



Proffitt

Management Solutions

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Newsletter

Leadership, Trauma, and Recovery

The way we live and work has changed dramatically the past year, upending our routines, our identities, and for many, our sense of security. The trauma of job insecurity, health insecurity, major intergenerational loss, and culture assaults leave us reeling and impact our productivity. Leaders are concerned about their employee's well-being and safety.

Traditionally, when employees share or demonstrate a need for assistance, we rely on our human resources department (or representative) to step in.

However, leaders and managers who are able to work with HR and their employees through trauma recovery are of greater help to those they lead—and their entire organization.

The Catalyst for Change

It's no wonder that reports of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are on the rise. Experiencing violence (as a victim or witness), a serious illness, or the death of a loved one can trigger post-traumatic stress. Unfortunately, fear, misunderstanding, and lack of trust prevent many employees from seeking assistance or even reporting events.

Trauma can impact anyone. Great leaders recognize this. They understand that how we manage trauma can define our life.

The best leaders I know share openly about their own struggles, how they manage uncertainty, and are able to engage others to share their story. Why?

We know that negative experiences can be a catalyst for positive change. It might be a new understanding about a personal strength, the impetus to explore new possibilities, the desire to improve relationships, a sense of awe for life, and/or a spiritual renewal.

A Message from Nancy...

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization's bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?



In today's highly competitive environment, it's no surprise that "*what got you here may not get you there.*"

At **Proffitt Management Solutions** we are fully committed to providing a unique blend of team and individual development and executive coaching sessions where participants achieve more focus, a sense of purpose, and better results in their leadership roles.

Find out how services such as individual or team coaching and development, motivational and skills workshops, seminars may help you better answer those 5 questions and benefit you...

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Individual wellbeing matters in every organization, small or large. When leaders and managers are equipped to treat everyone with care and compassion, employees experience less absenteeism and burnout and more job satisfaction.

In [Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research, and Applications](#), (Routledge, 2018), authors Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun share their research on trauma and how leaders can help traumatized people recover. According to Tedeschi, “...despite the misery resulting from the coronavirus outbreak, many of us can expect to develop in beneficial ways in its aftermath.”

What is Trauma?

Although trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are frequently used interchangeably, they are different.

According to the American Psychological Association, trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event. It is time-based, can be experienced more than once by an individual, and there are multiple types of trauma:

- Physical or psychological
- A one-time event
- Historical - this type of trauma is often associated with racial and ethnic population groups in the United States who have suffered major intergenerational losses and assaults on their culture and well-being
- Traumatic grief/separation/forced displacement
- Natural disasters
- Witnessing any of the above traumatic events

Responses to trauma can be expressed through emotions and/or behavior, and can impede an individual's ability to function.

What is PTSD?

PTSD is a longer-term condition that can develop as a result of trauma, however, not all traumatic events lead to PTSD. Re-experience of the event can occur through flashbacks, dreams, and thoughts. Common signs and symptoms of PTSD include:

- Avoidance of people, places, or memories of the event
- Difficulty sleeping
- Being easily startled
- Feelings of guilt or blame for the event

- Outbursts of anger
- Constant state of agitation/arousal (not triggered by traumatic event reminder)
- Event memory lapse
- Negative thinking about self/world
- Loss of interest in pleasure, family, or friends

According to the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, PTSD symptoms can begin as early as three months post trauma or years after, occur for more than a month, and interfere with work, relationships, and daily tasks.

A diagnosis of PTSD can be done by a trained medical professional, but leaders who have a greater understanding of the condition can aid in the recovery process.

What Leaders Need to Know about PTG

In one study of 10,000+ trauma survivors, researchers found that the trauma survivors (those who have experienced serious injury, combat, or the loss of a loved one) experienced increase in their well-being through post traumatic growth (PTG). They reported a greater sense of purpose, stronger social connections, and/or deeper spirituality.

