Emotional Labor and Public Lawyers
Leisha DeHart-Davis, PhD
Director, Local Government Workplaces Initiative
Professor, School of Government

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

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

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?

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?
Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down

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

Emotional Labor: Breaking It Down

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

Degrees of Emotional Labor

Surface acting: pretending or faking
Deep acting: changing your emotion
Which do you think is harder on you emotionally?
Why Care?
• Emotional labor can
  – Increase or decrease job satisfaction and engagement
  – Can lead to burnout and self-estrangement if not managed
  – Increase health effects for those not involved in their jobs or not identifying with organizations
• Exhaustion, stress and depression, loss of memory, hypertension, heart disease

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

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

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
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

Let’s Take a Break!

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

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 ____________
Mental Health Among Attorneys

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


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

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)

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

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