

The
Fulfilling Career
Podcast *with* DR. TEGA EDWIN

Episode #015: 5 Costs of a Trauma-Insensitive Workplace

Show Notes: <https://hercareerdoctor.com/costs-of-a-trauma-insensitive-workplace/>

(00:00):

Trauma is how our bodies respond when it's been stressed beyond its tolerant limit. And quite a few people are walking around at work, either experiencing events that traumatize them or experiencing events that trigger previous trauma and not enough managers or leaders are leading and communicating in a way that is sensitive to people's physiological and emotional scars. And there are costs to being a trauma insensitive workplace like actual factual costs. And so in today's episode, I'm sharing five costs of being a workplace that actively ignores trauma and its impact on behavior and response at work.

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Welcome to the fulfilling career podcast, a show for 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 or successfully job search. I'm your host, Dr. Tega Edwin a career counselor and coach 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.

(01:23):

Okay. So the cost of being a workplace that doesn't embody trauma and from policies, procedures, and practices, let's talk about that first. Let me set baseline actually, in case you haven't listened to any of the other episodes where I've discussed work stress and trauma at work and trauma-informed leadership, let's set baseline some terms before getting into today's topic. So what is trauma?

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Trauma is not an event. Okay. Trauma is the result of an event or events that push an individual beyond their stress tolerant limit. So we all have a limit of stress that we can, that our bodies physiologically can tolerate <affirmative>. And when someone is pushed consistently or really aggressively beyond the limit where their body can come back and regulate to their version of normal that's trauma. So this push beyond their stress tolerant limit, it overwhelms their ability

to cope and now negatively impacts their mental, physical, social, or emotional well-being and functioning.

(02:29):

So, That's what trauma is. It's it's the result of an event that has pushed someone beyond what their body can regulate to effectively mitigate the impact of trauma at work trauma-informed leadership is needed.

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So, what is trauma and from leadership? Well, I always like to start by saying, 'cause people hear the term trauma-informed leadership and automatically it's like, "but I'm not a therapist," And I'm like, "I don't want you to be a therapist." <Laugh> .

(02:53):

The goal of trauma-informed leadership is not to be a medical or even a healthcare provider, unless you work in that setting. Really, What trauma-informed leadership is, is a, a way of leading that is committed to promoting workplaces that acknowledge the role trauma can play in an employee's life responses and interactions at work, right? So a trauma-informed leader understands that trauma is prevalent. People have experienced it in their personal lives, might be experiencing it at work or might be coming across situations at work that trigger trauma responses.

(03:30):

And once an individual is triggered or is experiencing a trauma response real time, that then impacts their ability to do their work. It impacts their Interac with people. It impacts their behavior, etc.

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So, trauma-informed leadership recognizes that the physiological and emotional scars from trauma drives people's behaviors and responses. And so those leaders are committed to implementing policies and procedures that actively seek to avoid retraumatize in employees, because if we're being real, like quite a few people go into work and are either experiencing stressful events at work that compound to stress their systems. So think about things like bullying inflexible work practices, unclear communication practices just toxic communication and feedback practices, physical work environments that are not safe and triggering. Like those things can really trigger previous trauma that hasn't been healed, or it can stress a person to the point in which that they, they experience a trauma response because of the work environment.

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And when an end of the is in a state of experiencing a trauma response, the way they see the world, the way they interact, the way they communicate, literally changes like people who haven't fully healed from trauma are hypervigilant. Once they're triggered, they can go into the fight or flight freeze response that might really color the way not only they interact, but the way people perceive them research has shown that trauma literally changes the brain y'all.

And so in the midst of a trauma response, an entire part of an individual's brain, the frontal cortex literally goes offline.

(05:15):

Lik, the example I always give is, you know, think to yourself and a point when you've had an argument with someone and I, I know you've had the times when I talk to people about this, they're like, oh yeah, I know what that is.

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Well, you have an argument with someone and you know, when you're done with the argument, whether it was a serious argument or not, you get in the shower, it's always in the shower and you start going over the conversation.

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And then you're like, "oh, I should have said this!"

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And this would've been a good rebuttal. And you start rehearsing the entire conversation and thinking of all perfectly eloquent comebacks you could have had, well it's because your brain literally went offline while you were arguing because you were stressed in that moment.

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And so the part of your brain that's responsible for language, for logical functioning for future thinking, it went offline and your primitive brain took over. And so, when you got in the shower, you were relaxed, you were safe, you were calm, you had access to your entire brain function, and now you are thinking logically.

(06:12):

So, if we think about it that way, take that to like, that's a very, very simplified version of how I like to, just to help people understand what it feels like for someone to be in the midst of a trauma response.

