EMPATHY BURNOUT

Finding work-life balance in public service roles

Hello!

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1.

Getting on the same page

Understanding Empathy Burnout

Some useful definitions

Emotional Labour

Emotional labor is the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfill the emotional requirements of a job. More specifically, workers are expected to regulate their emotions during interactions with customers, co-workers and superiors.

Source: Wikipedia "Emotional Labor"

Burnout

Burnout is a term that has been used since the early 1980s describe the physical and emotional exhaustion that workers can experience when they have low job satisfaction and feel powerless and overwhelmed at work.

Source: Tend Academy

http://www.tendacademy.ca/what-is-compassion-fatigue/

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue has been described as the "cost of caring" for others in emotional or physical pain (Figley, 1982). It refers to the profound emotional and physical erosion that takes place when helpers are unable to refuel and regenerate.

Source: Tend Academy

http://www.tendacademy.ca/what-is-compassion-fatigue/

EMPATHY BURNOUT

Empathy Burnout describes an emotional detachment brought about by prolonged exposure to emotional situations. Is has also been used to describe a feeling of emotional and physical exhaustion (burnout) due to an overload of others emotions and/or overwhelming amounts of emotional labour.

Empathy Burnout
in context

- Most commonly described in caregivers or "helping" professions (nursing, social work, first responders etc.)
- More recently has been looked at in the context of public service roles and the feeling of "being on" at all times (high emotional labour).
- Emotional contagion vs. Empathetic concern
  - **Emotional contagion**: vicariously sharing another person's feelings
  - **Empathetic concern**: forming a goal to alleviate that person's suffering.
  - Whereas **contagion** involves blurring the boundary between self and other, **concern** requires retaining or even strengthening such boundaries.

Source: "How to Avoid Empathy Burnout" by Jamil Zaki. *Nautilus*, April 2016

2.
Libraries and Burnout

Changing libraries, changing stressors

Is burnout an issue in libraries?

What factors contribute to burnout in library professionals?

Workplace stressors
in libraries

- Some of the most common stressors identified in the literature are:
  - Workload
  - Control
  - Recognition
  - Image
  - Value

Source: "A Passion Deficit: Occupational Burnout and the New Librarians" by Linda A Christian, *The Southeastern Librarian,* Winter 2005

How is your library changing?

How is your library, and the landscape in which it operates, different than it was 20 years ago? 10 years ago? 5 years ago?

Do any of these feel true?

- More outreach?
- More programming?
- More online engagement?
- More community engagement?
- Less money?
- Less staff?
- Less time?
- More "on demand" service expectations?
- More 24/7 service expectations?
- More emotional labour?

" **For librarians, stress can come from dealing with difficult patrons and uncertain budgetary constraints, to having to do work for which they aren't qualified, due to staff cutbacks. [...] This is not to say that information professionals should stop bringing caring and service to the job, but they have to learn where to draw the line for their own mental health and to maintain their effectiveness on the job.**

- Patricia Katopol, "Enough Already: Compassion Fatigue", *Library Leadership & Management*, Vol 30, no. 2.

3.

A Quick Detour

What does it mean to be a librarian?

THE RESILIENCE NARRATIVE

"When I was in library school [...] I didn't hear anything about workload, emotional labor, self-care or burnout. What I did hear a lot about was how librarians are creative, resilient, and good at doing more with less.

[...]

Resilience promotes the idea that library staffers can overcome anything and that those who cannot are at fault for their situation."

- Meredith Farkas, "Less is Not More" American Libraries Magazine, Nov/Dec

VOCACTIONAL AWE

"So what exactly is "vocational awe?" Well simply put, it is the idea that libraries as institutions are inherently good. It assumes that some or all core aspects of the profession are beyond critique, and it, in turn, underpins many librarians' sense of identity and emotional investment in the profession."

- Fobazi Ettarh, from this May 30, 2017 blog post - bit.ly/alvocawe

Does your job have to be
a calling?

- When/Where/How can we critique our profession and our workplace?
- What do you have left to take home?
- Are vocational awe and the resilience narrative standing in the way of better libraries?

