



Strand² Squared

A Paradigm Shift Solution

Mitigating Organizational trauma and toxic work environments

This presentation pairs well with: Holistic Professional Wellness: Beyond Vicarious Trauma
and/or: Human Centric, Trauma Responsive Leadership

“Emotions tend to be contagious. Toxic ones leak out onto the workplace affecting more than just the person afflicted. It can poison a team, a workplace, an organization”. -Peter Frost

Agencies and organizations that provide services to individuals, families and/or communities who have experienced trauma and/or victimization are susceptible to becoming traumatized systems that experience the cumulative effects of the work itself. Highly mission driven work (i.e. law enforcement, victim advocacy, forensic nursing, medical emergency response, child protective services, court work...) creates an intense emotional culture, and the emotional nature of the mission seeps into that culture. The culture and work mutually reinforce each other over time creating risk for secondary victimization, thus making organizational health an ethical obligation.

Trauma can affect organizations just as it affects individuals. And just as silence and lack of understanding about trauma hurts the individual- it can also hurt the organization and the people the organization supports. Often, we fail to understand the symptoms of organizational trauma and try to mitigate the issues as “interpersonal” or “intra-personal” striving to address the factors with common tools like “better communication”, “clarification of expectations and roles”, “self-care” but really the issues are embedded deeply within the overarching organizational system.

This presentation will look at the presence of trauma through the organizational lens exploring how trauma can become systemic creating an invisible, but all-present, underpinning toxic tone. We will discuss the ways in which trauma impacts an agency and how to detangle the difference between an individual with toxic behaviors and an individual working (surviving) within a toxic environment. It will highlight signs and symptoms, risk factors and consequences while exploring ways in which we can mitigate and navigate these stormy environments. We will also identify factors that negatively impact organizations beyond the presence of trauma compounding the toxic environment further.

Every organization in the field of criminal justice and other helping professions face some risk for organizational, systemic trauma, and with the nature of our work, it is particularly important for us to be vigilant and ensure protective factors in order to combat trauma through transparency, vulnerability and healing strategies.

Objectives:

- to provide tools to identify a toxic organization who is systemically traumatized
- to articulate some common symptoms that point to organizational trauma
- to analyze risk and protective factors
- to provide strategies and possible solutions to create and maintain healthy organizations
- to provide tools to mitigate organizational trauma and work towards healthy culture
- to work beyond the “Self-Care” “Vicarious Trauma” paradigm