

Defending the Frontlines: Wellbeing and Performance for Public Justice Professionals

Presented by: Reinetta Arnold, LCSW, MAC, CFVIP, CACTS
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Reinette Arnold, LCSW-QS, MAC, CFVIP

- Therapist | Speaker | Consultant | Disruptor
- **Education:** Bachelors Degree - Psychology - Georgia State, Masters Degree - Social Work - Univ. Of Georgia
- Founded **The Empowerment Agency** in 2013
- Qualified Supervisor for Clinical SWs - Florida
- International Speaker and Consultant
- **Subject Matter Expert:** Wellbeing, Crisis Intervention, Critical Incident/Debriefing Services, Domestic Violence, Suicide Prevention, Business Development
- Trained in 4 Evidenced Based Suicide Prevention Workshops
- “Wellbeing” Ambassador
- Operator of **”The Builder’s Table”** a micro co-workspace located in Dunwoody, GA





The Empowerment Agency

- **Management Consulting:** provides trauma informed, program development and coaching services for companies seeking relevant, culturally competent, and evidenced-based material to increase the knowledge, awareness, performance and wellbeing among employees.
- **Clinical Services:** provides counseling, clinical consultations, and critical incident stress management services to individuals, organizations, and communities. Signature programs and specialty areas include Wellbeing + Performance, Crisis Intervention, Cross –System Collaboration, Domestic Violence and Behavioral Health.
- **Technical Assistance and Capacity Building:** provides TA & CB services to organizations, government entities, and corporations focused on increasing the capacity to serve, meet organizational objectives, program development, and/or leadership capabilities.
- **Professional Development** – provides services to organizations and individuals geared towards meeting their business and/or career objectives. Services include CE workshops, leadership development, new business development, and clinical supervision for behavioral health practitioners.

Objectives:

- **Analyze Autonomic Stress States:** Analyze physiological nervous system responses from vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and chronic burnout using mindfulness and somatic self-monitoring markers.
- **Formulate Threat-Resilient Coping Systems:** Formulate and apply cognitive reframing techniques to develop mindset shifts from “threat appraisal” to a high-agency “challenge appraisal”.
- **Integrate Real-Time Micro-Recovery Protocols:** Design and integrate micro-recovery workflows into daily practice to systematically mitigate decision fatigue and preserve ethical, legal, and clinical competence.

Let's Talk About Stress

- What is Stress?
 - Eustress
 - Acute Stress
 - Chronic Stress

Impact of defending justice:

- As a result of your purpose, passion, and drive
 - It comes with a risk...
 - Vicarious Trauma
 - Compassion Fatigue
 - Burnout

Rachel Naomi Ramen, MD

“The idea that we could be immersed in such pain and suffering and not be impacted by it, is as insane as thinking we can walk through water and not get wet”.

Why is this important?

- The body has a physiological response
 - Brain Health
 - Genomic or Genetic Health
 - Metabolic Health
 - Mental and Emotional Health
- It may impact...
 - Sexual Health
 - Spiritual Health
 - Social Health
 - Financial Health
 - Professional Development

Responses to Stress, Burnout and Trauma

- How do I know when I have been activated?



Tool: Mindfulness and Somatic Self-monitoring

- **Goal of Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is a form of present-moment awareness or simply living in the moment. When we are mindful, we are noticing what is happening in our bodies and the world around us as it is happening
- **Goal of somatic self-monitoring:** The goal of the exercise is to teach your brain that it is safe and in no danger, but you don't care whether the pain changes, or gets better or worse while you are tracking it



Sample Somatic Tracking Exercise

1. Notice it with interest, maybe even with a little curiosity, but with no emotional reactivity.
2. Pay attention to how the pain moves around or changes in quality but do so without emotion. Accept it as happening right now but realize that this thought or body sensation is transient and caused by the brain. Say to yourself “It’s just a thought, a sensation, or neurons firing.”





Why does this matter?

What's the relevance?

Why should I reconsider, the way I show up?

Why should I redefine the way I show up?

Why should I start re-evaluate the way I
perceive self-care?

Two reasons:

Quality of Life

Wellbeing



Let's Talk Strategy – Micro level

- Integration of practices into lifestyle
- Rituals, practices, routines
- Low hanging fruit
- Reminders, triggers
- Community
- Accountability partners
- Build a wellness advisory board (health + professional development partners)

Let's Talk Strategy – Mezzo level

- Leadership
- Systemic Re-design
- Integration into workplace
- Normalize the concept “Self-care = Performance”
- Build relationships with partners and stakeholders to increase access to resources
- Feedback loops and processes

Objective #2

- **Formulate Threat-Resilient Coping Systems:** Formulate and apply cognitive appraisal and reframing techniques to develop mindset shifts from “threat appraisal” to a high-agency “challenge appraisal”.

