean people aren't doing their jobs. That just means there's some breakdowns in the system. There's some information we don't have. The workload is too high, and so things get lost in the shuffle. And so those system failures can really burn us out in these types of jobs.

And then working conditions would be another one. So do you work in a really supportive, positive environment? Or do you work somewhere that is more negative and toxic and, if you take time off, people eye roll-- oh, it must be nice, and we'll pick up the slack for this person. So how does that feel?

Those of us that are familiar with nonprofit work, with the funding that is or is not available, that can be really difficult for working with clients if our funding is tight. And then, lastly, the risk factor being sociocultural context-- so COVID, for example, or do you live in a community where you are very supported as a law enforcement officer or not supported at all as a law enforcement officer?

So thinking about the sociocultural context of where you live, what's happening in the world, the political climate that's taken over the last few years, all of that will absolutely impact your resiliency in the workplace because the sociocultural context of what impacts you personally is going to bleed into our workplace every day. We all saw what COVID did to our type of work. Those of us that had to stay working or were mandated, or the mental health in our clients was depleting. Therefore, we had more pressure and stress in our jobs, and our jobs were changing.

So just thinking about all of these things and how this can add to your own inability to bounce back because the goal is we want you all to leave with tools that you can see this coming and have the resources in place.

And I think one of those is really-- and I said this earlier, but why do you do what you do? I think it's important to have a why and not just something that's in the back of your mind but maybe something that you can either visualize or write down. Your agency, your organization has a mission statement. So can you draft your own mission statement in a sense that really speaks to why you do what you do? Maybe it's a passion for your family. Maybe it's the job. Maybe you did get into this line of work, and you still remember why you got into this in the first place.

I had an opportunity to transfer from general crimes unit, which I really didn't like, to work internet crimes. But I can't tell you really why I wanted to do that other than a desire to do something a little different. I don't think I saw the satisfaction in the work that we were doing until years later. And so I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction now about the work that we do. And so that has a bit to do with why I continue to do this job.

Maybe there's a spiritual side or a faith-driven side to you. Some people volunteer their time, and that may be why they do what they do. Maybe it's your creative side. Maybe there's a hobby or something that you do in your personal life that allows you to do what you do. Or maybe it's just that desire, obviously, to do good or it's built into your morals, your values, your ethics.

What I would really challenge you to do, obviously, is really take some time and think about what that is when someone says to you, how can you still do this job, or why do you continue to do this job? I have a pretty good answer. I have a solid thought that I put down on paper. I have a picture at work of a victim that we rescued. The mother shared it with us, and she said keep this by your computer or share this with your team. And so on those days where I forget why I got into this, I can look at that photo. I can look at photos of my family. I can look at some of the successes that I've had and remember why I got into this in the first place.

And to Dave's point, obviously, using that in that positive, thought-driven sense within us, and I think, on average, I should say-- there's studies that say, on average, we have about 55,000 thoughts a day, and 80% of them are negative. And I would say, unfortunately, in our line of work, we might even have more than 80%. Just that cynical mindset takes over. And so having positive thoughts is discipline.

And I always say self-care. It gets a bad rap for being really fluffy. And it can be. But self-care is really also about the self-discipline piece of we have to challenge ourselves to think about the positive thoughts and to provide compassion to ourselves and to those around us. And so our goal, obviously, being to reduce stress and create some resilience, we have to look at our mindset.

And so when Dave and I do our two-day course, I have a belief wheel that talks about what's a negative belief that you hold that's kind of at the top, and then how is that going to impact your thoughts and your feelings? How then does that impact your behavior, whether with a client or working a case or with your family member when you come through the door? And then, based on that, we kind reassure our initial belief because the results are also going to be negative.

And so really challenging, again, ourselves to think about where can I look at my thought process, and then taking that to your office and say, where do we have some really negative beliefs or where is there some really toxic places? For a lot of people, it's the break room. People go in there, and it's the vent space. But then how does that impact our positive thoughts and our ability to be resilient in that space?

