National Leadership Consortium Bulletin

Leading Through Times of Chronic Stress

The National Leadership
Consortium | on Developmental Disabilities

National Leadership Consortium Bulletin

About the Bulletin

The National Leadership Consortium Bulletin is a free, web-based publication dedicated to providing relevant, trustworthy, and thought-provoking information to leaders, practitioners, and people with disabilities and their families involved in the field of developmental disabilities support services. The Bulletin will serve as a bridge between scientific journals and day-to-day leadership, exploring timely research and policy issues in the leadership and disabilities fields with the aim of promoting organizational change and assisting leaders to support people with disabilities to experience inclusive, valuable, and meaningful lives.

About the National Leadership Consortium

Leadership, Values and Vision: Transforming Lives and Organizations

The National Leadership Consortium was founded in 2006 to develop current and future generations of disability sector leaders to have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to transform services and systems to be responsive to the needs, wants, and rights of people with disabilities. Our mission is to provide quality training, technical assistance, and support aimed at the development of values-based leadership in disability sector leaders. The National Leadership Consortium is focused on promoting the rights of people with disabilities to direct their services and lives and to fully belong in their chosen communities. One way the National Leadership Consortium works to meet this mission is through a nationally recognized, intensive leadership development program, the Leadership Institute. These in-person or virtual trainings focus on knowledge, skills, and supports leaders need to transform systems and organizations in the disability service sector.

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If you would like to contribute a reflection, strategy, position piece, or research to the Bulletin please contact us at bulletin@natleadership.org. Even if you have not written for publication before, the team at the Bulletin would love to help you develop your ideas.

Why the Bulletin?

You may wonder why The National Leadership Consortium is creating the Bulletin. Well, throughout my career I have been fortunate to be in jobs where I had both access to a variety of information sources on policy and programs and time to review it. That information has not only educated me but has inspired and broadened my perspectives as a practicing professional. We know that for many leaders this is not the norm.

Most of the people who participate in a National Leadership Consortium training are extremely busy, both in their work and personal lives. Because of their time commitments, they aren't able to read publications that may assist them in their professional roles.

Additionally, journals in many fields are increasingly published by a shrinking pool of for-profit publishers and are behind a paywall, making them not terribly accessible to people without a subscription to the journal or those not at a university that allows access. You can't really measure the utility of an article without paying for it, so many practicing professionals don't regularly read journals, government monographs, or publications from universities, think tanks, and advocacy organizations.

With this new bulletin, we are hoping to provide information on current best practices and research that allow practitioners at all levels of an organization to easily access useful information that will contribute to their work. We aim to give practitioners information in a usable format that is linked to documents and resources that are in the public domain or that we have permission to release. We will also solicit and share articles from Leadership Institute alumni who are demonstrating real-world leading-edge practices, strategies, and accomplishments.

We hope to publish this bulletin three-to-four times a year and will have past issues readily available on our website.

We welcome your comments, critiques, feedback, and ideas that would turn this effort into something very useful in our joint efforts to include people with developmental disabilities in everyday life in their community.

Thanks for reading,

Steven M. Eidelman

Steven M. Eidelman MBA, MSW, *is the Faculty Director and liaison between the National Leadership Consortium and the University of Delaware. Steven is also the H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Human Services Policy and Leadership at the University of Delaware. He is a past President of AAIDD, serves as Senior Advisor to the Chairman of Special Olympics International and serves as the Executive Director of The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation. Contact Steven at sme@udel.edu.*

Introduction: Leading Through Times of Chronic Stress

This has been a *hard* few years- like crying in the frozen food aisle at the grocery store kind of hard. Political unrest, climate change-fueled natural disasters, economic crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made sustaining and supporting ourselves, our families, and communities challenging and for some, a climbing Mt. Everest-like task. Showing-up each day to lead organizations that strive to support others in living full, healthy, and connected lives has always been beautiful and complicated, often messy and sometimes hard, but it is even more so during times of collective and individual struggle.

Some of the stressors that leaders of disability support organizations have faced over the past two years are not necessarily new. High turnover, staffing shortages, and trying to keep people supported and staff healthy, safe, fulfilled and connected are struggles that are not unique to the past two years. The profound grief and possible trauma that comes from unexpected disasters, or from the death of coworkers, the people we support, those we love, and the loss of opportunities for rituals and routines are part of the messy business of being human together. Learning to see, understand and address systemic inequities within our organization is long overdue in many places. Working with inadequate funding, changing frameworks for best-practice, and regulatorily environments continually challenge our field. Over the past two years however, the frequency, intensity and urgency around these challenges have undoubtedly increased.