Great leaders care about the physical, psychological, and emotional health of those they lead. They are interested in the science of trauma, and the insights it can offer in our recovery from the pandemic, racial violence, and even economic uncertainty. As a result, they help others affirm their individual values and strengthen community.

What is Post-Traumatic Growth?

Post-traumatic growth occurs through the struggle with adversity and results in a transformative, positive change. You see, part of our struggle is our quest to make meaning from the trauma. Based on the research published by Lawrence G. Calhoun and Richard G. Tedeschi in [The Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth](#) (Routledge, 2014), people who make meaning out of trauma:

- Increase their sense of personal strength and ability to prevail
- Improve their relationships and sense of belonging
- Experience greater compassion
- Deepen their sense of purpose and appreciation for life

Research also reveals the benefits of small support

groups. These offer the opportunity to share our stories, an invaluable tool in PTG.

PTG at Work: What Managers Need to Know

Make no mistake: trauma can happen to anyone, and it does. Great managers and team leaders understand this, and take it to heart. Instead of ignoring a traumatic event, referring their employees to HR and avoiding involvement, or expecting employees to “get over it,” great leaders and managers engage in conversations. They provide a psychologically safe-space where employees can share their stories, restore their wellbeing, and reaffirm their sense of purpose. How?

Group Storytelling for PTG

A simple, yet effective storytelling exercise was published not long ago in Harvard Business Review. Through key questions, managers and team leaders can help employees validate an experience and move forward constructively. Below are five questions, tailored to pandemic recovery:

1. What is your greatest loss as a result of the pandemic?
2. What is your greatest gain as a result of the pandemic?
3. What self-discoveries have you, or are you making as a result of the pandemic?
4. How can you apply your discoveries going forward? What would it look like?
5. What can you use to prompt you to apply your discovery? Specifically, what two words or phrase?

Of course, you can adjust the questions for any event. It may be helpful to remind your team to refrain from cross talk (don't interrupt or comment on what someone else has said), as well as keeping what is shared confidential. You see, listening as “attentive companions” creates and holds a safe space for one another. When we use storytelling based on these questions, we express authenticity, vulnerability, and trust: for and in others.

Your Trauma Recovery: What Employees Need to Know

As many of us return to pre-pandemic routines, trauma and trauma recovery are frequent topics of discussion. For some, the challenges have brought

a new appreciation (and recognition) of personal strengths. They are exploring new possibilities personally and professionally.

If you're not there yet, know you are not alone. Help is available. While post-traumatic growth (PTG) may happen naturally, there are steps you can take to facilitate the process.

5 Ways to Facilitate Growth after Trauma

A traumatic event is often shocking, scary, and sometimes, dangerous. It disrupts our beliefs and challenges our assumptions. Trauma can produce anxiety and repetitive thoughts.

1. **Educate:** A traumatic event is often shocking, scary, and sometimes, dangerous. It disrupts our beliefs and challenges our assumptions. Trauma can produce anxiety and repetitive thoughts. It can also be a catalyst of positive change. Consider where you might find positive impacts.
2. **Regulate emotions:** Notice feelings as they occur. Give them space “to be” (without becoming hooked) by breathing through them. Then, determine what thoughts preceded negative feelings. Replace negative thinking with a focus on past successes, best-case scenarios, and resources and preparation. Physical exercise can also help to regulate emotions.
3. **Share your story:** Talk about your experience: past and present. Share the effects and your struggles with a trusted friend, colleague, or mentor.
4. **Create an authentic narrative:** Accept the past and imagine a better future. In what ways are you changing or have you grown? Where are new possibilities and opportunities?
5. **Be of service:** Sometimes, we just need to get out of our own head. Helping others can renew our energy and help us find meaning.

While this list might sound too simplistic, naïve, or optimistic, know that it is based on years of scientific research published in *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research, and Applications*, (Tedeschi et al., Routledge, 2018).

So, please, be patient with yourself. When you are ready, the effort is worth it: you are worth it. And you don't have to do it alone. If you need help, ask your manager, a trusted mentor, or a qualified professional. If I can be of assistance, please let me know.



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