

EXPERT INSIGHT: Three Ways to Disrupt Modern Day Stress | **Transcript**

Intro:

Right now one of the biggest concerns for leaders in the social sector is the wellbeing of their staff.

From Pro Bono News and Top Five Movement, this is the Leading Generous Teams podcast and I'm Clare Desira.

As the founder of the Top Five Movement, I've worked with thousands of leaders across 40 countries and I've seen how challenging it is to lead teams at the best of times, let alone right now.

COVID-19 has had a seismic impact on the social sector, and this is taking its toll on the people working in it.

So this show is dedicated to you, generous leaders who recognise that the resilience, mindset and mental health of your teams has never been more important.

Hit subscribe now to never miss an episode.

And if you can't wait to start building your team's resilience with our free tools, head to www.topfive-movement.com/tools to get started.

And of course, for all of your social sector news head on over to www.probonoaustralia.com.au.

Clare Desira: Hello, and welcome to another bonus episode of Leading Generous Teams. These episodes are really designed to bring you some expert insights and expand on the conversations that we've been having with our generous leaders around mindset, resilience, and wellbeing and to give you some extra tips that you can try yourself and with your teams.

Today, I really want to talk about stress and focus and the language and the thoughts we use in both of these situations. To help illustrate this story, I want to take you to a far off land and a far off time when we were able to travel. That's right, I want to take you to a time where I'd just flown in and landed in another city and it was on the evening of one of the biggest opportunities for Top Five so far. It was make or break, and that's maybe a little bit dramatic, but look, I was going to be front and centre at an Employer of Choice breakfast. I was going to be the keynote speaker and be sharing our ideas and our tools around resilience and mindset with nearly 100 of the best employers in their industries.

Now, these leaders are my kind of people. They'd been acknowledged and awarded for not only being able to get results, but also for really caring about their staff and making sure that they were looking out proactively for the resilience and wellbeing of their staff, right up my alley. Not only that, but at this event, the state government was going to be endorsing ours as work that

can really truly build supportive, productive, and mentally healthy workplaces together, which is really important to us. And one of our clients, a community organisation CEO was also going to be sharing about how our work supported them through a tricky merge. So as you can imagine, it was a really huge opportunity and the stuff that dreams are made of for an organisation like mine.

So there I was, I'd arrived at the hotel, just come from the airport and I had a spare five minutes. I had to get ready for dinner with the state government programme director. That in itself felt like a really big deal. I had time to get changed out of my jeans and runners that I'd been travelling in and into something more professional, when you've got to be kidding, I realised that I'd left my suit bag on the plane. Couldn't believe it. So I had nothing to wear tonight, or for the main event the next morning, except for the jeans and runners I'd been travelling in.

My stress levels were totally at a crossroads. When faced with stressful situations, our stress vices have evolved over the years. Perhaps they used to include booze and chocolate. Maybe more recently, they include Netflix, and often they might include the good old classic, critical self-talk. My vice of choice, like for so many others, is critical self-talk.

Now in my hotel room, standing there, the younger me would have fallen into a tirade of statements like, "I'm so hopeless and stupid. How could I have done this? No one is going to take me or my work seriously. You're not ready for this." And those critical self-thoughts, those thoughts would have hijacked my night. And instead of relaxing into and enjoying the big break and being sharp and focused but actually enjoying the moment, it would have turned me into a stiff, overly professional cocktail with a twist of apologetic hot mess and I would have lost myself completely in trying to prove that I could be taken seriously. Not a fun way to spend a night or an amazing opportunity. And by then, these thoughts would have escalated well beyond the outfit and jeans and runners.

Left unchecked, these thoughts can consciously or unconsciously spiral to become bigger than any small issue and our brains just love to dive into stories of past mistakes that can create a solid case that those critical thoughts are the only truth. But of course, they're not. Research shows that critical self-talk is a default for many, particularly women, when they're under stress. And back in my hotel room, I was at that crossroads, but I knew better than the younger me to turn to critical self-talk. I put our tools in place to turn that once practised script on its head so that I could make the most of this opportunity. So when the programme director arrived for dinner, I explained what had happened, they laughed at the story and said, "Let's just drive out to the airport and try our luck."

Now on the way, instead of getting lost in a sea of hopelessness and apologies, we shared fond travel memories of how things go wrong, but become part of the adventure anyway. We talked about lost passports in Turkey, missed planes in Peru on New year's Eve, and lizards mistaken for tsunami alarms through the night in Thailand. It was real and human and an adventure. It wasn't stiff, professional small talk while I quietly shamed myself for making such a careless mistake.

Let's be honest, this isolation time has been such a priceless experience in humanising things. Kids are zooming through the background of calls. People are acknowledging how messy life is when parts that we usually keep separate are falling on each other in a heap. I really hope we don't forget the importance of being human over perfect and just how it's helping us connect more honestly. We all make mistakes and we all face our own stress crossroads sometimes too. Our thoughts about these mistakes have a significant impact on how we spend our energy, what we mentally dress

rehearse, how we show up, and of course, our relationships, whether they be personally or the work cultures that we create and become a part of. If your team is in a habit of making the small things into big things, then let's have a chat about how our change mindset and resilience programmes can lift focus and performance, but most importantly, all around humanness in your teams.

Today, I want to leave you with three tools that you can use for when you're next at a stress crossroads. The first is something you can do immediately when you find yourself in that situation, and that is using grounding techniques. This is a way that you can immediately switch your brain into a different mode, and the easiest way to do this is to be able to think in facts. That's right, just to think in facts.