Yet leaders continue to show up in their professional roles at organizations that continually strive to walk their mission and values. The work of helping people with disabilities and their families access their rights, live fully and with dignity within, and share their gifts with their community is vital, powerful, joyful and meaningful. It can also be exhausting, stressful, and potentially traumatic. In this issue we explore chronic stress and trauma on leaders of disability support service organizations and on the organizations themselves as well as strategies that promote individual, organizational, and systemic well-being and resilience. We also explore the paradox that organizations as well as individuals can be both struggling and embodying hope, joy, and resilience.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the Bulletin,

Kristen Loomis

Kristen Loomis *is the Co-Director of the National Leadership Consortium. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Human Services from the University of Delaware and is currently working towards her Master's in Business Administration with a concentration in Strategic Leadership. Contact Kristen at kloomis@natleadership.org.*

Recognizing and Reducing Stress, Chronic Stress, and Trauma in Yourself and Your Organization

by Amanda J. Rich

Stress, Chronic Stress, Crisis, and Trauma: What They Mean

We live in a world of stress and that is not a bad thing. Personal and organizational stress are the cascade of internal actions that allow us as individuals and groups to meet the demands of changing circumstances. Stress allows us to quickly adapt to changing regulatory requirements, generate new ideas and plans of action to meet an urgent staffing need, stay up late to get a grant proposal in by the deadline, or finish preparing a training. The right amount of stress can propel us to connect with other people and other parts of ourselves, collaborate, and solve problems creatively. In other circumstances when it feels like too much, we may resist change, shut down, or withdraw from our responsibilities and each other (see Polyvegal-theory).

Like going to the gym, we as individuals and organizations can build strength and agility through responding to predictable, tolerable, and controllable stressors. However, working out for 15 hours straight or going into the gym for the first time and trying to deadlift 150lbs does not build strength or agility and instead is likely to lead to strain, injury, and decreased capacity. Stressors that are unyielding, unpredictable, and/or exceptionally intense may lead to unease, a reduced ability to plan and take action towards future goals, meet the needs of the moment, and detract from the mission of the organization (See What Happened to You?).

A crisis is generally defined as a sudden event or situation that is perceived as threatening and exceeds our ability to cope using resources and strategies that have worked in the past. It may lead to short- and long-term challenges in functioning. Similarly, trauma is defined as a harmful or threatening event or condition and has a lasting effect of dysregulation. Though stress may be positive and helpful, chronic stress and trauma may be harmful in both the short and long term. Trauma may lead to changes in how we see ourselves, our connection to others, the world, and how we respond to it.

Checklist for Identifying Stress, Chronic Stress and Trauma in your Organization

Leaders can learn to recognize signs of trauma and chronic stress not only on themselves and other individuals but at the organizational level as well. Signs that an organization may be experiencing the impact of chronic stress, trauma, and dysregulation are listed in the checklist below. Taking a few minutes to review this checklist could identify signs of stress that you see in your own role as a leader, or in your organization.

Keep in mind, this checklist is designed to increase your awareness about potential stress-related issues you or your organization may be experiencing. It is not meant to calculate a stress score, nor does it give you any information about the resiliency of you as a leader or your organization. (Adapted from A Treasure Box for Creating Trauma Informed Organizations)
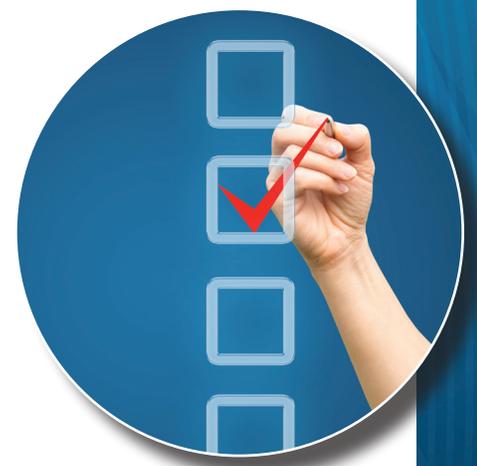
Examples	I see this in my own leadership practices	I see this in my organization's practices
A climate of feeling on edge, reactive, crisis-driven activity, and or feeling "too busy" to think		
Feelings of being disconnected or withdrawn from group or mission		
Avoidance of problems		
High rates of turnover or absenteeism		
Viewing situations in extremes, as all good or all bad		
General feelings of mistrust or lack of appreciation		
Rigid and disciplinary leadership style or organizational policies and practices and micromanagement		
Consistently talking *about* as opposed to *with* one another in your teams or organization (triangulation)		
Adopting or sticking to a rigid hierarchical (top-down) leadership style or organizational structure		
Leadership, staff, and those served are quick to fight, attack, or become defensive		
Lack of engagement and contribution in meetings		
Lack of humanness or sense of impersonal operations		
Use of restraint, seclusion, and exclusion, humiliation, or shaming		
Lack of choice, agency, and control for staff and service users		
Feelings of stunted or dulled innovation, feelings of being stuck		
Feelings of physical and emotional unwellness in self or across teams/ organization		
Lack of or fragile group identity		
Sense of equal urgency across priorities		
Repeated difficulties or repeating the same mistake over and over again (lack of personal or organizational memory)		
Poor communication		
Verbal, physical or emotional violence		
Use of negative communication and language (oppressive, reductionistic, pejorative, and or distancing/jargony language)		

Resources and Ideas for Reducing the Impact of Stress, Chronic Stress, and Trauma

Systems at high risk for crisis and chronic stress require agile and resilient leaders who have a clear vision and hope for the future. These leaders put people's wellbeing first, understand the context in which their organization operates, and can understand, recognize, and effectively respond to trauma and human emotions. Trauma-informed leadership may be a useful framework to support resilient, humane, and effective organizational cultures. There is not a clear or universally agreed upon definition of trauma-informed and healing centered leadership, however leaders within this framework:

- *Help their team articulate a vision* for a hopeful future and can understand and effectively support the strength that comes from human diversity, the background of those within the organization, and the organization's legacy.