And I think a lot of it too, is-- and I always really try and think about my career as before we started talking about mental health and wellness and then after because I can see that vivid point in my career where I realized the importance of what I needed to do for myself but also what I needed to do for the folks that I worked with. And a lot of that started with this idea of mindfulness, really kind of paying attention to how I was feeling, what was going on with my body, what was going on with my thoughts, like we just talked about in terms of that positive mindset.

Or I subscribe to this idea that-- and I tell people this every day-- what if we were just grateful for everything today? I know that's a difficult theory in a sense. But what if we looked at things in a different light? And so I'm constantly challenging myself, and I do this in the mornings. I used to get out of bed, get dressed, and be at work as quick as I could be. And then I realized that it was important to really develop a routine that put me in the right frame of mind before I got to work. Could I eat a good breakfast? Could I spend a little bit of time reading, praying, working out-- again, work in progress. So not all those things happen every day.

But it allows me to show up, to work a little more present and a lot more prepared. And so it helps me focus on where we're going, what we're doing because I know the minute I get to work, I'm going to be in a much different situation than I am when I'm at home and I have more control because now I'm dealing with the issues of the day, and I have the stress and dealing with things that are coming up.

But, at the same time, I'm also more aware as I go through the day. When I Prepare myself, when I put myself through some of those pre-exposure techniques, I'm better able to fend off some of the things that I'm going to deal with during the course of the day when it's most stressful.

And, again, I think it's really a lot about just kind of waking up those inner feelings, those inner workings, how am I feeling emotionally, mentally, physically? Do I feel it in my body? I'm more aware of my breath and my posture. I have a sign under my monitor that says take a breath because there are times when I work child exploitation cases where I find myself clenching my teeth and holding my breath because I think I'm fearing what I'm about to see on the screen.

So I have a number of things in my office that are visual reminders or audio cues that will help me really dig into myself a little bit. We have all this technology now. We have apps. We have our smartwatches. We have a number of things that will help us wake us up, if you will, in terms of trying to build that mindfulness.

And I think with mindfulness comes along. What is it like to work with me? And sometimes we don't like the answer to that question. And one thing I stress in any and all trainings and meetings I have is, if you were to show up as a victim of a crime, and the person there to help you was yourself, would you want to receive that help? How would it feel to work with you as a victim of a crime, and you are the one that comes into the office to get help from yourself, if that makes sense? And taking that a step further to say, would I want to be supervised by myself? Would I want to be on my team with myself?

So having some real honest conversations about what is it like to work with me, what is it like to live with me or be my partner, be my sibling, whatever that looks like, and asking yourself these questions-- again, I always encourage people even to take pictures and write these down and bring these to the workplace where we normalize this and really focus in on this. And this could change day to day, week to week, just depending on your workload and what's going on at home. So, again, just some inner critic conversations and awareness can really go a long way.

As can empathy, of course. So one thing we know about trauma is everyone experiences it differently. And that's no different for those of us in the workplace. So Dave and I might respond to a scene and do the exact same thing, see the exact same situation, but because of Dave and I's support system, or lack thereof, because of our own mental-- what we were born with, because of our past traumas or lack thereof, we are both going to respond very differently to the scene that we come in contact with.

What if the victim in that scene was my daughter's age, and so I had more of a reaction to it, or had the same name as Dave's wife? Whatever these little things can be that might happen, we all have to understand that we all handle compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma differently.

And so empathizing with one another in the workplace, looking for that in other people, if you know your colleagues to know they're a little off today, and instead of pulling ourselves up by your bootstraps, maybe going up and asking that person how they're doing, putting our phones down, our computers away, and just checking in with one another, not comparing ourselves or what we would do to those of our colleagues.

And, lastly, this is something I always remind myself because I like to sit with my arms crossed and I don't always look super friendly, but I feel like I am. And so I have to be very well-aware that 90% of our communication is nonverbal. And there are studies that prove this as well. And so even knowing, like, what do I look like externally? And is it a conversation you can have with someone in the workplace too, again, when we empathize with one another and what we're going through? Also understanding emotions show up in communication shows up through our body language.

And, obviously, I mean, the title of the course suggests that we want you to start this process yourself, but there's also an organizational component to it. I mean, you work for an organization. You work for an agency. And, hopefully, that culture there is one that is building or fostering you and your coworkers.

