Mental Armoring: Mitigating the Effects of Vicarious Trauma for Law Enforcement Officers, First Responders, and Mental Health Personnel Who Respond to the Trauma of Others

May 21, 2013
Oak Creek, Wisconsin
Distinctions

Eustress vs. Distress

Acute vs. Chronic

Burnout vs. Traumatization

Vicarious Trauma

Compassion Fatigue
Neurobiology of Stress and Trauma

Subcortical “Under the Hood”
F/F/F Where Trauma lives

Brainstem

Cortex

Conscious Awareness & Responses

Greenleaf Integrative Strategies
Resiliency in Work & Society
Neurobiology of Stress and Trauma

Brainstem

Stressor (perceived by 5 senses)

Conscious response to threat

Amygdala - fear/aversion

Neurotransmitters

Brainstem

Greenleaf Integrative Strategies
Resiliency in Work & Society
Lessons Learned from Neurobiology

1. Stress is not intangible; there are electrochemical pathways that drive reactions.

2. In order to “survive,” brain prioritizes subcortical habits.

3. Resiliency skills → Enhanced subcortical habits
   – Self-regulation
   – Protection against injury
Our Updated Approach to Resiliency

**Scientific basis**

- **Resiliency 1.0**: Psychotherapy
- **Resiliency 2.0**: Neurobiology and psychology

**Neurological locus**

- **Resiliency 1.0**: Mainly cortical
- **Resiliency 2.0**: Cortical & sub-cortical

**Training modalities**

- **Resiliency 1.0**: Inspiring tips & exhortations
- **Resiliency 2.0**: Concrete behavior change coaching

**Advantages of Resiliency 2.0**

- Takes advantage of findings in the last 5-10 years. Leverages new technologies like fMRI.
- Many stress reactions can only be illuminated & modified by understanding sub-cortical processes.
- More targeted, comprehensive and integrated. Resiliency 2.0 training engages individuals not benefitted by tips/exhortations.
What Resiliency Is – and Isn’t

**MYTHS**

- Resiliency is an inherent trait.
- Resilience is about “toughing it out” or reacting to every setback with a smile.
- Resiliency means chilling out and not taking things seriously.

**REALITY**

- Resiliency involves learning behaviors, thoughts, and actions.
- Resilient people still feel sad, angry, or frustrated when faced with a setback. But they find ways to move forward and tackle challenges with creativity, hope, and a positive attitude.
- Resiliency and smart responses go together. It can be the difference between success and failure. Or the difference between recovery and despair.
Resilient Workforces Avoid:

- Compromised performance
- Turnover
- Low morale, disillusionment
- Traumatic reactions
- Maladaptive behaviors (e.g. passive-aggressive workplace behavior, bullying, excessive alcohol use, absenteeism)
Exercise: Getting down to what matters to you

STRESS INVENTORY

• Note your long-term patterns and trends (left column)
• Note any short-term stress symptoms (right column)
Discussion

• Gather into groups of three

• Each individual will share for 2 minutes the barriers to self-care in the midst of doing work that involves seeing the underbelly of life

• The small group will then decide what to share with the larger group
Practical Skill: Breathing

A. Abdominal Breathing
   – To ensure that breath goes to lower lung fields, lengthen exhale

B. Alternate Nostril Breathing
   – inhale right nostril, exhale left, inhale left, exhale right

C. Harmonized Breathing Words
   – (silence)...One
   – Calming…Down
   – Soft…Belly
Practical Skill: Get the Good Stuff

• Write down three good things that happened today

  1. ____________________________________________________
  2. ____________________________________________________
  3. ____________________________________________________

• Then plan out how you can get more good stuff tomorrow
# My Resiliency Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I will do:</th>
<th>When I will do it:</th>
<th>Resources needed:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>For me</strong></td>
<td>First thing Friday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Practice breathing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use audio/video aids</td>
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| **For my colleagues**                 |                                        |                   |
| • Share this class with colleagues   |                                        |                   |
| • Assess needs & capacities          |                                        |                   |
| • Encourage training for my team     |                                        |                   |
| • _________________________________ |                                        |                   |
| • _________________________________ |                                        |                   |
| • _________________________________ |                                        |                   |
| • _________________________________ |                                        |                   |

**Greenleaf Integrative Strategies**

Resiliency in Work & Society
Key Takeaways

- Resiliency is not an “inherent” trait. It is a practical skill.
- Resiliency improves with training.
- Organizations ignore resiliency at their peril.
OPTIONAL slides to follow – if time permits
How Visualization Works

**Basis for Mind over Matter**

Dr. Candace B. Pert is among the pioneers who illuminated the biological mechanisms by which mind-body modalities achieve what they do. Therapeutic visualization (or guided imagery) has been documented to improve immune system functioning and reduce hospital stays.


**Stress Management as a Competitive Advantage**

“Using advanced statistical techniques… we discovered that how a person views the world exerts a powerful, if not more powerful effect, *than the actual events themselves.*”

Practical Skill: Visualization of Resiliency

• Purposeful Daydreaming

• Promoted in athletes and soldiers to “see” success

1. Centering Breath
2. Performance Statement
3. Highlights Reel
4. Future Situation