- Support others within the organization in *realizing the prevalence and impact of trauma* and paths towards resilience and healing.

- *Respond* in a way that integrates components of healing and an understanding of trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.

- Actively work to see and *resist practices and policies that may be re-traumatizing* for staff and clients.

Healing Centered and trauma-informed leaders center the fullness and messiness of the human experience within their organization and can develop managerial and transformational skills in the areas of:

- Promoting emotional, relational, and physical safety

- Creating cultures of transparency, trustworthiness, and honesty

- Promoting effective communication, collaboration, connection, and mutual support

- Empowering voice, choice, and control

- Creating cultures of ongoing learning and self-reflection

- Recognizing and celebrating human diversity, engaging and promoting cultural humility across all areas of the organization, and addressing inequities and injustices

Though research on the effectiveness of healing-centered and trauma-informed leadership is limited, studies have found that trauma-informed systems can reduce burnout and other risks for staff, improve client satisfaction and improve client outcomes.

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Research-Informed Action: Direct Support Professionals' Perspectives on Workplace Support: Underappreciated, Overworked, Stressed Out, and Stretched Thin

by Caitlin Bailey

Introduction

The workforce shortage/ crisis/ systemic failure- or whatever we're calling the biggest issue currently facing disability sector agencies, leaders, and most importantly, people with disabilities and their families- is well documented; we see its impact on our work every day. Organizations that support people with disabilities struggle to recruit and retain quality Direct Support Professionals, with average national turnover rates hovering around 43% and reaching up to and above 100% in many agencies. Moreover, our field has long struggled to value the Direct Support profession and offer compensation, benefits, and respect commensurate with the importance of DSPs' role in our organizations and the lives of people with disabilities. The issue has, of course, been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Although low wages continue to keep DSP retention low, decades of research show that DSPs tend to leave their organizations because they lack training, support, or quality relationships with their co-workers and managers needed to succeed in their day-to-day roles. No doubt, the responsibilities associated with the position are stressful. Still, DSPs consistently share that the biggest issues related to turnover are due to inadequate support or appreciation from their peers, supervisors, or organizations.

One pathway to reducing stress and increasing recognition and appreciation for DSPs is to include them in the development and implementation solutions by listening to their thoughts and ideas about strategies that would help. The study, *Direct Support Professionals' Perspectives on Workplace Support: Underappreciated, Overworked, Stressed Out, and Stretched Thin,* does just that, offering the point of view of more than 440 DSPs about the support they need to succeed in their roles.

What Does the Research Say?

Results from this study, collected via surveys and interviews conducted by Katie Johnson, MPA, provide six areas of potential solutions to improve the job-related support DSPs receive.

1. Enact transparent management practices and strategies that include DSPs in decision making, enhance workplace culture, and support DSP supervisors to be motivated, engaged, and promote trusting environments.

2. Ensure recognition of DSPs and their essential work through fair and adequate compensation, acknowledgment of the challenges and stressors associated with the DSP role, and supports and structures that can help avoid work fatigue and prevent or mitigate burnout.

3. Address staffing issues, such as high turnover and underqualified or unreliable DSPs and managers.

4. Enhance quantity and quality of training opportunities for DSPs, so they gain the knowledge and skills needed to provide services responsive to the people they support. Further, ensure DSPs can demonstrate skills by enacting structures that link training and competency.

5. Adequately fund basic program needs, such as technology and transportation, so DSPs have the resources needed to support people well.

6. Maintain reasonable job expectations by recognizing and addressing when DSPs are overworked, including DSPs in decisions that impact their work, and streamlining role-related responsibilities such as overburdensome documentation requirements that limit the time DSPs have to provide direct supports

What Does it Mean for Our Field?

For decades, efforts to address workforce shortages, high turnover, low retention rates, and a growing need for high-quality Direct Support Professionals have been underway. Many of those efforts directly relate to the recommendations from this study; they can potentially decrease vacancies and turnover that increase stress for the DSPs who remain in their roles. For instance, recently proposed legislation such as the *Supporting our Direct Care Workforce and Family Caregivers Act*, the *Better Care Better Jobs Act*, and the *Credit for Caring Act* attempts to address low DSP wages, DSP shortages, and increased funding needs.

There have also been efforts to directly improve working conditions for DSPs to enhance the support they receive and decrease their job-related stress. Several National Leadership Consortium Leadership Institute alumni and faculty have dedicated their time and expertise to address the issues identified by DSPs in this study.

- In 2021, the Administration for Community Living (ACL), part of the US Department of Health and Human Services, launched the *Blazing New Trails for Community-Based Direct Support Professionals prize challenge* to support new and innovative solutions to strengthen the DSP workforce. ACL ultimately awarded the grand prize to the Collaborative for Citizen Directed Support, led by Marian Frattarola-Saulino, Co-Founder and CEO Values Into Action, a support coordination agency. The Collaborative has developed an interactive map to connect DSPs with people with disabilities who self-direct their services and lives. This innovative idea could lead to enhanced wages for DSPs, increased autonomy for DSPs, and ensure that people with disabilities have access to qualified staff.

- The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals, led by Joe Macbeth, Desiree Loucks Baer, John Raffaele, Dan Hermreck, and Nicole Dama, launched the E-Badge Academy, a national certification program that lets DSPs and Frontline Supervisors demonstrate their competencies and earn badges, ensuring that DSPs have and can be compensated for the skills needed to be effective in their roles.

