

Creating a Good Environment for Your Court

Judge Wayne L. Mack
Justice of the Peace

Missy Ringo
Court Clerk

Montgomery County
Precinct One

1

Funded By a Grant From the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals

© Copyright 2025. All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system without prior written permission of the Texas Justice Court Training Center unless copying is expressly permitted by federal copyright law. Address inquiries to: Permissions, Texas Justice Court Training Center, 1701 Directors Blvd, Suite 530, Austin, TX, 78744.

2

Roadmap

Welcome and Icebreaker

Exploring Emotions

Creating Your Own Environment

Stress and Trauma

Resources

Conclusion and Takeaways

3

Welcome & Icebreaker

4

Exploring Emotions

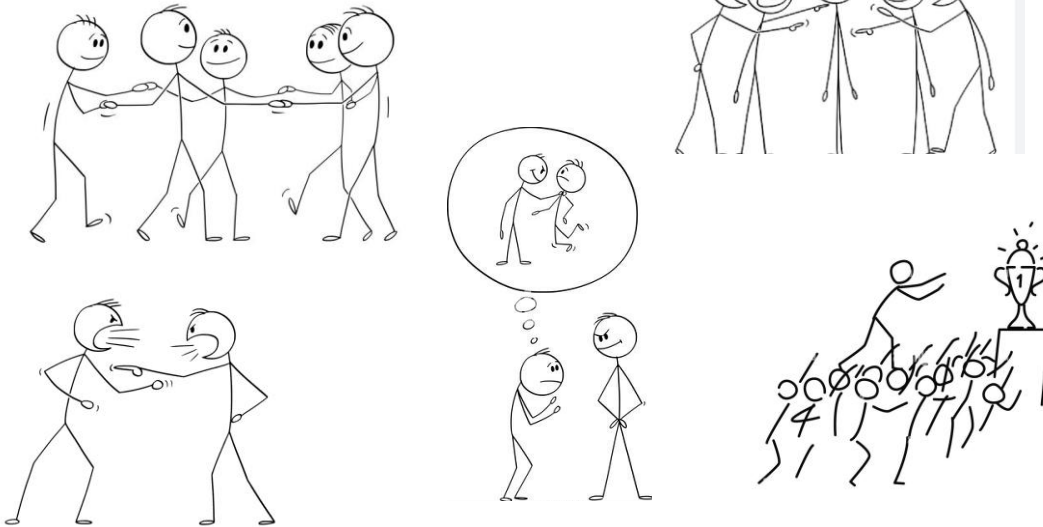
5

Mondays



6

Staff



7

Sometimes You Might Feel...



8

Sometimes Your Staff Might Feel....



9

Creating Your Own Environment

10

Examples of a Difficult Work Environment

- Chaotic
- Unhappy judge/staff
- Hostility
- Favorites
- Bad attitudes
- Lazy people

11

What Are Some Causes?

- Dealing with angry people
- High stress
- Overworked
- Not feeling heard
- Not feeling appreciated
- Finger pointing
- Expectations too high
- Someone could just be having a bad day
- Problems outside of office
- No direction or standard operating procedures

12

$$\mathbf{E + R = O}$$

Event

Response

Outcome

13

Know What You Can Control

- Focus on the things that are in your control.
 - Sometimes there are things you can do.
 - Sometimes all you can do is control how you respond.

14

What Can You Do To Set the Tone for the Day?

- Acknowledge
- Smile
- Greet
- Assess the mood of others
- Be positive

15

How Can You Improve Your Work Environment?

- Support your staff
- Take a break
- Be polite
- Remain focused
- Prioritize
- Learn from past mistakes
- Listen
- Communicate
- Don't participate in or encourage toxic behavior
- You must understand in order to be understood
- Education
- Clear policies/ procedures/standing orders
- Anything else?

16

Policies/Procedures/Standing Orders

- What do you have in your court that helps you and your staff do your jobs/makes things easier?