Tool: Cognitive appraisal

- Cognitive appraisal the process of evaluating a situation to decide if it is a threat, a challenge, or something entirely neutral.
- The brain often misidentifies non-life-threatening events as dangerous, such as a difficult email, long community, a calendar request or a long commute to court.

The goal is to move from **threat** to *challenge...*

Tool: Cognitive reframing techniques

- Goal to develop mindset shifts from “threat appraisal” to a high-agency “challenge appraisal”.
- It shifts internal narrative from a threat to a challenge, “an opportunity”.
 - Changes brains perception from failure to opportunity of success
 - Changes bodies physiological response from stress - “flight or fight” resulting in a cortisol spike (blood glucose spike)
 - Reduces exposure to prolonged stress

Reflection Question #1

*Think of a recurring, high-stress scenario in your current workload—such as an uncooperative client, an adversarial judge, or an unmanageable case volume—that routinely triggers a feeling of dread or helplessness (**threat appraisal**).*

*If you view this scenario instead as a complex puzzle that tests your specific skills (**challenge appraisal**), **what is one micro-action within your control that you can take to reassert your agency?***

Reflection Question #2

*Vicarious trauma and systemic barriers often make public defense feel like a losing battle. To build a **threat-resilient coping system**, **what specific phrase, mental pause, or debriefing routine can you commit to using the next time a case takes a frustrating turn, ensuring you focus on where your actual leverage lies rather than the systemic factors you cannot control?***

Objective #3

- **Integrate Real-Time Micro-Recovery Protocols:** Design and integrate micro-recovery workflows into daily practice to systematically mitigate decision fatigue and preserve ethical, legal, and clinical competence.

Tool: Micro-recovery workflows


- Put yourself in a “Bubble” – (1-minute, 2-minute, 5-minute, 10-minute reset)
- Transition Rituals
- Sensory Breaks – reduce stimulation from external sources
- Practice movement
- Work schedule boundaries

Sample Exercises

- 20-20-20 Eye Reset
- Walk during breaks
- Automatic prompts that schedule meetings with 10-minute gaps
- Eat your lunch within multi tasking. Be present
- Clear tabs, reduce clutter or Desktop
- Watch a funny video
- Drink water (extra credit if it includes electrolytes)
- Incorporate breathing techniques
- Positive self-talk – “High five Exercise”

Sample Micro-break Resources

- Himalayan Singing Bowl
- Hand pan Music
- Alexa or Google
- YouTube
- Spotify, Pandora, etc.

A photograph of Angela Davis speaking at a microphone. She has a large afro and is wearing a dark turtleneck. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people. The text is overlaid on the image.

**I am no longer accepting
the things I cannot change,
I am changing the things
I cannot accept.**

—
Angela Davis

“True resilience is the ability to consciously adjust your internal interpretation of external events to prevent unnecessary biological wear and tear”.

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Theory to Practice

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- **Fatigue Flashpoint:** Look at your typical Tuesday or Thursday.
 - Write down the *exact* moment where decision fatigue peak-loads
- **Select a 60-Second Protocol (2 mins):**
 - **The Somatic Reset:** 3 cycles of "box breathing" (4s inhale, 4s hold, 4s exhale, 4s hold) to down-regulate the nervous system.
 - **The Cognitive Offload:** Spending 60 seconds scribbling a chaotic "brain dump" on a scrap piece of paper, then immediately shredding/crumpling it to clear working memory.
 - **The Environmental Shift:** Standing up, stepping away from the screen/case file, stretching the neck, and drinking a full glass of water.
- **Map the Formula (1 min):**
 - "Immediately after I finish [**Insert Fatigue Flashpoint**], and *before* I start [**Insert Next Task**], I will commit to [**Insert 60-Second Protocol**] to protect my focus."

Discussion



Tell yourself one key takeaway from today's session.

Sample prompts:

- Starting today, I will...
- I know understand why...
- Self-care will...



Upcoming Opportunities:

- Organizational Consulting
- Networking
- Wellbeing Meetups (Outdoors or activity based)
- Speaking engagements (Keynotes or technical assistance)
- Collaboration Opportunities

If you would like to collaborate on special projects or events, please reach out to reINETTE@empowered-consultants.com



Thank You!

For more information feel free to contact The Empowerment Agency

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