"The more one struggles for their work, the "holier" it becomes and the less likely that people will fight for a healthier workspace, and the less likely it will be that people will actually separate themselves from their work. I mean how often have you heard someone say that they work through lunch and on the weekends, because they're so "passionate" about what they do?[...] Why should working until you literally burnout due to physical and emotional exhaustion be the norm? [...]"

- *Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe?" from bit.ly/alvocawe*

" *We as librarians need to stop spreading this rhetoric that libraries are this beacon of democracy and critical thinking. Libraries are just buildings. It is the people who do the work. And we need to treat these people well. You can't eat on passion. You can't pay rent on passion. It is not a sustainable source of income, and we need to stop treating vocational awe as the only way to be a librarian.*

- *Fobazi Ettarh, "Vocational Awe?" from bit.ly/alvocawe*

4.

The Challenges

Where is Empathy Burnout lurking in your library?

What are some of the challenges we face in mitigating burnout?

A (non-comprehensive) list

- Lack of training for dealing with trauma/mental health/substance abuse and other challenging situations
- Staffing and budget cuts
- Gaps in training and transitional training/mentoring for new librarians/staff
- Changing role of the Library
- Interpersonal relationships and dynamics
- Demands of front facing and public service roles
- Out of date workplace Health and Safety programs
- Creating and maintaining boundaries
- Workload
- Guilt
- Etc.

Considering two types
of stressors

Internal

Stressors that develop within, or due to, the culture of the organization (ie: workplace dynamics and conflict, scheduling/workload, insufficient training, health and safety etc.)

External

Stressors that largely originate outside the organization but are present in the workplace (ie: difficult patron interactions, helping patrons experiencing trauma, funding uncertainty etc.)

Why burnout hurts
your organization

- Increased absenteeism
- "Presenteeism"
  - The "cousin" of absenteeism - employees are at work but are not engaged in their work
- Higher turnover rates
- Lower productivity and lower quality of work
- Less stability in the workplace
  - Scheduling
  - Disorganization
  - Workload
- Potential for more conflict and interpersonal issues

6.

Identifying Burnout

What to look for in ourselves and others

Recognizing the signs
of burnout

- *Psychology Today* describes the three main markers of burnout being:
  - Physical and emotional exhaustion
  - Cynicism and detachment
  - Feelings of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment.
- Each of these three factors has some signs/symptoms that we can watch out for in ourselves and others.

Signs of physical and
emotional exhaustion

- **Chronic Fatigue**
- **Forgetfulness**
- **Insomnia**
- **Increased illness**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Anger/Irritability**
- **Physical symptoms**
  - Heart palpitations, shortness of breath, gastrointestinal pain, headaches etc.)

Signs of cynicism and detachment

- **Loss of enjoyment**
  - Avoiding projects and social situations, extending beyond work to home life as well.
- **Pessimism**
  - Negative self-talk, escalating to issues of distrust with co-workers, family and friends.
- **Isolation**
  - Resistance to socializing, irritability, inability to be around others.
- **Detachment**
  - Sense of disconnectedness from work and people, removing yourself emotionally and physically from the job

Signs of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment

- **Feelings of apathy and hopelessness**
  - Similar to depression/pessimism - feeling that nothing is going right or nothing matters.
- **Lack of productivity or poor performance**
  - Lack of productivity or motivation despite working full days or long hours, inability to complete projects or meet deadlines, feeling that no matter how hard you try you can't get on top of your work.
- **Increased irritability**

Source: "The Signs of Burnout… Do You Have Them?" by Sherrie Bourg Carter Psy. D., *Psychology Today*, November 2013. http://bit.ly/1EzhJVt

7.

Looking for Solutions

Always. Fade. Away.

Are we looking in the right direction?