- Montrel Tennessee, Project Manager at the Government of the District of Columbia Department of Disability Services, is part of a team that developed the DSP Academy, a training program for young adults with disabilities to become Direct Support Professionals, a program that can help increase the number of qualified DSPs in the workforce while enhancing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

What Does it Mean for Me?

If you lead an agency that employs Direct Support Professionals, this research offers concrete strategies to improve the day-to-day working conditions that DSPs experience. Particularly, leaders have the opportunity to reduce additional stressors that DSPs face, such as feeling undervalued, not having adequate training, and lacking opportunities to participate in decisions that impact their work. Ideas you might think about implementing:

1. Take some time to reflect and identify instances or patterns when you, your team, or the organization undervalues DSPs. Better yet, ask DSPs what the organization does that makes them feel valued or undervalued. A Start Stop Continue process or a survey might get you valuable feedback.

2. If you are a person who makes decisions that impact DSPs, brainstorm ways to involve DSPs in future decisions. Can you hold listening sessions to gather DSP input? Can you include DSPs on special committees (and pay them for their time to participate)?

3. Consider how the pandemic has contributed to the stress that DSPs face. Have you paused needed training or canceled regular meetings that help keep DSPs informed? Think about ways to ensure that DSPs can still access the support and training they need to succeed in their roles.

4. Investigate strategies that can link training with competencies and compensation. Experts have found that when companies 'pay for performance' through credentialing or certification, they can increase the tenure and quality of the workforce. A 2019 white paper makes this case.

5. Focus on building the management skills of DSP supervisors. Many frontline leaders are promoted from a direct support role, but they do not receive the necessary management and leadership training to help them become great supervisors. Management training, coaching, and support can improve the manager-DSP relationship and increase retention.

6. Offer resources to help DSPs deal with stress, trauma, and burnout. COVID-19 has been especially hard for many DSPs who have supported people in navigating the pandemic, taken on extra hours, or even moved in with people to reduce the chance of spreading the virus. Many have also been dealing with the loss of people they care for and support. Connecting DSPs with therapeutic supports, building a trauma-informed culture, and recognizing the pandemic's toll on DSPs is essential to their long-term wellbeing.

Caitlin Bailey *is the Co-Director of the National Leadership Consortium. She holds a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Science. Caitlin is passionate about enhancing leaders' skills and evidence-based practices in our field. Contact Caitlin at cbailey@natleadership.org.*

Avoiding Burnout: Tips for Leaders

by Cory Gilden

What does the research say?

Burnout is affecting workers across fields and generations, with the negative effects of the phenomenon increasing during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The term is often flung about casually by exhausted employees, but burnout is more than fatigue from working long hours or stress from difficult work or tight timelines; burnout also involves feelings of betrayal and disillusionment from your work not providing the purpose or emotional gratification you thought it would. For people who are burnt out, work often takes over their lives, leaving them feeling trapped in a state where no amount of work brings a sense of satisfaction or fulfillment.

A survey by the job search company Indeed in March 2021 found that employee burnout has gotten worse during the pandemic. More than half of the people surveyed (52%) felt burned out and more than two-thirds (67%) reported that their burnout has gotten worse since COVID-19 began. This increase in burnout was seen across generations, with Gen X employees (born between 1965 and 1980) showing the biggest rise in burnout from 40% in January 2020 to 54% in February 2021.

"In the recent Indeed study, more than half of the respondents (52%) felt burned out and more than two-thirds (67%) reported that their burnout has gotten worse since COVID-19 began."

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in more remote work, which respondents said negatively impacted their work-life balance, with remote workers reporting they were less able to unplug from work (27%), working longer hours (53%), and working more (31%). Additionally, workers overall named stress from finances (33%) and health concerns (25%), lack of free time (40%), and lack of paid time off (20% or remote workers and 30% of onsite workers) as contributors to their burnout.

What does it mean for our field?

The disabilities field notoriously suffers from a decades-long shortage of reliable, long-term employees and this direct support workforce crisis worsened during the pandemic, negatively impacting support for people with disabilities. A new study by ANCOR found a 16.7% increase in providers that have had to stop accepting new referrals of people desiring support, a 70.6% increase in discontinued programs, and a 29.2% increase in delaying the launch of new programs or services from 2020 and 2021 due to insufficient staffing.

What does it mean for me?

Burnt out employees can be less productive and less creative, which could hurt the company's culture and bottom line. Leadership experts suggest that employers should take advantage of this window of adjustment to revamp the workplace to empower employees to do their best work.

Ways to prevent burnout

- Higher emotional intelligence, mindfulness skills, and positive coping strategies have been found to guard against burnout. Facilitating trainings in these skills as part of staff job trainings could promote more positive outcomes for employees, including direct support professionals, and people who use supports.

- If all or some employees in your organization worked from home during the height of the pandemic, returning to the office may be hard for many. After having control over when, where and how they work, employees may struggle under in-person supervision or being micromanaged by supervisors. Give employees more autonomy over their schedules with more flexibility in scheduling.When possible, let people work remotely or add more paid time off. Reducing hours can also help prevent burnout.

- Emphasize the importance of work-life balance by encouraging employees to step away from work calls and emails during paid time off, holidays, and off-hours, when possible. Have managers and leaders model these behaviors and create a culture in the workplace that values work-life balance.