So a lot of it, too, is really trying to change the culture of that organization. So, again, think about how your agency promotes engagement, productivity performance. Do you have opportunities to learn and grow? Because I think, in a lot of cases, high engagement is that antidote to stress. I know that when I am highly engaged, when I'm motivated, when I'm working a case that really gets my blood going, I feel less stressed.

Now I may feel some stress at times during that case or based on who I'm interacting with or some decisions that are made. But research suggests that the quality of your experiences at work have a lot more impact on your overall well-being than the number of hours that you work. So I think that's where it speaks to this idea that find something that you like to do. Find a find an organization or an agency that has a culture that you're looking for. That will go a long way with regards to improving your mental health and wellness.

We talk a lot about training people and them not, then, taking advantage of it or then leaving the organization. But the same is true on the other side where if we don't train people or we don't motivate people and they stick around, well, then we've got another problem to deal with.

So I want people to speak up. I've said it to people over the years. Listen, I may supervise you, but I want to know what you're feeling. I want to have a two-way conversation here because I don't want you to get to the point where you're just throwing in the towel, and you're going to sit quietly and do the very minimal amount of work.

And I do want you-- I like this slide. I think Melissa came up with this graphic on the right here. But for the longest time, I thought it was all about trying to be perfect and always saying yes to things and being the guy that came in and worked myself to the bone. And, yes, that may impress certain people.

But, at the end of the day, you're not winning any awards for that because you didn't make any mistakes or because you never took vacation time. I used to think that having vacation time was a badge of honor. And then I really started thinking about my own mental health and well being and trying to spend as much time in Florida now as Melissa does. So, again, focus on yourself, and that will go a long way.

And just some more awareness that comes along with this. When we are stressed, one thing That seems to be impacted is our time management. And so I was very much like Dave, where I was working constantly, and I wore that badge of honor of people know they can contact me all the time. I will answer. I'm dependable. People praise me for working hard. I work through my lunches. That was what I was known for. But my personal life suffered greatly for that.

And so thinking about and seeing in your team and your employees, are people too present, where they don't take breaks, they don't take vacation, they're always available, like Dave and I, or absentee, where you start to see that they're missing things more often, showing up late to meetings, they're just not available. You can just tell they're not really present mentally. So looking at what we see in ourselves and our colleagues.

And then something else to consider that Dave and I dig into more with more time in our two-day course is we know that now, in the workplace, there's this struggle of generational differences. And so looking at what generation you come from, there are lots of strengths. There can be some weaknesses. And then how do we work together?

And so even having conversations with various generations within your workplace to talk about things that matter to them, things that would be helpful, things that they value, and vice versa to figure out where the strengths lie and how we can work together and compromise, knowing that there's all these differences in the generations currently in the workplace.

So, again, I think this would be an example of that. How do we understand one another? Do we encourage empathy and understanding? What were the successes in baby boomers versus the millennials and gen Z? And then where do we find that common ground, so finding that mutual respect within one another and learning from each other.

And then goes the piece of that mutual empathy. Again, we've kind of talked about this a little bit, but I think even taking mutual empathy to your home life and saying, for those of you in law enforcement, of course, you don't want to be called out on Christmas Eve. Of course, you don't want to work overtime, and all of these things that happen.

And as a partner of someone in law enforcement, it's part of my responsibility to empathize with that and to understand that that's more on your plate, and you don't want to miss those things, at the same time as for a law enforcement officer, understanding that now my partner is home with our kids on a holiday by themselves, and we can both have mutual empathy in those circumstances.

And what I see happen a lot is people build up resentment and frustration with each other, and instead of communicating through it and saying, look, we both have tough situations. We can empathize with each other through that. So whether that's something you do in the workplace or at home, just something to consider working on.

And we talked a lot, too, about just the roles of a leader. And, I mean, these are common sense here. But, I mean, I've said to my folks, hey, let me know when I'm not doing something right or when I'm not modeling the behavior that I've talked about in terms of the program that I want to unveil.

So I'm very clear with the folks what I expect of them, not just from a work standpoint, but also in terms of self-care and mental health and wellness. And I've let them know that I'm there for them and that we're going to continue to reinforce that culture because I've learned that that's just as important as the work that we do is this idea that we're going to take care of people and build that culture where people want to come to work.