What kind of culture are we cultivating for ourselves? Our co-workers? Our patrons?
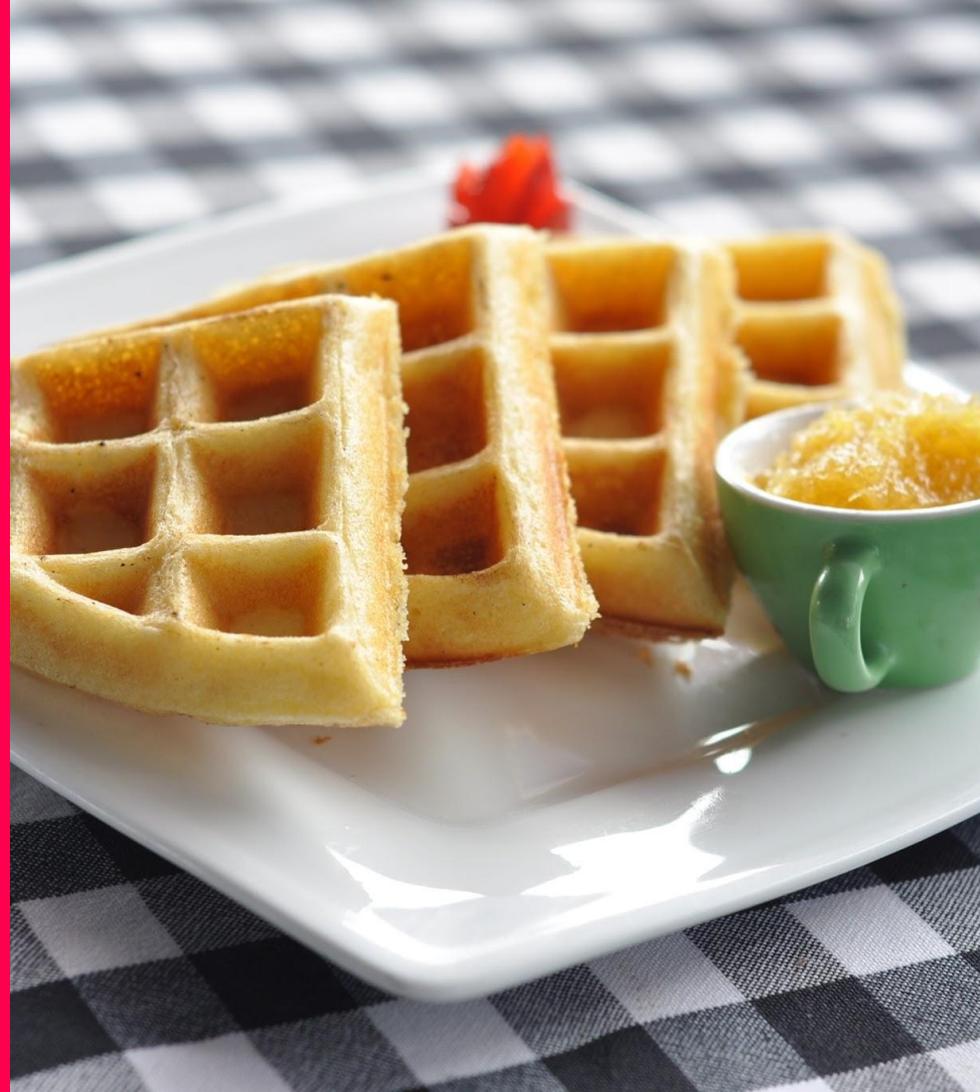
Taking a three pronged approach.

Organizational   **Managerial**   **Individual**

Looking at organizational solutions

- Policy and Best Practices
  - Patron Conduct
  - Emergency Plans/Working Alone/Risk Assessment
  - HR/Personnel
- Health and Safety Program
- Employee Family Assistance Program (EFAP) & other benefits coverage
- Training Opportunities
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - De-escalation
- Board/CEO/Management (etc.) buy-in

Looking at managerial
solutions

- One-on-one coaching and discussion
- Incident reporting and reviewing
- Ongoing training plans
- Evaluating the workplace culture
    - Staff meetings
    - Collaboration
    - Is your door open?
- Being aware of signs of burnout
- "Talk less, listen more"

Looking at individual solutions

- Identifying burnout in ourselves and others
- Cultivate the culture you want to grow
- Self-care
  - What does it look like for you?
    - Physical
    - Emotional
- Mindfulness
- Mentorship

# Mentorship for work-life balance

- Mentorship provides opportunities to discuss challenges, set goals and share successes and concerns
- Establishing a mentorship:
    - Find the right fit
    - Take advantage of existing programs (MentorMatch etc.)
    - Consider omni-directional or lateral mentorship
    - Looking beyond libraries
- Mentorship can be valuable at any point in a career, not just for new librarians

What does work-life balance even mean?