17

Supporting Your Staff

- Make sure they feel safe when doing their jobs and know that you have their back
- Make sure they have the training, equipment, and supplies they need to do their jobs
- Have reasonable expectations
- Give positive reinforcement
- Do not require them to do things that are outside of their required duties (ex: interpreting, making decisions that the judge should make, inquests, etc.)
- Be open to feedback and help
- Encourage people to (respectfully) speak their minds
- Admit when you're wrong and make necessary changes

18

Insight from Real Clerks:

“If you had all Justice Court judges in one room, what is the most important thing, from a clerk’s perspective, you would want to tell them?”

- Practice good time management – be on time
- COMMUNICATE
- Have reasonable expectations of staff
- Only change/add/cancel court when really necessary
- TRUST YOUR CLERKS

19

Employee Retention

- Who in the audience has the longest-standing clerks or other staff members?
- What specifically do you do to keep your staff happy?
- What are the benefits of having staff that stick around for a long time?

20

Interactions With:

- Your constable/bailiff
- Other judges/officials in the county
- Other departments

21

Strategies for Building Trust and Cohesion in the Workplace

- Communicate effectively
- Resolve conflicts
- Celebrate successes
- Build trust
- Practice team-building activities

22

Team Building

Why are team building activities important?

- Communication
- Motivation
- Problem-solving
- Trust
- Connection
- Culture

23

What Are Some Team Building Activities?

- Choose a co-worker - go around the room and have everyone say something positive about that person
- Escape rooms
- Playing games together
- Off-site meetings
- Scavenger hunts
- Start the day with a positive team meeting

24

Interactions with Parties

Being in court can often lead to heightened emotions.

- ▶ Stress
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Argumentative
- ▶ Scared
- ▶ Defensive
- ▶ Anxious
- ▶ Confused

25

Justice Courts Play a Crucial Role in Representing the Judicial Branch of the Government

What can you and your staff do at the counter or in the courtroom to calm these emotions?

- Acknowledge
- Smile
- Be kind
- Be positive
- Be sympathetic
- Refer them to self-help packets from TJCTC

26

Interactions with Attorneys

- What are issues that arise when dealing with attorneys?
- How can you address these issues?

27

Stress and Trauma

28

Response to Trauma

29

Emotional Responses

- Feeling anxious, sad, angry or fearful
- Feeling numb, shocked or detached
- Having negative thoughts about yourself or the world
- Blaming yourself or others
- Having difficulty feeling positive emotions
- Feeling isolated or withdrawn

30

Physical Responses

- Headaches
- Stomach pain or digestive issues
- Difficulty sleeping
- Racing heart or sweating
- Feeling jumpy or easily startles
- Physical sensations like pain, nausea or trembling

31

Behavioral Responses

- Avoiding people or places that remind you of the trauma
- Avoiding talking about your experience
- Trying to distract yourself with work or hobbies
- Trying not to feel anything at all
- Suicidal thoughts
- Relying on substances such as alcohol or sedatives

32

What Causes Trauma?

- What are some things in your job that could cause a trauma reaction?

33

Coping with Stress & Trauma

Following 5 slides:

Credit: Michelle Fontenot, JD, Med,
Texas Lawyers' Association Program Director

34

Self-care:
What Is It and Why Does It
Matter?

Self-care is not “selfish”

Self-care is actually essential for those in service-oriented professions, like the practice of law

Working more and more without a strategy for renewal is not sustainable in the long-term

35

Autonomic Nervous System

(And why it matters in a courtroom setting)

Sympathetic System

- Heart and blood pressure increases
- Respiration accelerates, blood sugar is released from the liver
- Adrenalin, noradrenalin are released from the adrenal glands
- **Fight or flight response**

Parasympathetic System

- Heartbeat slows
- Blood pressure reduces
- Respiration slows
- Your body experiences visceral responses typical of periods of rest and relaxation
- **Rest and digest; experience safety and connection**
- **“Freeze” response**

36

Ways To Activate the Parasympathetic Nervous System

Running/Hiking/Walking

Swimming/Lazy River

Dancing/Aerobics

Yoga/Sitting in Stillness

Playing a Musical Instrument/ Listening to

Music

Painting / Creating Art

Gardening / Working with Hands

Cooking/Mindful Eating

37

Take a Break

Move

- Move your body

Schedule

- Schedule time to unwind

Breathe

- deeply

Leave

- Take a walk

Activate

- Activate your senses

38

Practice Gratitude

Research has established an overwhelming connection between gratitude and good health.