Just food for thought here, nothing that's shocking, but the goal is that we want to focus about 50% on individually what I can do to improve my self-care and resilience, and then also 50% as the workplace, understanding that this type of work is really an occupational hazard. This comes with the territory of the work that we do. And so it is the responsibility of work and ourselves personally to come together to offer changes and offer good supervision, but also, again, work on ourselves at home as well.

As I mentioned earlier, too-- and this is really a benefit of the bigger class, but we do a lot of assessments and surveys. There's a lot of good things that you can do out there to build resiliency and kind of gauge your own self-care as well. Bosses say all the time, I have an open door policy. And that just doesn't mean that the door is open and you're going to walk right in, but that they really want to listen to what it is you have concerns about. And so we've really tried to do that here.

I think that point about fun is extremely important. I always say that I hate saying out loud that we have fun at work when it deals with internet crimes against children. But you have to be able to laugh. You have to find time behind closed doors to appreciate the dark humor and look forward to coming to work and enjoying some good times, if you will, with your coworkers, whether that's on the job or in more of a social environment.

And then another food for thought is just thinking about what responsibilities are on your plate. And for some offices, I'll have them write these things down. I'll do one personal and professional to think about that, and then look at the things on the outside of the plate that you would rather have on your plate. So then looking at how do I reorganize this? How can I start saying no to things?

Sometimes, we just have to set boundaries, which is really hard in our professions. Sometimes, I can delegate things to other people. I just have that control, that sense of control. And so how can I loosen that up to add those other things on my plate that I want.

And then looking at what your warning signs are-- so what does your green look like? For me, it's seven hours of sleep, working out. I don't feel impatient and irritable with people around me, and then looking at what my yellow and my reds are. And so I'm an overeater when I'm really stressed, and I also get really irritable and impatient with people-- like Dave said earlier, his wife having a typical bad day or problem that most people in the world face, but then we have such horrific stuff that we see every day, what we want to say is, like, you have no idea how bad the world really is.

And so, for me, that's like my yellow when I get into that space. And so looking at what that is for you, I highly encourage bringing these conversations to the workplace. They're tough conversations, but they're extremely helpful for some insight in learning more about each other.

And then some other questions, just to consider when you're working through your warning signs. So internally, just where you can acknowledge them, how you can talk about it in your home life. What's it like to be around me on a yellow or a red day? Asking colleagues those questions and then, certainly, with your friends and family as well.

And I know some of these-- I would love to be able to say to people, hey, you've got too many cases on your plate, so I'm going to take a few of them away from you. But as we talk more about taking care of our folks, and we stress self-care, I'm telling my investigators, hey, if you have a case that you're concerned about, let's talk about it. If you have something on your plate that maybe you're not in the best position to work, maybe we can have somebody else get involved as well. So I know we can be very protective of cases or the things that we have at work.

But, obviously, we want everybody to understand what everybody's dealing with. So this idea about taking some time off and making sure people get training. I mean, those are important pieces to this, as are the idea of providing support from a supervisory standpoint as well as on the social side.

Some of the programs that we've unveiled have a family or a social component to where we want our folks to be able to say, hey, this is not only affecting me, but it's also affecting my wife or my kids or maybe my friends, and I'd love to get them some help as well. We kind look at them as the collateral damage in all of this, sometimes.

And then, lastly, just to look at how you organize this moving forward. So when you look at yourself and how you move through the resiliency, what can I do home and personal life, what professionally-- do you have debriefings and trainings-- and then organizationally. Do we acknowledge this, and do we offer training and support? So just starting to jot down some ideas for how to focus on each one of these as you move forward, and do it in a way that feels very small and doable. We don't want this to be something to overwhelm you but something that helps in a lifestyle change moving forward.

And we talked a lot about hobbies. We've kind of hit it a few times here today. But take some time for yourself. I think that's really one of the important points that we're going to make in this two-day class and in this webinar is this idea that no matter what you have in your life, whether that's your career, whether that's a family, whether that's outside commitments, I can't stress how important it is for you to find time just for yourself, no matter how busy you are.