It's about finding the right balance between your work/career priorities and your personal/private life priorities.
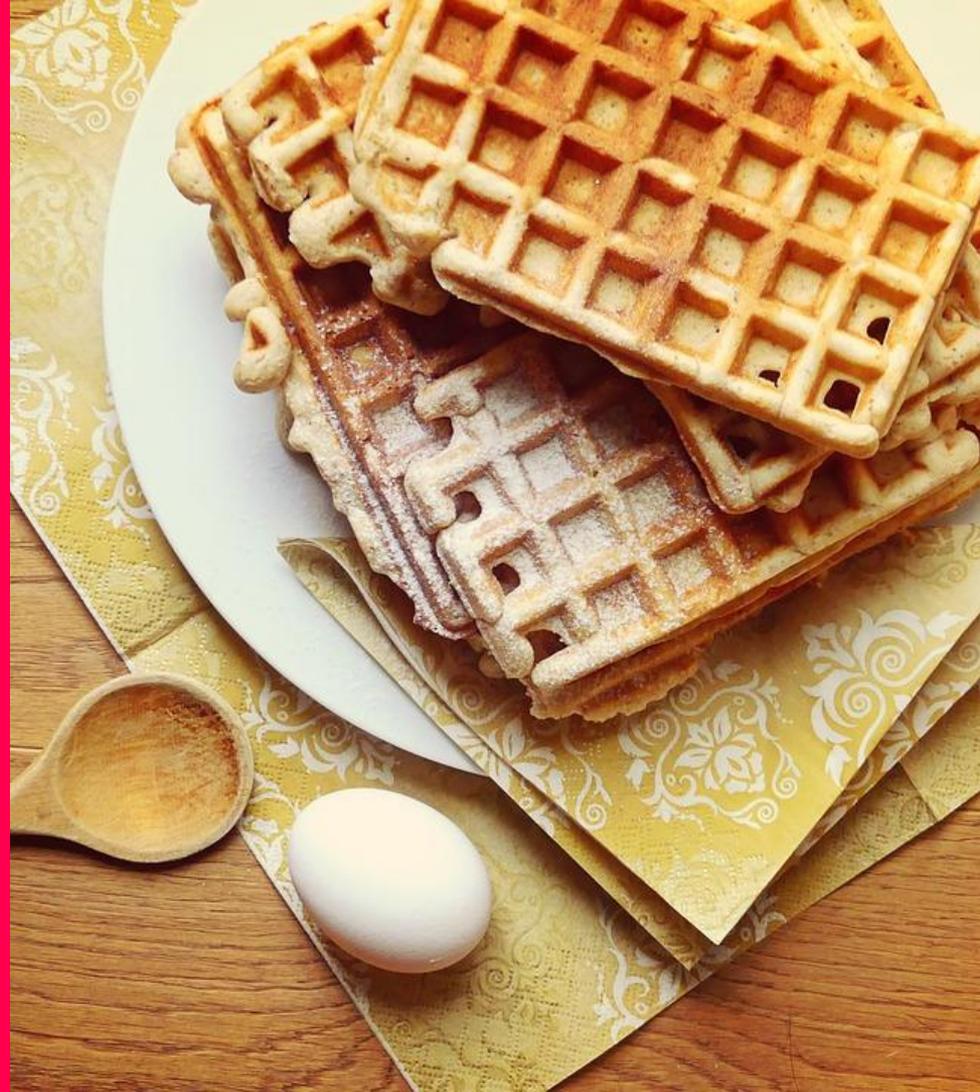
This is my annual
John Green slide
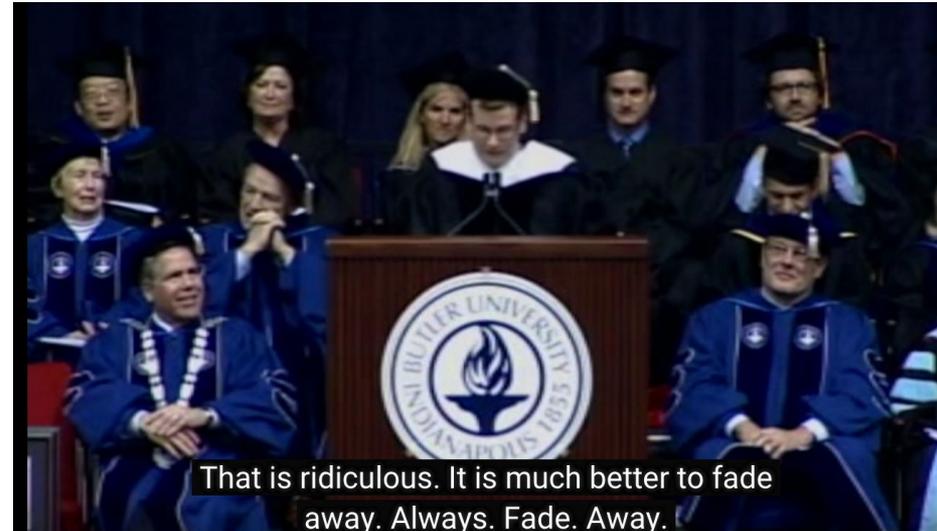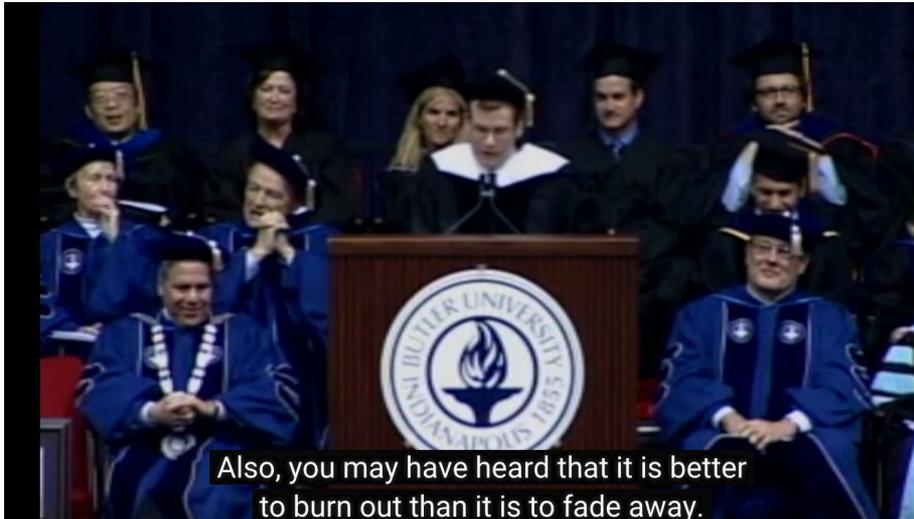
Source: John Green Commencement Address - Butler University.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLQ4Tswr1Ss

Set yourself up
to succeed

- Try to keep things in perspective (the "is anyone bleeding principle?")
- Do the things that fill you up
- Learn when (and how) to say "no"
- Prioritize your health
- Scheduled relaxation
- Who is your support system?

What does your self-care look like?

8.

Waffles. Friends. Work.

I promise those waffle pictures weren't just to make you hungry.

The immortal words of
Leslie Knope

We have to remember what's important in life: friends, waffles, and work. Or waffles, friends, work. But work has to come third.

Source: Parks and Recreation. Season 3, Episode 13

Thanks!!

Any questions?

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Credits

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