So for example, you might start focusing on the thought or saying out loud, "Today is Tuesday. The day's date is, my name is, the season is, this month is, next month is." It doesn't really matter what you're saying, it's just about focusing on and saying to yourself or out loud facts. That, as I said, it activates a different part of your brain and can stop it from racing off in different directions.

Another really terrific grounding technique that anybody can access anywhere is to just use your senses, to really fully engage your senses. And that can be as simple as really paying attention to feeling your feet on the ground or feel your body sitting in a chair. Or you might like to use your sense of sight, for example, and take a notice of what you can see around you. What's moving, what's still, what's shiny, what's rough, what is a certain colour, for example. So it's anything that you can do to really engage your senses can be a really terrific grounding technique as well.

The second technique I wanted to share with is a cheat sheet, actually having a cheat sheet for when you get stressed. So this takes a little bit of preparation and awareness because in advance, you need to think about knowing what your triggers are for that critical self-talk or falling into one of those negative thought loops. So for me in that hotel room, I knew I was feeling really doubtful and shaky about my work and being taken seriously.

Now that's not something that was completely new to me. It's definitely something I've experienced before. Perhaps if I'm nervous about a big opportunity or presentation, or if I have made a mistake like I had in this case. And something I know that is helpful every single time is to simply jump on our website and to read through some client feedback, to help remind me of the value of our work. This allows me to step outside of my own head and just remind me what others say is valuable about what we do.

A way that clients often use this cheat sheet idea is if they know that they get nervous presenting in meetings, or perhaps they have a stakeholder that they get a bit nervous around or is a bit more difficult to work with, and let's be honest, we've all got those in our lives. And having a cheat sheet that can be filled with just some true thoughts that you can focus on going into that situation can be a great alternative to feeling nervous or focusing on the worry or thinking and dress rehearsing mentally all of the things that could go wrong.

The last technique I wanted to share is where we lift things up a little and start to think beyond yourself and beyond what you're thinking and how you're showing up, and this is about how do we actually translate this to our teams. Now this is about watching your language in your teams and also noticing the language that people within your team is using as well. I would never suggest that you use

ridiculously over the top positive language. That's not what is the approach I'm recommending here at all. It's just not accessible or realistic, and we think at Top Five that positive thinking is actually quite boring as well. We don't think it's ever the answer, but I believe it's about choosing helpful, productive and encouraging language wherever possible. It can make a big difference.

Some really quick examples that might feel familiar to you straight away are, for example, when a team is going through change, it can be really common for people to feel like they're missing something and so they can use language like, "We don't know what will happen. No one's telling us anything. How are we supposed to do X, Y, and Z when we're out of the loop?"

That can be a really common reaction and common language for teams going through change. But instead you could actually focus on a thought like, or language like, "This week, we can open up communication lines and learn more." So you can see it shifts from that worrying, "No one's telling us anything," to a really proactive approach and a focus on what is within your control.

The last example I wanted to share around language is one that we've all been guilty of using, particularly if your team is feeling busy, busy, busy. And show me a team, especially in the social sector that doesn't have more work than time to do at the moment. But I'd really love to encourage you to think about, instead of saying, "We're so busy," or "I'm so busy," you can still acknowledge how much you have on. But to make your language more proactive, you can try switching it up to something in your team like, "Yeah, we've got a full week on and we've got a lot to do. So it's really important that we focus on decision making and prioritising this week."

It's a big shift from just saying, "We're busy." I feel like when we say, "We're busy, busy, busy," we can tend to almost give in to that and feel like that busyness is just throwing us around life wherever we need to be. Whereas when we can shift our language and the focus of our thoughts on something more proactive like, "Yes, we have a lot on," or, "It's going to be a full week, but we need to really focus on and we're really going to focus on decision making and prioritising." It brings back in that approach in our thinking back within our control and to things that we can influence, which is really important during times of uncertainty and change.

I'll pop a link in the show notes to this episode for some more of these mindset shift examples, and also a question that we use at Top Five Movement with every client to help them really understand the impact of their thoughts and their language as well. These techniques are well with practising . At first glance, they might seem really simple to understand and a little bit fluffy, but we know for sure that they can actually be really strategic skills to develop for your work and well beyond as well.

That's all from us today. Next Tuesday, we'll be sharing another interview with another generous leader. So stay tuned for that. And for now, take care of yourselves and keep being human. Oh, and in case you're wondering, we did find my suit bag at the airport and I may or may not have caused a little security scare. I just saw it hanging there behind the desk and I just started running towards it. I just couldn't help it. So it was a little scary, but also a terrific win. Have a great day.

Clare Desira: As we wrap, I want to say a big thank you to all of the generous leaders and their teams out there, making a difference in our world, especially right now.

LEADING GENEROUS TEAMS

HOSTED BY CLARE DESIRA

I'd like to say thank you to the people of the Kulin nation, from the Country where this podcast is produced, and of course I want to say thank you to you, our listeners.

Be sure to subscribe to the podcast and never miss an episode and if you're looking for some tools to get started with straight away, we've got some for you. Head over to topfivemovement.com/tools. For the latest social sector news, head over to probonoaustralia.com.au.

And for now, we're wishing you the strongest mental health mindset and resilience as you head into the rest of your day. Have a good one.