- Reevaluate employee perks/benefits such as casual dress code, flexible scheduling, or extra vacation time. Different perks work in different environments, so collect employee feedback about what would help improve their workplace experience to best retain and attract reliable employees.

- A large proportion of leaders and staff do not feel like they have a mentor at work or do not meet with their mentor consistently. Supervisor support has been associated with lower burnout and so establishing dependable mentor-employee relationships can protect against burnout.

Cory Gilden *is the Research and Evaluation Manager of the National Leadership Consortium. Cory holds a Ph.D. in Urban Affairs and Public Policy and works with local and national organizations conducting research and advocating for people with disabilities and their families. Contact Cory at cgilden@natleadership.org.*

Helping Stressed Out Organizations: Thoughts From Leaders in Our Field

by Amanda J. Rich

Researchers such as Sandra Bloom and colleagues have long studied organizations as living systems. They found that organizations, like people, can struggle with the impact of crisis, chronic stress, and trauma. Organizations facing sudden and intense challenges may experience crisis after a sudden death, unexpected layoffs, or natural disasters. Many of the challenges leaders of disability support organizations face, such as staffing issues, are not crises, but long-term stressors and traumas accumulated from ongoing mistakes and organizational and systemic shortfalls.

Organizations and systems are at higher risk for risk for becoming traumatized when

- there are long term stressors without adequate resources,

- there are ineffective or harmful policies and procedures in place,

- lessons from the past are forgotten,

- people within the system have experienced high levels of adversity, and

- trauma and the emotional climate of the organization is not recognized, acknowledged, and adequately addressed.

In addition to disability support service organizations being at risk for chronic stress related to staffing and contextual changes, people within service systems that include people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and staff who work in human services are more likely than the general population to have had trauma and to have experienced high levels of adversity.

Organizational and systemic chronic stress and trauma can detract from an organization's mission, exacerbate, and/or cause new harm for service users and staff. The resilience, strength, and effectiveness of organizations is closely linked to the well-being of its workforce, including leadership.

Building greater resilience in disability support service systems will require those within systems and organizations (e.g., policy makers, funders, executive directors, program staff, service users, volunteers, boards) to understand, recognize the signs and impact of trauma and chronic stress, and work collaboratively to build compassionate systems.

Tips & Tools: Reflections from Leaders

We asked members of the National Leadership Consortium online Community of Practice network, made up of disability service sector leaders from across the United States and Canada, to reflect on the following question: How do you support your own well-being and your team's well-being during times of intense or ongoing stress? They shared many thoughtful ideas and recommendations, many of which are supported by recent research, highlighted in the "Leader's Thoughts" and "Recommendations" below.

Mindfulness and Meditation

"Mindfulness is a way of befriending ourselves and our experience." Jon Kabat-Zin

Leader's Thoughts:

- "When I cannot reduce my stress, I have about 10 different meditations I can listen to which promote decreasing stress and anxiety, and also promote my general wellbeing overall."

- "Morning pages. Every morning I write (on actual paper) 2-3 pages, whatever is on my mind. It helps me get out of my head, process what is taking up mental space, and often get perspective on what is most important to tackle."

- "As a result of my training and meditation I am able to remain calm and think things through even in the most stressful situations."

- "I've increasingly been opening meetings with a short round of therapeutic breathing. It centers everyone present, and also normalizes self-care for our employees."

Though there are many definitions of meditation and mindfulness, meditation is generally thought of as a set of practices done with the intent of focusing attention and increasing awareness that has roots in Eastern traditions. John Kabit-Zin, the founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBRS) program defines mindfulness as the state of "awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally". Mindfulness is often developed through meditation. There is a large body of research that finds mindfulness supports an array of physical, psychological, and emotional health benefits including stress reduction, increasing working memory, decreasing emotional reactivity, increased problem solving, increased relationship satisfaction, increased empathy, increased compassion, decreased blood pressure, and an increased immune response.

In addition to personal benefits, mindfulness has been found to improve interpersonal and work-related outcomes. A recent study in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* found that mindfulness in leaders is associated with increased workplace satisfaction of those they lead. In the study, Johannes and colleagues used survey data from 34 leaders and 98 workers to measure the leader's self-reported mindfulness, mindfulness in communication, worker's satisfaction with their leadership in general and satisfaction with the communication with their leadership specifically. The researchers found that leaders who scored high on mindfulness and mindful communication had followers that were more satisfied with the relationship and communication with their leadership.

Recommendations:

- Start small. Incorporating even several minutes of mindful meditation practice is a great place to start.

- Take a few moments to breathe deeply and notice what your body is feeling throughout the day without judgement.

- Technology may help.

  - Mindful.org
  - Insight Timer
  - My Life
  - UCLA Mindful
  - Headspace

Supporting Role Clarity and Preventing Work Overload

"Clarity precedes success." Robin Sharma

Leader's Thoughts:

- "In Person Centered Thinking training, we talk about using the "Donut (or Doughnut)" to delineate between what an employee's Core Responsibilities are, in what areas they can use their creativity and knowledge to accomplish tasks, and what they ultimately have no control over. I use this tool on myself all the time and find it great. stress reducing tool. Much of the stress I have experienced in my life had to do with things that I had no control or influence over in the first place."

- "I ask for help and delegate what I can."

