



Emotional Labor and Public Lawyers
Leisha DeHart-Davis, PhD

Director, Local Government Workplaces Initiative
Professor, School of Government



1

Format

- Interactive, connecting dots, chats/polls
- Chat Tom Thornburg directly with comments and questions
- Break at 9:50 am to 10:05 am



2

Overview

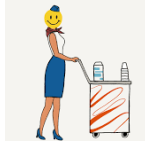
- What is emotional **labor**?
- **Why does it matter** for public lawyers?
 - Burnout
 - Engagement
- **Managing** emotional labor



3

Emotional Labor

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



4

High Emotional Labor Occupations

- “Listening occupations”
- Firefighters
- Social workers
- Police officers
- Rape crisis counselors
- EMS responders
- Public health professionals
- In what ways is public law a listening profession?



5

Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down



- The “display rules” expected on the job by organization or profession
 - Compassionate
 - Stoic
 - Stern
 - Calm
- What are your display rules?

6

Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down



- What you *feel inside*
- What are examples of some of the internal feelings that contradict your display rules?

7

Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down



- The process by which you reconcile internal feelings with display rules
- What is your process for reconciling the two?

8

Degrees of Emotional Labor

Surface acting: pretending or faking Deep acting: changing your emotion Which do you think is harder on you emotionally?

9

Why Care?

- Emotional labor can
 - Increase or decrease job satisfaction and engagement¹
 - Can lead to burnout² and self-estrangement³ if not managed
 - Increase health effects for those not involved in their jobs or not identifying with organizations⁴
 - Exhaustion, stress and depression, loss of memory, hypertension, heart disease



1. Lam and Chen 2012; 2. Hsieh, Jin, & Gray, 2011; 3. Shan 2012; 4. Schaubrock and Jones 2000

Burnout

- Emotional Exhaustion
- Cynicism
- Ineffectiveness

Emotional Exhaustion

- Feeling of being overextended, depleted, used up
- Incapacity to disconnect from job, even during sleep
 - I feel used up at the end of each day.
 - I feel emotionally drained from my work.
 - I feel fatigued when I have to get up in the morning and face another day on the job

Poll Question 1

- In thinking about your work over the last 30 days, how often have you felt emotionally drained from your work?
 - Not at All
 - Very Little
 - Moderately
 - A Lot
 - Extremely

13

Cynicism

- Depersonalization
- Negative, callous, excessively detached from others
- →I have become more calloused towards people since I took this job.
- →I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally

14

Poll Question 2

- In thinking about your work over the last 30 days, how often have you felt less empathetic with others at work?
 - Not at All
 - Very Little
 - Moderately
 - A Lot
 - Extremely

15

Ineffectiveness

- Feelings of incompetence/diminished achievement
- Also, perceived inefficiency, poor professional self-esteem, and a growing sense of inadequacy
- → My work doesn't make much difference in the world
- → Some days I feel helpless at work

Poll Question 3

- In thinking about your work over the last 30 days, how often have you felt helpless at work?
 - Not at All
 - Very Little
 - Moderately
 - A Lot
 - Extremely

Engagement

- Opposite of burnout
 - Energy
 - Involvement
 - Self-Efficacy

Poll Question 4

- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following questions:
- At work, I feel bursting with energy
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

19

Let's Take a Break!

- Stretch
- Meditate for three minutes
- Have some tea
- Take a quick walk

20

Managing Emotional Labor

- “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
- If you can’t take care of yourself, you can’t take care of _____

21

Mental Health Among Attorneys

- 2016 survey of 12,825 attorneys found
 - 21% with alcohol problems
 - 28% reporting depression systems
 - 19% anxiety
 - 23% stress

- *Krill, P. R., Johnson, R., & Albert, L. (2016). The prevalence of substance use and other mental health concerns among American attorneys. Journal of Addiction Medicine, 10(1), 46.*

Chat Question: What are the sources of stress on public lawyers?



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

Taking Care of Yourself

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

25

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)

26

Poll Question 5: How often do you get 30 minutes of exercise?

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Weekly
- Rarely
- Never

27

Nutrition



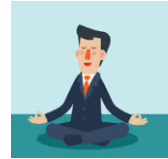
- More anxiety/depression with Western style diet, less with Mediterranean style diet (Owen and Corfe 2017)
 - Mediterranean diet: vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains
 - Western diet: processed foods and refined sugar

Poll Question 6: How healthy do you eat?

- Healthy
- Somewhat healthy
- Somewhat unhealthy
- Very Unhealthy

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)

Poll Question 7: How often do you engage in intentional relaxation/meditation/spiritual practice?

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Weekly
- Rarely
- Never

Conclusion

- Emotional labor is a phenomenon for public lawyers
- So is burnout
- Both can reduce quality of life
- Taking care of yourself can help mitigate the negative effects of both

Questions? Comments?



34
