Today’s Presenters

Kaetrena Davis Kendrick
Researcher, Leader, Consultant, and Coach

Sunnie Scarpa
Library Director, E.C. Scranton Memorial Library (CT)
Low Morale in Libraries: Impacts & Countermeasures

Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, MSLS
Sunnie Scarpa, MLIS
My mission is to inspire authentic collegiality, and to promote well-being, share the gifts of creativity, and cultivate empathetic, engaged leadership in the workplace.
Low Morale makes me feel/think ____________.
Low Morale Studies: Defining the Experience
Low Morale Studies

- Focus: Credentialed librarians working in various library environments.

- Motivation:
  - issues of collegiality, ethics, professionalism
  - workplace culture / organizational behavior
  - leadership training & professional development
  - emotional labor of librarianship

- Question: What does it feel like/mean to have low morale within the environmental and social contexts of librarianship?
Low Morale is...

Exposure to repeated and protracted workplace abuse or neglect

Emotional abuse: manipulation, intimidation, thwarting, targeting, or micromanaging.

Verbal/written abuse: lying, public shaming, yelling/shouting, ephemeral/unfounded complaining, disinforming, or snitching.

System abuse: system rigging, cronyism, steamrolling, or violating human resources or workplace policies and procedures.

Negligence: *laissez-faire* or ambivalent library or campus leadership/administration, lack of advocacy, capricious decision-making, or ineffective communication.
Review: Low-Morale Experience Development
Low-Morale Experience Development

- Trigger event
- Emotional responses to trigger event
- Protracted exposure to abuse/neglect
- Emotional and cognitive responses
- Physical and mental health impacts
- Attempts to end/resolve experience
- Recovery
- Lessons learned

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Organizational Impacts

- Increased procrastination
- Increased tardiness & absenteeism
- Increased employee isolation
- Increased training gaps
- Sustained negative emotions

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Low-Morale Experience Factors, Systems & Frameworks
Low Morale: Factors & Systems

CORE/GENERAL:
- Insidiousness
- Contagion
- Uncertainty & Mistrust
- Enabling Systems
  - Promotion & Tenure
  - Staffing & Employment
  - Human Resources Limitations
  - LIS/Library Perceptions
  - Leadership

ADDITIONAL FOR FORMAL LEADERS:
- Misaligned Values
- Potemkin Power
- Positional Isolation
- Crossfire
- Accountability
- Legacy Toxicity
- Enabling Systems (no new systems reported)
COVID – 19: A Note of Recognition

- Reflects data gathered March 16, 2020 – May 11, 2023 (N= 473)
- Participants already dealing with low-morale before pandemic
- Goal = to see how library responses to COVID-19 impact LMEs.

Photo by Katie Harp on Unsplash
COVID – 19: A Note of Recognition

Upticks in...
- Negligence (81%)
- System abuse (62%)

Experiences/Challenges with:
- Burnout (80%)
- Resilience Narratives (79%)
- Vocational Awe (72%)

Abusers were...
- Library administrators (77%)
- Supervisors/managers (48%)

Top Impact Factors/ Enabling Systems:
- Uncertainty & Mistrust (81%)
- Leadership (71%)
- Staffing & Employment (62%)
- Human Resources Limitations (55%)
Low Morale
Countermeasures
Self-Preservation

Tools required for survival and deflection of acts of workplace abuse and neglect at the time the events occur.

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Established Self-Preservation Tools

- Assertive Communication
- Boundaries
- Creativity

Photo by Patrick on Unsplash
Emerging Self-Preservation Tools

- Conflict Resolution
- Reassessment
- Collective Care

Photo by Paul Hanaoka on Unsplash
Collective Care

“Collective care refers to seeing members' well-being – particularly their emotional health – as a shared responsibility of the group rather than the lone task of an individual. ... It places an emphasis on joint accountability, with the aim of collective empowerment.”

(Mehreen & Gray-Donald 2018)
Ongoing Research, Community & Coaching

• Low morale research is ongoing (scan code for all data collection projects)

• Community:
  - Renewers: A Facebook community
  - @RenewersLIS (Instagram)
  - @RenewersL (Twitter)

https://bit.ly/41mURpu
Ongoing Research, Community & Coaching

- **Coaching & Consultation:**
  - Programmatic/Individualized & Executive Coaching
  - Low-morale experience recovery
  - Career path clarity or transition
  - Space for reflection on/cultivation of healing leadership styles

- **Workshop Facilitation & Group Coaching**
  - New leaders establishing trust with in-place or new managerial teams/employees
  - Established leaders seeking reconnection within/fresh perspective for historically dysfunctional departments

- **Start at Renewals:** [https://www.renewalslis.com](https://www.renewalslis.com)
Definition of success: Peace of mind attained through self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do the best of which you’re capable.

- John Wooden
The Most Important Countermeasure: A Healthy Workplace Culture

• Hire and train empathetic staff with healthy boundaries
• Healthy organizations proactively work to prevent/minimize low morale triggers and empower staff to empathetically enforce healthy boundaries
• Educate your Board, so they can partner with you to provide sufficient funding and staffing
A Healthy Workplace Culture

• Create supportive policies and procedures
  • Code of Conduct should specify anti-harassment policies to apply to patrons, staff, and Board members; and effective incident reporting systems should be in place

• Banish uncertainty and mistrust by creating clear goals for every staff member, tied to the mission/strategic plan
Creating a Healthy Culture:
Start with Yourself

• Create systems in your own life/work to stave off burn out and increase job satisfaction
  • Lead by example: prioritize PD & create strong networks
• Model healthy boundaries for all staff
  • Leave on time, communicate candidly regarding boundaries, use all Paid Time Off!
Trauma-Informed Leadership/Librarianship

• A trauma-informed response includes these four main tenets: Realization, Recognition, Response, and Resisting Re-traumatization

• 6 key principles: Safety, Trustworthiness and Transparency, Peer Support, Collaboration and Mutuality, Empowerment and Choice, Recognizing cultural, historical, and gender issues
Support Middle Managers

• Create a supportive team by scheduling regular meetings where supervisors can collaborate and problem solve together

• Promote consistent, caring, honest communication
  • Standing meetings hold space for non-urgent work matters

• Don’t let one apple spoil the bunch
  • Hold employees accountable for their work and behavior, and empower supervisors to do the same
Other Things to Think About:

• The importance of “Psychological Safety”
  • Knowing that it’s okay to take risks, express ideas/concerns, ask questions, and admit mistakes – without fear of reprisal
  • Create a systems of support – morning meetings, collaborative white boards, café club, staff training day
  • Becoming a continuous learning organization- staff view mistakes as stepping stones to success
Other Things to Think About:

• Systemic supports, i.e. good habits:
  • Always check in with staff after an incident
  • Give regular, specific praise in person and in writing, both publicly and privately
More Questions?

• Keep in touch: scarpas@scrantonlibrary.org