I'm constantly stressing to my folks, listen, go do something for you. Maybe that's exercise. Maybe that's a hobby. I found scuba diving years ago, and it's wonderful because it's me by myself in the silence of the ocean. And I don't have to talk to any of the fish that are in there, which is even better. But it's a practice. We have to work at even the things that are fun to us.

Last thought, just to ponder, and then there's one question I can answer quickly if there's more. Is the broken system a little less broken with you in it? So when I have really hard days, I get really discouraged and defeated in our work because it's never-ending. This is something I have posted on a sticky note in my office that is just something I like to ask myself on tough days. So something to consider, mention to your coworkers, send an email to give a little awareness to the great work that you all do. And thank you for what you do.

We had a question, Dave, about the absenteeism. What if someone already falls into that? And so I think there's a few ways to answer that. But, ultimately, I always lead with just checking in with that person uninterrupted, one on one. You might be surprised sometimes the information you get. Also, as much as we don't want to go to a performance improvement plans, I think there's a supportive way to do that, where it doesn't feel like this intimidating process or this scary situation, where it can be like, look, we want you to be here. Here are ways that we can help. And here's a guide for us to work together.

But first and foremost, wanting to check in with how you're doing, maybe looking at is there a way to reorganize a schedule that's-- they've got too much on their plate. Or can we diversify some of their responsibilities so there's more flexibility in some of the work that they have? So I think there's ways to be creative to look into that. But would you add anything?

No, I think your point about checking in is perfect. And I also think it's that idea of a little bit of flexibility. I know, at times, we work in a government agency or an organization where we've done things the same way forever. But I don't think it hurts to-- I walk around the office every so often, check in with people. I ask how they're doing. I want them to be kind of forthcoming, if they will, in terms of some of the things that they're experiencing. If I get the sense that they are kind of checking out, maybe I'll have them go do something different. I'll see if there's anything else that they want to do that interests them.

The trap we run into is that we work the same type of cases all year long. And so I have said to people over the years, if there's something that gets you going, let's look into that. If it still fits our space, maybe it's something that we can investigate, and that will bring you some of that excitement that is missing.

Somebody made a comment in the chat, and I think it's a great comment. We want more supervisors and leaders to be a part of this conversation. I've been involved in a number of conferences, presentations dealing with mental health and wellness, and I know that Melissa has as well, where we're not seeing the supervisors in the room. We're not seeing the bosses, the people that can affect the change that's necessary.

So, again, we hope to do this course on a much bigger scale, and we would love to have more people in the room. Obviously, we'd love to have the folks on the front lines but also the bosses and the supervisors and the people that really need to understand the importance of what we're talking about.

Dave, there was one more question if you have one minute, I think you'd be good to answer it-- someone wanting to leave but doesn't know that they should give that neutral answer anymore of it's time to move on, want to switch things up because they have experienced historical issues with discrimination, toxic team members. So I'd be curious with your experience if you have any comments on how honest are you about leaving your position.

I think about it all the time, and I worked for 12 years in a state agency, and I became very comfortable there. And I remember thinking to myself, there's no way I can leave this. It's a great job. But there were difficulties with it, and I really hemmed and hawed about leaving, and it was the greatest decision that I ever made to come up here. And now I work for a county agency, but I even fell into that trap early on where I said, oh, I'm never going to leave this second job either.

I think once we get over the hurdle of saying we can't leave this job and recognize that there are other things and probably greater things out there, life gets a lot easier. And so I'm constantly thinking about what do I want to do next. Maybe it's something outside of law enforcement. Maybe it's something else that I do from a hobby standpoint that would bring me immense joy. But I think too often we're just afraid to open that door and see what else is out there.

Well, great. Thank you so much, Melissa and David, for this excellent presentation today and sharing your insights and knowledge with us. Again, reach out to us at info@ncjtc.org to request to host this training at your facility or the link is also in the chat. This concludes our webinar today.

Thank you again, David and Melissa, for sharing your insight and the importance of this topic. If you're interested in additional training, please visit www.ncjtc.org for a listing of upcoming training opportunities or to review our on-demand training. Thank you again. Have a great day.