

# Creating a Good Environment for Your Court

Judge Wayne L. Mack  
Justice of the Peace

Missy Ringo  
Court Clerk

Montgomery County  
Precinct One

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## **Funded By a Grant From the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals**

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# Roadmap

**Welcome and Icebreaker**

**Exploring Emotions**

**Creating Your Own Environment**

**Stress and Trauma**

**Resources**

**Conclusion and Takeaways**

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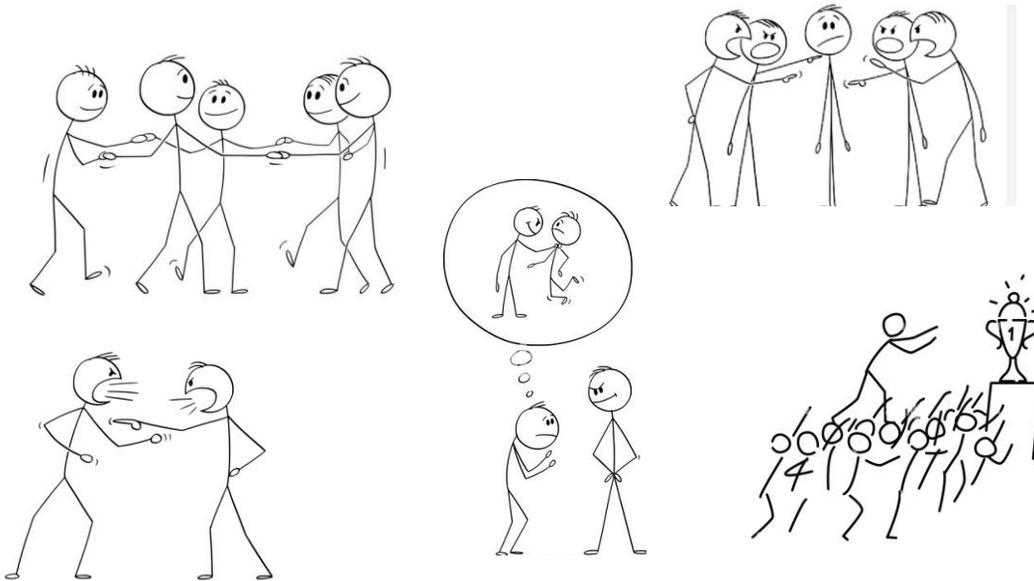
# Welcome & Icebreaker

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# Exploring Emotions

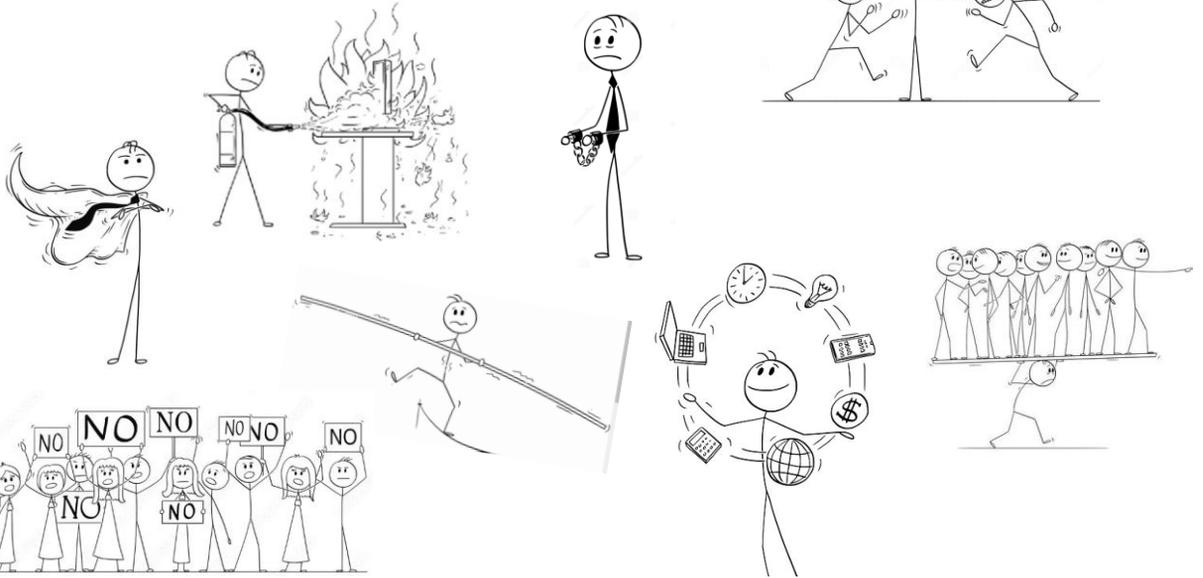
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## Staff



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# Sometimes You Might Feel...



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# Sometimes Your Staff Might Feel....