- "I have offloaded or opted out of as much as I can. Promotional emails that don't offer me anything? Unsubscribe. Feeling overwhelmed with my schedule? Go through the week and remove/cancel anything non-urgent/task-focused (such as educational webinars or meetings I feel obligated to go to but don't actually serve me a purpose)"

> ## "You can't 'win' work."
> **Simon Sinek**

A 2018 survey by Gallup of 7,500 full time employees from a wide range of fields found that two of the top five causes of burnout included an unmanageable workload and a lack of role clarity. A lack of role clarity or role ambiguity is a lack of certainty or predictability regarding expectations and behaviors in the context of work. In a 2018 study, Finkelstein and colleagues found that role ambiguity and perceived work overload were two significant predictors of burnout specifically amongst professionals working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Recommendations:

The Harvard Business Review suggests several strategies to reduce work overload. They include developing a "time-budget" that factors in sleep, commute time, personal commitments, and self-care; ensuring you are clear on your role and your mission; cutting back on non-urgent tasks and tasks that do not align with your mission and continually revisiting and rebalancing your time.

Leaders can support role clarity by ensuring clarity within and across roles in their organization. Person Centered Thinking Training uses a doughnut related tool to help clarify essential job roles, where workers can use creativity and judgment and what tasks are outside the scope of their paid work

Routines & Rituals

"The human soul can always use a new tradition. Sometimes we require them." **Pat Conroy**

Leader's Thoughts:

- "Working in social services, there are so many things that can really be out of our control to an extent. I've found that developing and sticking to a daily/weekly routine of things that I can control is very beneficial for remaining calm and empathetic in those stressful or unplanned situations."

- "I get up early every weekday to work out or stretch. This time alone also helps me organize my thoughts for the day. On Sunday mornings (through October), my friends and I ride down to the beach and jump in the lake regardless of the weather and temperature. It does wonders psychologically, emotionally, and physically."

- "On Sundays, I enjoy cooking and prepping meals for the week while blaring music in the kitchen. These are the things that keep me sane after a stressful work week."

Routines and rituals, or patterned events that result in emotionally meaningful experiences, help manage stress and anxiety and promote well-being. Although novelty and excitement are also important, routines and rituals help to improve sleep, promote social and academic success in children, and promote resilience in times of crisis and uncertainty (See The Importance of Creating Habits and Routines). A 2020 article in the *Journal of Global Health* highlighted the importance of regular daily routines to support mental health, manage stress and increase sense of personal accomplishment both during and after the pandemic.

Many of us mourned the loss of shared rituals that happened both within and outside of the workplace during the pandemic. Gathering in groups in a patterned and predictable way for a meaningful experience has an impact on our sense of connection and psychological well-being. Shira Gabriel and colleagues found from across 5 studies that the engagement in social rituals predicted a decreased sense of loneliness, an increased sense of meaning and spiritual connection, an increase in self-awareness and an increase in positive feelings.

Recommendations:

- Create routines that are reasonable and flexible.

- Support those you lead in developing a sense of predictability, though routines may change during and afterthe pandemic.

- Create and engage in ritual when and where possible. Celebrate retirements, graduations and other transitions.

- Even if in-person events are not possible, rituals can be created by embedding ceremony into common activities such as creating routines around virtual gathering, listening to music, or sharing a movie night remotely.

Exercise and Social Support

"We humans are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment of our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others." The Dalai Lama

Leader's Thoughts:

- "As a leader I try to connect more with my staff, even on a daily basis, check in on how things are going at home, what things might be bothering them, what are the items I can assist with at work that might be easier for me to handle."

- "Exercise, yoga, being outside, and laughter help me deal with stress."

- "Take walks." "Taking walks in nature, e-biking, meditation, an awesome nap, laughter with friends, and photography all help me manage my stress."

- "Exercise, music, spend time with others and sometimes lot's of wine!"

- "I found that exercising with the dogs in the middle of the day helps keep me centered and calm. This year has been about resilience and making sure I am connecting with people that can support me and hold me up when I'm not doing a great job of it myself. It has been very important to reach out."

- "Self-care! I work out 3x/week and I get a massage one a month and it is very rejuvenating."

- "I play competitive sports, such as basketball to invigorate myself and blow off steam."

- "I practice Brazilian Jiu Jitsu and during training I am constantly put in stressful situations."

- "I love being home with my family. We enjoy spending time outside swimming, hanging out on the front porch and watching the squirrels and birds. We also enjoy walking trails at our local park and looking for and/or hiding painted rocks."

- "Walking/running, listening to podcasts, and playing with my baby and puppy is always fun."

Physical exercise and social support have powerful direct and indirect impacts on mental health and well-being. In a large study in which data were collected in 2011, 2013, and 2015 from 1,237,194 people, researchers found that those who exercised had fewer days of poor mental health than those who did not even after controlling for physical and sociodemographic characteristics. All types of exercise were found to be beneficial though the greatest impact was found for those who engaged in team sports, cycling and aerobic activity for durations of 45 minutes, 3-5 times a week.

Exercise has been found to enhance people's moods and have a positive and impact on people's health and well-being in the short and long term. The relationship may be explained by an increase in a sense of personal accomplishment, building a tolerance of the stress response (fight/fight) system by activating it in controlled and predictable ways and triggering specific biochemicals in the brain.

