



Navigating the Emotional Costs of Teaching with a Resilient Mindset, Grit, and Stress Management

SPEAKERS

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Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor Annual Conference. This year, join us in New Orleans from June 9th through the 11th and attend a conference where you'll network, learn, and refocus on why you got into teaching in the first place. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today, we're gonna talk about resiliency, managing stress, your sense of wellbeing, and grit. This is a tad ironic, because I recently just got my voice back from being sick, so I will also be revisiting these topics with you all today. Your wellbeing, your resilient mindset, and your grit can all be greatly impacted by stress. So let's start with a few strategies for helping work-related stressors, and then a strategy for anticipating the problems that might consistently cause us stress. In this program, What Can I Do to Manage and Reduce Academic Job Stress, Stephanie Delaney talks about the benefits a 10-year journal can offer and how you want to "eat a frog first thing in the morning." This program is available for free until Friday, June 2nd, you can find a link to it in the recommended resources.

Stephanie Delaney 01:16

You might also anticipate work-related problems. And let's talk about some strategies for diminishing those work related problems. One is going to sound a little weird, but I encourage you to read your email. I've found that not reading institutional email leads to a lot of stress that people don't even really realize. Frequently, faculty are quick to respond to email from students. After all, that's why we're all there - for students - and maybe not so quick to read or respond to email from the college in general or from people in your department. They just put it off as being something that's not quite as important. But sometimes there's really important stuff in there. And when you don't know about it, it can cause problems. So I just encourage you to take time to every day, read your institutional email. Another strategy for dealing with work-related problems is to do the worst first. You may have heard the idea expressed as as eating the frog, I heard that if you if you eat a frog first thing in the morning, nothing worse can happen to you all day long. And so if you get that bad thing done, it's usually not quite as bad as you think. And by having it finished, you're a lot less stressed out. Again, it sounds like an obvious thing, but really, it really can help. Another one of those worst things that we tend to put off is

having difficult conversations. Telling that angry student that they're going to fail or talking to your dean about getting a more favorable teaching schedule, those can be things that you don't necessarily want to do. So you put it off and putting off those conversations is going to add to your stress. Learning how to have a difficult conversation is actually a skill that you can learn and you can develop. And I've done another 20-Minute Mentor talking about that topic. In addition, there's lots of books out there talking about it, I'd recommend Crucial Conversations. Let's talk about another strategy for anticipating those problems that might cause you stress. I'd encourage you to keep a journal ask yourself maybe every day or every week what caused me to be stressed out this week, or what caused me to be stressed out today. And ask yourself, is there anything that I could have done to avoid that stress? And you can use that journal to identify various trends. I have been keeping a 10-year journal that I've found has been really helpful in this and I'll put information about this 10-year journal in the resource guide for this 20 Minute Mentor. The 10-year journal has one line or one space per year on each page. So there's a date for you know, October the first and on October the first there's a line for 2011, 2012, 2013. So I can see at a glance what happened to me this time last year and this time five years ago. And I've been able to see various trends in what's going on. It was using those trends from the tenure journal that helped me realize that I tend to get sick after finals week, every quarter. And so you might use the journal in the same way to identify trends with your stress and see oh, you know, I often have students doing x and this is stressing me out or I often have co workers is doing why and this is really causing me stress. When you see these trends, you can begin to anticipate them and find things to do to avoid them. Let's talk about some strategies for building resilience to the stress that you may be encountering on campus. One great strategy is to sharpen the saw, you may be familiar with this idea from Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Successful People. And I find this to be something that when we get into the grind of the day to day, it's easy to forget to find time to do things to develop our skill to develop our, our profession. So the first thing that I'd recommend is that you take time to engage in professional development. Go to a conference, especially if it gives you an opportunity to get off campus and engage with some new and different people and get some new and exciting ideas to maybe shake up your teaching practice a little bit. You might want to join an association or a faculty workgroup and have that as an opportunity to, again, engage with your peers enjoy some camaraderie, learn some new things sharpen that saw as you develop your professional skills.

Tierney King 06:22

So instead of just powering through and potentially experiencing burnout, there are strategies to help mitigate the stress and foster a resilient mindset. In this program, How Can I Apply a Resilient Mindset to My Teaching Practice? David Betancourt explains how he uses three ideas for a more resilient mindset. From appreciative inquiry to a growth mindset to grit, Betancourt explains how these three tools have encouraged resiliency when navigating the emotional cost of teaching.

David Betancourt 06:50

In this time we have, I want to maybe just share with you three sort of ideas that I've really toyed with in these last couple of years, and even before, but it's all been underscored now with the with the pandemic. And so, I'm giving you some ideas to think about some things that we can implement in our own teaching strategies and having a resilient mindset. First one is the idea of appreciative inquiry. So you know, we're very much used to as teachers, I know myself, I've struggled with this my entire career of feeling like I've been successful, getting a lot of feedback from the students and from colleagues and

