

Today's Presenters



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Low Morale in Libraries: Impacts & Countermeasures

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**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 _____.

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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.



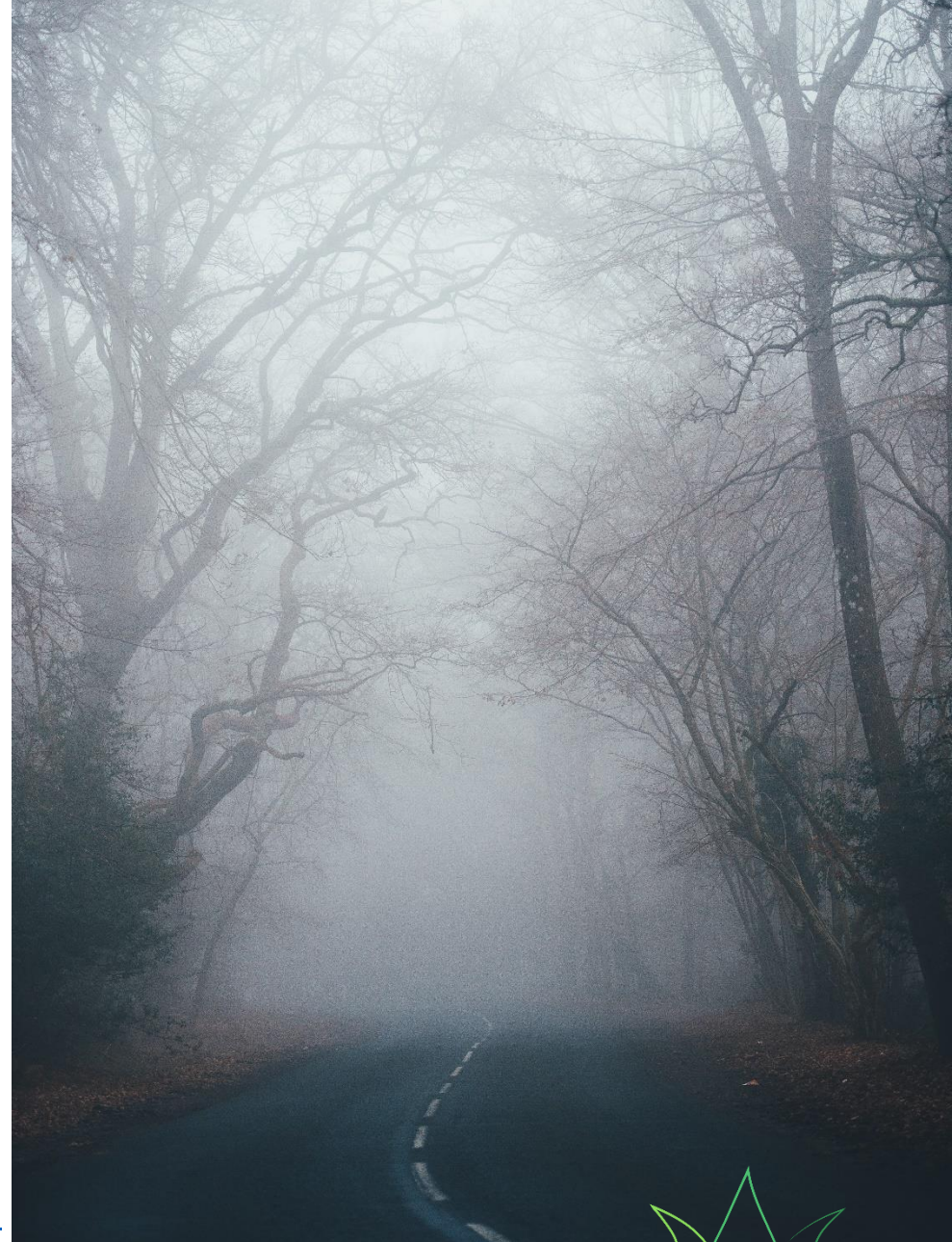


Review: Low-Morale Experience Development

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.



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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%)



A stylized graphic of a green leaf with multiple pointed lobes, rendered in a light green color, positioned behind the text.

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



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Emerging Self-Preservation Tools

- Conflict Resolution
- Reassessment
- Collective Care



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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>**





Sunnie Scarpa

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