> *"It is not surprising that social support is a powerful tool in managing stress, especially in difficult times. Simply being with one you love can increase pain tolerance."*

Humans are social creatures. Social support is one of the strongest predictors of long-life, joy and happiness. The Harvard Study is currently the longest running study on human development. The study began over 80 years ago and followed the health of 264 Harvard sophomores, over 1,300 of their children, 456 Boston inner-city residents and some of their children. They found that how happy we were in and with our social relationships had a powerful impact on our physical health, happiness, and longevity. It is not surprising that social support is a powerful tool in managing stress, especially in difficult times. Simply being with one you love can increase pain tolerance.

In addition to personal physical and emotional health benefits, social support can impact work related well-being and performance. In a recent study in the *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, researchers explored if a sense of control and social support impacts worker's engagement and/or risk for burnout in the face of demanding jobs. They found that workers that faced heavy work demands, and felt support from colleagues were more engaged and less likely to experience burnout than workers with lower levels of social support.

Amanda J. Rich *is an associate professor of Human Services at York College of Pennsylvania, the owner of Open Road Inclusive Community Consulting, the director of the Institute of Social Healing at York College of Pennsylvania and the managing editor of the National Leadership Consortium Bulletin. Amanda holds a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Sciences and is interested in the health and wellbeing of the human service workforce, trauma-informed and healing centered practices and disability justice. Contact Amanda at openroadicc@gmail.com.*

What are We Reading, Watching, and Listening to Related to Leading Through Times of Chronic Stress?

Title: Pain and Shock in America: Politics, Advocacy, and the Controversial Treatment of People with Disabilities
Authors: Jan Nisbett & Nancy Weiss (2021)

Jan Nisbett and the National Leadership Consortium's own Co-Founder Nancy Weiss provide a detailed and compelling overview of the use of pain, adversives and shock as "treatment" of people with disabilities. It serves as a reminder of how services and treatment impact and are impacted by societal views of disability and the importance of accessible, humane and ethical support in creating a more equitable world.

Title: Dare to Lead
Speaker: Brene Brown (2021)

In the *Dare to Lead* podcast series, emotions researcher and storyteller Brene Brown shares interviews with experts on leadership from across fields and personal reflection on the skills and tools needed to approach leadership with courage and heart. Every episode has actionable take-aways.

Link: https://brenebrown.com/podcast-show/dare-to-lead/

Title: The Lightmaker's Manifesto: How to Work for Change without Losing Your Joy
Author: Karen Walrond (2021)

This beautifully written book describes the link between joy and working for social changes as well as strategies for maintaining joy and wellness even during hard times.

Title: How Failure Cultivates Resistance
Speaker: Raphael Rose (2018)

In this 13 minute TEDx Talk, researcher and clinical psychologist at UCLA Raphael Rose explains findings from the research he does for NASA about resilience. He claims that the path to resilience is through slow and gradual behavior change, which is more likely to succeed and last, and being compassionate to yourself in moments of failure, which helps you rebound from failure faster and promotes resilience. Also, doing something for the joy it brings can allow you to engage in something meaningful and move beyond something difficult and not focus on stressors, also building resilience.

Link: https://www.ted.com/talks/raphael_rose_how_failure_cultivates_resilience

Title: The Thin Book of Trust: An Essential Primer for Building Trust At Work 2nd Edition
Author: Charles Feltman (2021)

"*Raisin cookies that look like chocolate chip cookies are the main reason I have trust issues.*" Many of us know that trust is important. We know it takes a long time to establish and a short time to destroy. In *The Think Book of Trust*, the nature of trust is broken down in ways that are easy to understand and communicate and how to build trust within personal relationships and within teams is operationalized. This book is short, useful and accessible.

Upcoming National Leadership Consortium
Events and Announcements

Winter Virtual Leadership Institute

February 8, 9, 14, 15, 22, 23, 28, & March 1, 2022

This four week, online intensive leadership development program is designed for seasoned and emerging leaders. Applicants may work in areas of executive leadership, management, or program leadership in organizations that provide, advocate for, or fund supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The focus of the Leadership Institute is on supporting participants to determine and set organizational direction to move their organization to a high-performance model and build a lifetime network of peers and leaders to sustain career growth. This Institute runs virtually for four weeks, meeting twice a week for 4.5 hours a day. To learn more, please visit nlcdd.org or email info@natleadership.org.

For Leadership Institute Alumni Only:

Healing Centered and Trauma Informed Leadership Series

Led by Amanda J. Rich (Owner of Open Roads Inclusive Community Consulting LLC, the Director of the Institute for Social Healing and an Associate Professor of Human Services at York College of Pennsylvania), this series is intended for those leaders who want to move beyond conversations of self-care and instead develop the skills needed to create systematic change and cultures of relational safety and trust in their organizations. Registrations for this Series (March 10, 15, & 17, 2022) will open soon. For more information, please email info@natleadership.org.

Planning for the Future: Becoming an Executive Director/CEO Workshop

Led by Steve Eidelman (Faculty Director, National Leadership Consortium), this workshop will help current and emerging leaders working in the IDD service sector to develop clarity around their career goals and plans as they consider a path to organizational executive leadership positions. Registrations for this Workshop (April 2022) will open soon. For more information, please email info@natleadership.org.

