

The
Fulfilling Career
Podcast *with* DR. TEGA EDWIN

Episode #013: Trauma-Informed Leadership: Why Do You Need It?

Show Notes: <https://hercareerdoctor.com/trauma-informed-leadership-why-do-you-need-it/>

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Between the pandemic, spotlight on racial injustice from summer 2020, the great resignation, we as a society are experiencing a collective trauma and there are more than a few workplaces that are actively contributing to or are the source of additional trauma that employees are experiencing. Moving forward leaders, corporate managers who want to recruit and retain top talent can no longer turn a blind eye to the trauma that their employees are either walking in with or experiencing at work. But what exactly is trauma in from leadership and why does it matter? Well, that's what I'm getting into in this episode.

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Welcome to the fulfilling career podcast, a show for of the professional woman, who's ready to work in an aligned career that allows her to thrive in her zone of genius, live on purpose and get paid a value-aligned salary. I share quick insights and strategies to help you reach your career goals. Whether you're trying to find your fulfilling career, grow your current career or a successfully job search. I'm your host, Dr. Tega Edwin, a career counselor, and who was able to turn my own frustration from being in an unfulfilling career into the framework I now used to help other women find their fulfilling career and job search with confidence. Let's dive in.

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It has been, and to see the list least interesting three, two to three years, I mean, between COVID between spotlight on racial injustice from summer 2020, when George Floyd was murdered between the great resignation inflation unemployment people have been going through a lot. And while some people are bouncing back, there's a large swath of people who are not, who are having a hard time bouncing back just by nature of their physiological makeup. And what I think a lot of organizations are not realizing is that we are not in the same workforce that we were in, in 2020. It's a different work for right now. I've been telling people and I will keep saying it. The great resignation is really the great flight response. People after COVID have realized that life is too short for them to be in workplaces that are legit trigger it and traumatizing in them.

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And so people are quitting and going to either work for themselves where they can set better boundaries or find companies that are better able to make them feel seen, valued and validated. So, as we think about everything that's been happening and the state of the workforce today, I think it's important to realize is that leadership moving forward cannot continue to lead the way they were leading.

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If you're at least listening-- the way you were leading a couple of years ago, it's important to really start to consider factor in and account for your employee's mental health, their state of being their well-being, because ultimately employee's mental health also impacts your bottom line.

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If your employees aren't mentally healthy, they're not going to perform at the optimum. And if they're not performing at the optimum, your company's revenue is going to take the hit. And so it's important that we talk about the trauma that people either experience personally and walk into work with or experience at work.

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And first, I wanna start by just talking about what exactly trauma is. I think a lot of people hear that term trauma and immediately they think of trauma as the event, trauma is the big car crash or the death of a loved one or the earthquake. And while those activities or events can be stressful for almost everybody, that is not what trauma is. Trauma in itself is an experience of being physiologically overwhelmed. So we all have a stress tolerance response. We all have a threshold for which our body can handle stress and it differs. It's not the same across the board. So trauma occurs when someone experiences a situation or multiple situations that consistently and persistently pushes them beyond their stress tolerant limit. So this push literally overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes them to feel helpless. It diminishes their ability to fully express themselves and even their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.

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That's what trauma is. Trauma is the result is the normal result of an abnormal event. It's not the event in itself. And trauma and traumatic experiences are really prevalent in our world today. A major study found that about 71% of the American adult population have experienced at least one traumatic event. And the research is clear on one thing. The trauma changes the brain fundamentally. So a term that people always say is, think of trauma as an emotional or psychological or even physiological scar. It's an injury. It's an emotional invisible injury that people cannot see. There's some people who experience trauma and eventually recover from it. There's stem comes back to their own version of regulation and normal, but that's not everybody. Some people go through such severe or persistent trauma that the psychological change from that trauma then impacts how they experience the world, how they interact with people.

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And that change isn't restricted to their personal lives. Trauma does not just impact our personal lives experiences. It impacts our interactions in the world entirely, which includes work. So trauma responses can show up at work in various situations, various forms of flight fight, or freeze behaviors that when seen out of context, when, when people see those responses or those behaviors, it's then easy to label employees as being difficult or they're resistant, or they're troublesome. They're just headstrong by managers or leaders who don't understand what's happening. But beyond the individual level, employees who are constantly being activated at work are also less engaged, less productive, and less likely to stay with an organization. So it's important that leaders take a lens of really trying to understand where is this behavior coming from? What is the trigger for this behavior? What is my work culture? Like? What is the culture we are establishing at work and how might it be impacting negatively people's mental health and people's response after the last couple of years, I think it's safe to say that we're going to start seeing more trauma responses at work, especially in workplaces with unhealthy work cultures and leadership practices.

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So moving forward, a corporate managers and leaders who want to recruit and retain top talent, especially diverse talent can no longer turn a blind eye to the trauma that their employees are either walking in with or experiencing at work. I mean, we know that millennial and gen Z workers more now than now, more than ever are looking for more meaningful work with accountable leadership. So what does this leadership need to look like in 2022 and beyond, right? What is this shift that leaders need to embody well, leadership that fosters engagement, productivity and retains top talent moving forward is going to need to be trauma informed. Okay. And trauma informed workplaces, trauma from leaders are not focused on treating symptoms and syndromes related to trauma people here, trauma and from leadership and automatically I, I, the question I always get is, but I'm not a, a, a psychologist.

