Follow the Yellow Brick Road and Overcome Vicarious Trauma

Dan Powers, LCSW

A Storm is a Brewing !

- Not the one you want

- This work will change your life!

- How did you get here?

- Did you think it would be like this?

What is Vicarious Trauma?

- Vicarious trauma is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed or responsible to help them.

- Over time this process can lead to changes in your
  - psychological,
  - physical, and
  - spiritual well-being.

What is Burnout?

- Burnout is a term sometimes used interchangeably with vicarious trauma, but this condition does not necessarily involve a traumatic element.

- People can experience burnout when they have a toxic work environment or when they feel themselves to be doing tedious or otherwise trying work without getting enough time for rest or appropriate self care.

It is Not Just One Case

- Vicarious trauma is a process that unfolds over time. It is not just your responses to one person, one story, or one situation. It is the cumulative effect.

- This process of change is ongoing. Your experiences of vicarious trauma are continuously being influenced by your life experiences (both professional and personal).

- As the process unfolds, there are many opportunities along the way to recognize the impact your work is having on you and to develop a strategy to combat it

Why does Vicarious Trauma Happen?

- It would be a lot easier if your didn't have a heart

- It happens because you care!

- Because you empathize with people who are hurting.
  - Empathy is the ability to identify with another person, to understand and feel another person's pain and joy.

- AND because you feel committed or responsible to help.

What Does Your Heart Say?
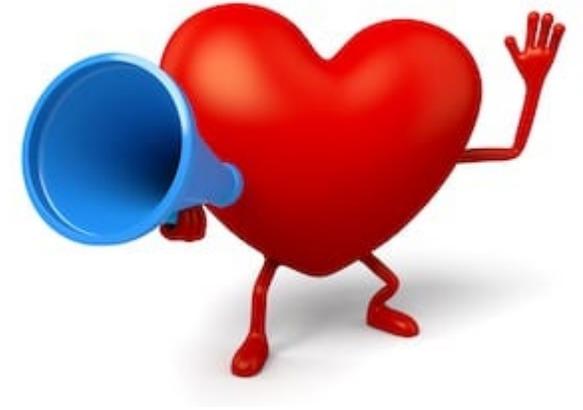
- What did your 8th grade career test say ?

- Ever think you would be doing THIS when you grew up?

- We find ourselves in things – no matter what religion you may be – we don't end up here by accident!

- Take a minute and think what influences you, what keeps you going ?

The Stuff We See and Hear, Others Don't

- Law Enforcement: 33% showed high levels of emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment; 56.1 percent scored high on the depersonalization scale (Hawkins, 2001).

- Only 15% of LE professionals were willing to seek personal counseling as a result of vicarious trauma

- Forensic Investigators, Internet Crimes Against Children: 36 percent of investigators were experiencing moderate to high levels of secondary trauma (Perez et al., 2010).

The Stuff We See and Hear, Others Don't

- Child Welfare Workers: 50% traumatic stress symptoms in severe range (Conrad& Kellar-Guenther, 2006). 34% met the PTSD diagnostic criteria, due to secondary traumatic stress Bride (2007).

- Forensic Interviewers: 34 % reported experiencing symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (Perron & Hiltz, 2006).

- Therapists, Sexual Assault: 70% experienced vicarious trauma (Lobel, 1997).

It is not always just the job….

- Your personal history
  - Past trauma

- What's going on in your life?
  - Relationship issues
  - Illness
  - Caring for a loved one
  - Financial issues
  - Your own kids

Cognitive symptoms

- They may take the form of
  - cynicism and negativity
  - or lead to difficulty concentrating, remembering,
  - or making decisions in daily life.

- You may also find it difficult to stop thinking about a case, even when not at work.

Physiological symptoms

- It can affect physical well-being, can appear in the form of
    - Fatigue
    - Headaches
    - Body aches
    - Impaired immune system
    - rashes
    - Ulcers or heartburn

Emotional symptoms

- They can include lasting feelings of
  - grief
  - anxiety
  - sadness

- Some people may become irritable or angry, become distracted frequently

- You may experience changes in mood or sense of humor.

- A person might also begin to feel generally unsafe.

Behavioral symptoms

- They might include isolation, increase in alcohol or substance consumption, altered eating habits, and difficulty sleeping.

- People experiencing behavioral symptoms of vicarious trauma may engage in risky behavior and avoid people or tasks, or they might find it difficult to separate work and personal life and may increase their workload.

Your Relationships

- Withdrawn, decreased interest in intimacy or sex,

- Isolation from friends or family, minimization of others' concerns,

- Projection of anger or blame, intolerance, mistrust

Spiritual symptoms

- Many helpers experience a loss of hope and feelings of disconnect from others and the world in general.

- People may lose sight of their life purpose or come to feel as if they are unworthy of love or do not deserve love.

- Many even question the existence of God

What Can I do About Vicarious Trauma?

- Understanding more about it is a great first step

- Learning to be aware of and address vicarious trauma in an ongoing manner goes a long way toward making keeping the flying monkeys away

Awareness

- Awareness can help you address vicarious trauma in at least two ways.
  - It can help you recognize and understand your own reactions.
  - Keeping it in your mind will also be good for helping you address vicarious trauma.

- You should check in with yourself regularly. How are you feeling (physically and emotionally)?
  - Can you figure out at least some of the reasons why you might be feeling this way?
  - What's making you tense, uncomfortable, distressed, annoyed, or tired?

Balance

- Do you have enough positive aspects of your life to combat the negative?
  - How would you rate your work/life balance?

- Balance is not just about work/life
  - How are you balancing each day?
    - Taking breaks
    - Getting up and moving
    - Eating…………… not at your desk!
    - Making time to renew (like going to a conference)

Connection

- Hand out with other people!
  - Friends, family, clubs, professional groups
    - They provide a different kind of support and connectiveness

- Put a bridge between your spirituality and your work
  - What gives you purpose, nurtures or anchors you?
    - God, faith, nature or your source or meaning and purpose.

Examine your Rituals and Habits

- Not enough time to get ready

- Staying up late

- Alcohol and smoking

- I can't do that attitude

- Small things make a difference

What Do You Have Control Over?

- What is one thing that brings you joy?
    - When was the last time you did it?
        - What gets in the way of doing it more often?

- Books, TV and movies

- What are your personal triggers indicating it's time to "recharge your battery?"

How Do You Think About This Work?

- What was you motivating to get this job?

- What difference ae you making?

- How do you measure success?

- What can you control at work?

- How does your personal history effect your work?

How Do You Approach This Work?

- Take control of things you can control
  - Your work area
  - When you take a break or go to lunch

- Stay away form negative people

- Do your best to connect to your team

How Do You Approach This Work?

- You don't have to hear about every case

- Take opportunities to do something different
  - Attend trainings
  - Join a committee

- Invest time in professional networks outside your work group

How Do You Approach Life?

- Happiness – What brings you joy?

- Achievement – Accomplishments you are proud of

- Significance – How are you changing the world?

- Legacy – How are they going to talk about you when your gone

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