Referenced Materials and Resources

Recognizing and Reducing Stress, Chronic Stress, and Trauma in Yourself and Your Organization

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2. Polyvagal Theory in Practice
   https://ct.counseling.org/2016/06/polyvagal-theory-practice/

3. What Happened To You?: Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing
   https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/53238858-what-happened-to-you

4. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach
   https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/userfiles/files/SAMHSA_Trauma.pdf

5. The National Council's Framework for Trauma-Informed Leadership
   https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/What-is-TI-Leadership-002-002.pdf?daf=375ateTbd56

6. The Future of Healing: Shifting From Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement
   https://ginwright.medium.com/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c

7. Cultural Humility
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaSHLbS1V4w&t=790s

8. Trauma-Informed Systems of Care: The Role of Organizational Culture in the Development of Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Compassion Satisfaction
   https://www.fatherhood.gov/sites/default/files/resource_files/e000003491.pdf

9. Trauma-Informed Care Outcome Study
   https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1049731518766618?casa_token=vX1WzGGoAt8AAAAA%3AcIW-pdcLqYvWxHx4BQJgb42-Im_yv6lBwxjKxrhQ0KiwTfsGXZmO1tvmwvPaw9_lV8Dtj4BP2OGZ&journalCode=rswa

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11. A Treasure Box for Creating Trauma Informed Organizations
    https://us.jkp.com/products/a-treasure-box-for-creating-traumainformed-organizations

Research-Informed Action: Direct Support Professionals' Perspectives on Workplace Support: Underappreciated, Overworked, Stressed Out, and Stretched Thin

1. National Core Indicators® Staff Stability Survey Report 2019
https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/upload/core-indicators/2019StaffStabilitySurveyReport_FINAL_1_6_21.pdf

2. Direct Support Workforce and COVID-19 Survey: Providing Support During the COVID-19 Pandemic
https://ici.umn.edu/covid19-survey

3. Issues in the Direct Support Workforce and their Connections to the Growth, Sustainability and Quality of Community Supports
https://mygoodlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/hcfa.pdf

4. The Staffing Struggle is Real: New Statistics on I/DD Agencies' Most Common Personnel Challenges and 5 Tips for Reducing Employee Turnover
http://mykapp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Medisked-Staffing-Survey.pdf

5. Relias DSP Survey 2019 Results
https://iacny.org/images/WhitePaper_IDD_DSPSurveyResults.pdf

6. Direct Support Professionals' Perspectives on Workplace Support: Underappreciated, Overworked, Stressed Out, and Stretched Thin
https://meridian.allenpress.com/idd/article-abstract/59/3/204/465465/Direct-Support-Professionals-Perspectives-on

7. Supporting our Direct Care Workforce and Family Caregivers Act
https://www.kaine.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/KAINE%20INTRODUCES%20LEGISLATION%20TO%20SUPPORT%20DIRECT%20CARE%20WORKFORCE%20&%20FAMILY%20CAREGIVERS.pdf

8. Better Care Better Jobs Act
https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/2210

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https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/3321?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22hr+3321%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1

10. Collaborative for Citizen Directed Supports - ACL Announces the Blazing New Trails for Community-Based Direct Support Professionals Prize Challenge Grand Prize Winner
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11. The NADSP E-Badge Academy
https://nadsp.org/services/the-nadsp-e-badge-academy/

12. The Start, Stop, Continue, Approach to Feedback
https://worldofwork.io/2019/07/feedback-start-stop-continue/

13. Moving from Crisis to Stabilization: The Case for Professionalizing the Direct Support Workforce Through Credentialing
https://www.nadsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Moving-from-Crisis-to-Stabilization-Credentialing-Report.pdf

Avoiding Burnout

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2. Employee Burnout Report: COVID-19's Impact and 3 Strategies to Curb It
   https://www.indeed.com/lead/preventing-employee-burnout-report

3. The Whys and Hows of Generations Research
   https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/

4. ANCOR Study: The State of America's Direct Support Workforce 2021
   https://www.ancor.org/sites/default/files/the_state_of_americas_direct_support_workforce_crisis_2021.pdf

5. Effects of Mindfulness, Coping Styles and Resilience on Job Retention and Burnout in Caregivers Supporting Aggressive Adults with Developmental Disabilities
   https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jir.12594

6. The Great American Burnout is Just Getting Started: The USWorkforce is Feeling More Burned Out Than Ever Before
   https://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-workforce-is-feeling-more-burned-out-than-ever-2021-6

7. The Research Is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and for Companies
   https://hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies

Helping Stressed Out Organizations: Thoughts From Leaders in Our Field

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   https://www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/about-us/the-sanctuary-model/

2. Organizational Trauma: A Phenomenological Study of Psychological Organizational Trauma and Its Effect on Employees and Organization
   https://www.hippocampus.si/ISSN/1854-4231/14.117-136.pdf

3. Role of Leadership in Facilitating Healing and Renewal in Times of Organizational Trauma and Change
   https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=6NwzEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR1&dq=%22organizational+trauma%22+risk+factors+hooper&ots=Pn3fjBwFkO&sig=o33sq37h9kiNtnyo1aK0xHCmSFY#v=onepage&q&f=false

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   https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00667/full

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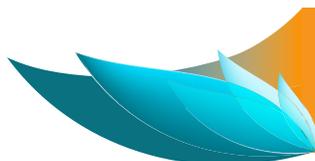
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