peers and administrators and everybody about the wonderful things that are going on in the classroom and what they see happening. And then you get your student evals, and you have 1,000 student emails, and one of them says something about teachers and not getting back to me fast enough. And the funny thing about that is that one eval is the one that you'll lose sleep over. That one evaluation, that one comment, that one little bit of feedback, not all the other 999 comments that are a testament to what you've been able to do in the classroom for your students. And so the idea of moving away from that, for me, is sort of an epiphany of my own that I had. Just moving to what's going right? What are the things that are that are going well? What am I doing well? What are the victories that we see every day, and being able to spend some time focusing on that. Doing it consciously, doing it with intent. And this is where appreciative inquiry comes into play, because appreciative inquiry isn't just about focusing on what's going right. We can all do that, to some degree, I think. But it's focusing on the why, why has it gone well? And that's where the inquiry part comes in to play and where it's most effective of this mindset of appreciative inquiry. The second thing was the idea of growth mindset. Now, while this - you're probably familiar with Carol Dweck and her writings - but this has been about the growth mindset for a long time. And while I have embraced it to various degrees over my teaching career, in the last couple of years, I've really grabbed onto it, just grabbed off it all the way. In doing so, I think we had to embrace the growth mindset, not just for our students, which we often do, we often advocate for them, that lifelong learning, keep learning. And then sometimes we get so busy and focused on doing that, that we forget to apply that to ourselves, that what else can we learn? Are we capable of continuing to learn our entire life, continuing to grow? And of course we are. We say so for our students, even as we get adult learners that come in and say yes, of course. And we're even often so much more impressed if they come in at 30, 40, 50 years old and they want to go back to school and learn something. And we embrace that, embrace it for ourselves. This is what I've really come to terms with continuing to learn continuing to find ways to discover teaching practices. And the third mindset is grit. Now we all just - it's a visceral word isn't it? You think of grit and you're just thinking of getting down in the mud, down and dirty, and getting things done, but also the idea that hey, no matter what, we're going to make this happen. But it's sort of like the British version of the stiff upper lip where we will carry on regardless sort of idea. While I do advocate for a level of that, I think there's lots of room for interpretation. So I've always been one who just goes for it. As you know, I'm thoughtful, yes, and I'm reflective. I'm more reflective now that I'm older. I'm more thoughtful now that I'm older. I accept more perspectives now that I'm older for sure. But I've always been an action guy too, like here we go, let's go. I'm just a little more careful so I don't hurt myself or anyone in the process before jumping off that cliff, I want to make sure I have a parachute. All that aside, the idea that I'm going to push through something, that I'm going to make it work no matter what I think has value, and at the same time, there is room for grace.

Tierney King 10:50

This type of resilience and grit can help you find your passion and sense of purpose. It can help you persevere against obstacles. In the Wellbeing , Seena and Stewart Haines explain the importance of resilience and grit and also review other things that can contribute to your overall wellbeing and happiness. From a feeling of autonomy when leading our lives, to how our meaning and purpose need coherence to give us a sense of pride when we accomplish something. The more we know about these concepts, the more we can implement these into our resilient mindsets, teaching practices, daily lives, and wellbeing, and foster more happiness.

Seena Haines 11:26

Resilience is indeed a dynamic process that encompasses positive adaptation. When we are faced with significant adversities in our life, we know that individuals handle adversity in diverse ways. And different approaches and strategies we take have been learned and shaped by our culture, society and our families. There are resilience factors that are uncontrollable, like the nature of a stressful event, the availability of support, our role models, our environment and our genetics. So when challenges come along in life, are you able to recover using your resilience muscle back to the status quo, but really, in fact, truly rising stronger from it thriving despite it, or will you drop below the status quo and worse yet, continue dropping to the point of dysfunction. The literature has shown some common skills and attitudes that could promote our resilience muscle, and our controllable - our attentional processes, your core values, beliefs, your coping style, and your intrinsic motivation. The next ingredient for resilience relates to our grit, and our more intrinsic or internal motivation. Grit helps us find our passion and sense of purpose. Persevering against obstacles is stated in this quote, "Toughness is in the soul and spirit, not in the muscles. So where passion meets persistence, especially when times are tough. That is our grit."

Stuart Haines 13:17

There are a number of other things that can contribute to a sense of wellbeing and happiness. And I'm going to quickly review some of those. First is a feeling of autonomy, that we are happier when we are self-directed in our actions that we have the freedom to choose, and to lead our lives in ways that are consistent with our values and beliefs. And when our autonomy is restricted in some way, it has a negative impact on our lives and the way we feel about our lives. Unfortunately, this is a two-edged sword because while we feel happier when we are in control over things, there are plenty of things that we don't have control over. So learning this distinction is critically important. Next, we feel happier when we master our environment. And this is to say when we have a sense of mastery, we can use our skills and talents to make positive improvements in our life and the lives of others. Whether that's building something tangible, like a piece of furniture or cooking a meal or solving a puzzle or doing something at work, like improving some operation or conducting research to address a significant problem, are delivering a great lecture or publishing a well regarded paper. Most of us want to feel competent, and we feel a sense of pride when our work results in some positive outcome. Another building block of happiness is meaning and purpose. And these are two closely related concepts. Meaning is the sense that our lives and what we do has value and what we do is consistent with the things that we value, which is called coherence. So for example, if I'm concerned about global warming and the environment, then making special efforts to recycle materials or drive a particular vehicle might give me a sense of meaning and purpose because those actions are consistent with my values. When we engage in activities that are inconsistent with our values, so for example, for many pharmacists selling tobacco products is inconsistent with their values. This leads to internal tension, what's known as moral distress. Now these three key attributes, exercising autonomy, using our skills and taking actions which we believe are consistent with our values, is very motivating. Indeed, self determination theory indicates these are the three most important ingredients that fuel our internal motivation. And when we are driven by internal motivation, we derive much more satisfaction. Another factor that contributes to our sense of well being is a feeling that we are developing and growing, that we are becoming more capable, more competent, that we can push through our initial fears about doing something new that we've never done

before. And that we are learning new skills, solving new problems, and, frankly, achieving our goals and our dreams. And it's this sense of progress, that this feeling that we're becoming better at something that really gives us a sense of satisfaction. So as you can see, our sense of happiness is really tied to our actions, our sense of autonomy, competence, and that what we do has purpose and meaning and that we are able to become more capable learn new things and become a better version of ourselves. And these actions are very gratifying.

Tierney King 16:56

Whether you're driving to work, or you just need a 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode Description.