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**TRUST**  
**PARTNERSHIP**  
**COOPERATION**  
**COMMUNICATION**  
**NETWORK**  
**SUPPORT**  
**SHARING**  
**WORK**

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Creating Your Own  
Environment

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## Examples of a Difficult Work Environment

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

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## 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

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**E + R = O**

Event

Response

Outcome

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

- Acknowledge
- Greet staff
- Be positive

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## How Can You Improve Your Work Environment?

- Support your staff
- Take a break
- Prioritize
- Listen
- Communicate
- Education
- Clear policies/ procedures/standing orders
- You must understand in order to be understood
- Learn from past mistakes
- Anything else?

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## Policies/Procedures/Standing Orders

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

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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?

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## Strategies for Building Trust and Cohesion in the Workplace

- Communicate effectively
- Have a security plan such as code words or gestures
- Resolve conflicts
- Celebrate successes
- Build trust
- Practice team-building activities

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# Team Building

Why are team building activities important?

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

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# 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

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## Interactions with Parties

Being in court can often lead to heightened emotions.

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

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## 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

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# Stress and Trauma

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# Response to Trauma

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## 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

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## 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

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## 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

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## What Causes Trauma?

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

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# Coping with Stress & Trauma

Following 5 slides:

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

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

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Self-care is not “selfish”

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

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

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# 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**

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## 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

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## Take a Break

**Move** • Move your body

**Schedule** • Schedule time to unwind

**Breathe** • deeply

**Leave** • Take a walk

**Activate** • Activate your senses

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## 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).

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## 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)?

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## 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

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## 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

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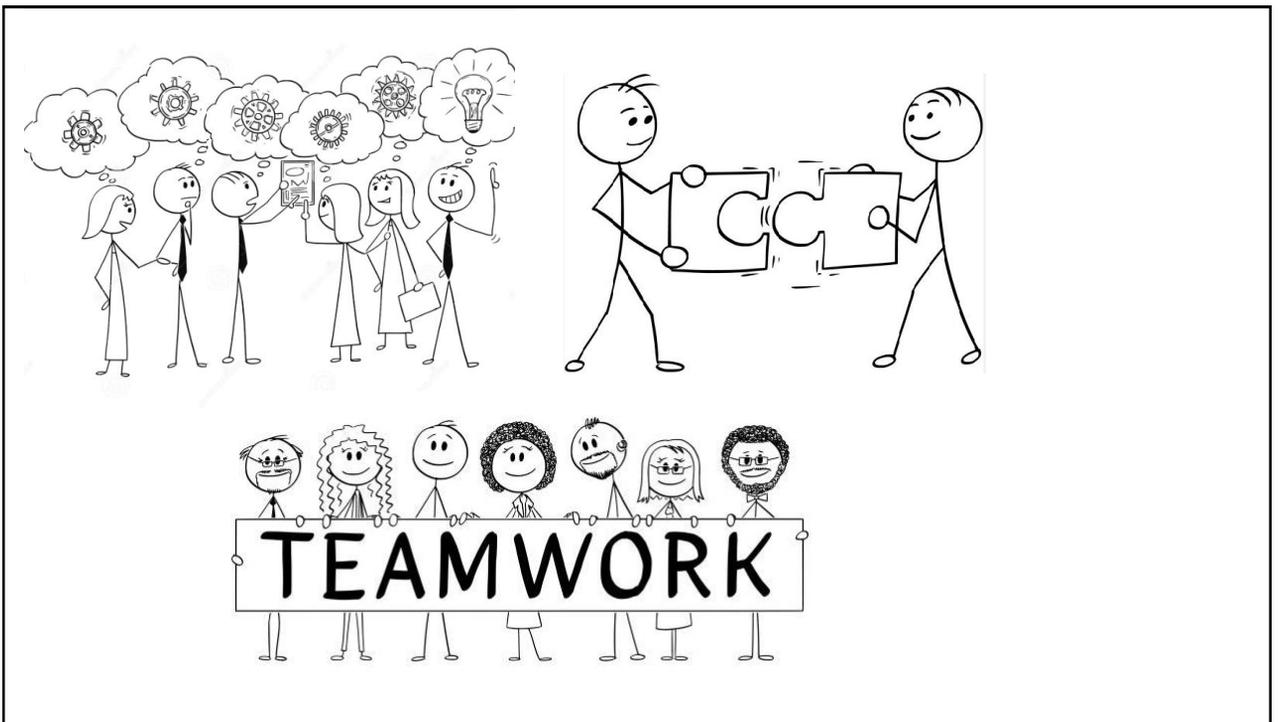


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## Conclusion

- 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

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Laziness kills ambition

Anger kills wisdom

Fear kills dreams

Ego kills growth

Jealousy kills peace

Doubt kills confidence

Now read that right to left