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I'm not a counselor. Like I don't do clinical work. And that is literally not the purpose. The goal of trauma-informed leadership is not to be a medical or healthcare provider, unless you work in that setting, because that requires a of training that you probably don't have anyway, instead, a trauma-informed leader leads in a way that is committed to promoting workplaces that acknowledge the role trauma can play in an employee's life in their responses and their interactions at work while supporting the collective wellbeing of all employees.

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Trauma-Informed leadership recognizes that trauma is prevalent and it has an impact on responses and behavior. And that type of leader understands that the physiological and emotional scars from trauma drives behaviors and responses in the workplace trauma and from leaders interact with their employees with empathic and compassionate attitudes and mindsets that always seek to understand the context behind the behavior or a response

trauma-informed leaders are committed to implementing policies and procedures and processes that actively seek to avoid re-traumatizing employees.

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That's what trauma-informed leadership is. It's not clinical work. It's a way of interacting with and seen and auditing your organization and interacting with your employees. So why does it matter, right? Why does trauma-informed leadership matter well aware and compassionate responses that result from being a trauma-informed leader also helps your employees feel seen, feel heard, valued, and included, which ultimately improves their productivity, their engagement, and overall retention rates in your organization. And all three of those productivity engagement and, and retention, they're all intertwined, right? Like engage employees tend to be more productive, which means better [inaudible] for an organization. Engage employees also tend to feel more committed to the work, which means they'll stay with the organization, ergo, better retention rates, higher retention rates means as an organization, you can then invest that 50 or 60% of salary that it takes to replace an employee.

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You can reinvest that in other areas of the organization. So what leaders might miss is that sometimes high attrition rates are flight responses, meaning that your employees are fleeing toxic environments, that they find traumatizing. One study showed that 70% of workers who were jobs such and reported that they were leaving their manager or the company culture and not the work itself. So, Leaders who are committed to culture change and retaining top talent in their organization must be trauma informed. So, e think of trauma-informed leaders. I wanna leave you with four sort of really core concepts of what it means to be a trauma-informed leader. So, specifically trauma-informed leaders, make employees feel safe and safe as an acronym: S.A.F.E. The S actually does stand for safe. <Laugh>. So trauma-informed leaders know how to communicate and established policies and procedures that make their teams feel emotionally, physically, and psychologically safe.

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The, A stands for assured. A S S U R E D. Assured. trauma-informed leaders are trustworthy and transparent and that trustworthy behavior, the trust transparency really are cornerstones in helping employees feel reassured and understood. And for individuals with a trauma history whose literal brain pathways have been potentially compromised by the trauma they've experienced relationships may not come as easy to them. So the feeling of reassurance that comes from transparency and trust helps to really foster a relationship that is the foundation for productive work. The F stands for free will. So trauma-informed leaders give employees choice in their work and work experiences. And foster in this free will really especially with employees who are coming in with a history of trauma, it really accounts for of trauma responses, because one of the things that leads to, or that could trigger a dominoes challenge trauma response is the perception of choice being taken away.

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When people who are still struggling with or recovering from trauma, feel like their choice in any situation is being taken away that can really trigger them to feel unsafe and then lead to a fight response in the moment. And last but not least, E is empowered. So trauma-informed leaders make their employees feel empowered by acknowledging employee strengths and encouraging their voices to be shared, heard, and respected, and doing this also fosters a trauma informed work place. So those four things I think are really cornerstone to what it means to be a trauma-informed leader and the result of being a trauma-informed leader.

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And like I said, after the past year, more and more people are looking for healthy workplaces that allows them to thrive. I mean, I think that's a big part of the drive behind this great resignation that everyone's been talking about.

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So leaders who want to improve engagement, productivity retention must be trauma-informed. It's time to shift your lens for how you see your employees and really start asking yourself what, what are the experiences my employees, my team are having, or is having in this organization? And how are those experiences either triggering previous trauma or serving as such high levels of toxic stress that it's leading to my staff, my team, my employees, my workers being traumatized at work and ultimately impacting their behavior, or even increasing attrition in a couple of episodes, I'm gonna be talking about the costs of a trauma-insensitive workplace. So what is it actually costing you when you ignore trauma? So definitely tune in and look out for that episode. I would love to hear your thoughts.

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If you are an organization or a leader, and you're interested in bringing a trauma-informed leadership training to your organization, feel free to contact me on LinkedIn.

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If you just search my name Tega Edwin, or if you go to hercareerdoctor.com/traumainformedleadership, you can find more information about the ways that I provide training to organizations and consult with organizations who are really ready to shift and audit policies and practices to become more trauma-informed.

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Thanks for listening. And I'll catch you in the next episode. Thank you for tuning in to this week's episode of the fulfilling career podcast, if you haven't yet, don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss any new episodes. Also let's continue the conversation, take a screenshot of this episode and share it on Instagram, tag me at her career doctor. And let me know your main takeaway. Thanks again for listening and I'll capture in the next episode.