Keeping a gratitude journal causes less stress, improves the quality of sleep, and builds emotional awareness.

(Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005)

39

Self-Care and Supporting Others

- What do you do for self-care?
- How can you support your staff and others around you (without negatively impacting your own well-being)?

40

Resources

- 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
Building personal effectiveness and resilience.
- Leadership & Self Deception
Identifying blind spots and improving interpersonal relationships
- The Go-Giver
Creating value for others while achieving personal success

41

From TJCTC Website

<https://www.tjctc.org/mental-health.html>

- Mental Health Net
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Alliance on Mental Health
- National Council for Behavioral Health

42

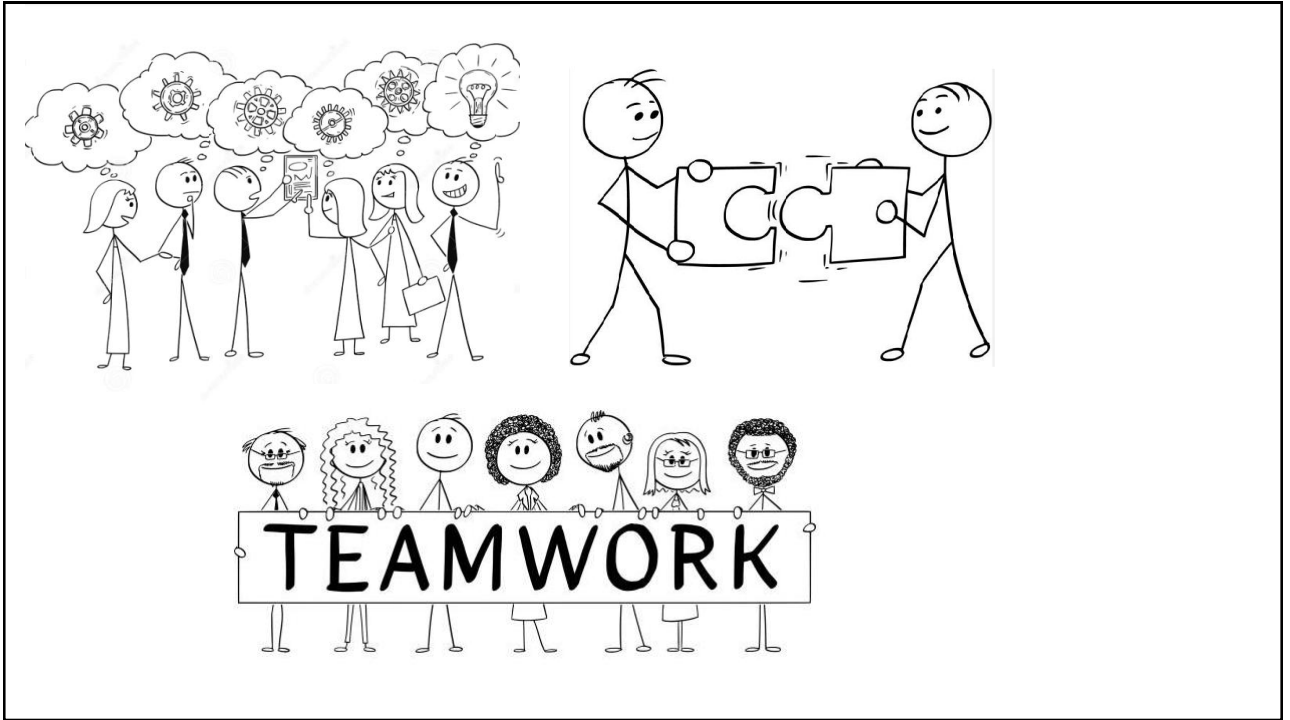


43

Conclusion

- Controlling your environment starts with you
- Supporting your staff will benefit everyone
- Communication is key to a healthy work environment
- Clear policies and procedures are absolutely necessary
- Peer support and awareness are critical to managing negativity or trauma
- Negative situations can lead to positive growth when handled constructively
- Self care and self awareness are crucial

44



45

Laziness kills ambition
Anger kills wisdom
Fear kills dreams
Ego kills growth
Jealousy kills peace
Doubt kills confidence

Now read that right to left

46