(06:26):

And so then when you take that to a workplace, right? When we, now that you have that context about trauma and trauma and from leadership, when you take that to a workplace, what does it cost your organization? When you ignore trauma, when you don't lead with practices, policies, and procedures that are compassionate and empathic, when you don't set systems in place or train managers to interact with people with compassion, because there are costs, there are actual costs of being a trauma insensitive workplace.

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So, a workplace that actively ignores trauma and its impact on behavior.

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So, I'm gonna very quickly share five costs with you.

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The first is that a trauma-insensitive workplace impedes change. So employees who are physiologically activated are generally less receptive to change like their primitive brain fights change. And that's because change signifies a loss of control and loss of control is a landmark of trauma and a trauma trigger.

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So when you have employees who have reached that point of toxic stress and trauma at work where they are literally just engaging with the world differently, you're trying to change systems. You're trying to change operations. You're trying to change procedures. Like their brain is literally like "uh no, thanks. I'm not doing that. I don't want that because I don't know what's on the other side of this change."

(07:49):

So, managers and leaders who don't have a trauma informed lens will find that whenever they wanna implement change, it feels like an uphill battle. They always fighting their team or fighting their people to set this change in place. And they think people are being difficult and yes. Yeah, let's prevail.

(08:06):

Some people are just being difficult. Okay. But I'm not talking about those people. A good chunk of people are responding from a place of a trauma trigger where they might not, they might not even be aware of why they're still resistance to this change, but literally for their brain change does not feel safe.

(08:23):

The second thing is that a trauma-insensitive workplace impedes appreciation for diversity in the workplace. So, I know that since 2020, all the companies and their sisters and brothers have been like all up on this DEI initiatives, we, that's not a conversation for today. I just wanna know you to know that employees who have experienced trauma who are experiencing trauma or are being, re-traumatized see the world with that trauma lens. And they generally function in a protective fight flight or freeze manner.

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So, once they're in this state, the primitive survival brain is in control. Okay? And that part of the brain has a very strong us versus them response because us people who are similar to me, people who are like me, people who are familiar are safe, them don't know who they are. Don't know how they think don't know what is important to them.

(09:17):

They are not safe. An employee who is in this state has a harder time accepting or appreciating diversity because it's similar to change. New people means new systems means new ways of communicating. Again, I don't think I'm up for that. That's how their brain works.

(09:33):

The third way that a trauma sensitive workplace can cost you and your organization is that it impedes creativity and innovation. So, as you've probably gleaned by now, trauma responses often arise when an individual feels threatened and a number of things in the workplace can trigger this. It literally can be a word that you say it can be the tone of your voice. It can be what you're asking people to do. People have different triggers. Well, once an employee is in this state, their thought processes become rigid. They think in very concrete, very shallow and unimaginative ways. It's a trauma defense relief.

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It's a way of protecting themselves. It's let me go back to what is safe and, and, you know, the clear parameters, very straight way of thinking. So anyway, employees who are constantly being triggered at work often revert back to this shallow thinking and have a hard time accessing the part of their brain that is responsible for creativity and innovation, because that's the same part of the brain that I was talking about earlier that goes offline. And when, when you're stressed, the frontal cortex. And so when an employee is, is triggered, they lose access to that part of their brain. That's responsible for innovation and creativity.

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Number four, a trauma-insensitive workplace impedes teamwork. When we, as humans experience stress, we shift our automatically into survival mode. Well, trauma is the result of toxic stress. And in toxic workplaces with toxic work cultures where employees are being traumatized or retraumatized, you find that employees perpetually exist in survival mode.

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And so, interpersonal skills essentially go out the window and building relationships become difficult. What are the key ingredients for effective teamwork? Strong communication and relational skills.

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So, people who are experiencing trauma in the moment are having a trauma response are very much in a state of, again, self protection. You don't wanna communicate with you lashing out at you because I'm not regulated. And so communication, relational skills go out the window, which means teamwork is negatively impacted. And then finally a trauma insensitive workplace impedes retention. So research has shown that in workplaces where toxic stress that leads to trauma is high employees, experience mental health problems, like anxiety, burnout, depression, and substance use, and ultimately higher turnover rates, which all increase administrative costs. If employees don't feel safe, they're likely to demonstrate a flight response. Okay. Usually when we don't feel safe, our body does one of three things:

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Fight. We're gonna fight. The, the thing that we think is attacking us flight, we're gonna flee run away from the thing that we think is danger or freeze. If I stay very still, maybe danger won't notice me. So what you find is that in workplaces that are trauma, insensitive attrition is a lot higher because your employees are engaged in flight responses. They are mass fleeing this workplace that is triggering them. So this is why when people talk about the great resignation, I'm like, no, it's the great flight response. People are mass "exodus" out of workplaces that

have been stressing them. And they've just reached their breaking point. They're like, "I'm not doing this anymore. I don't wanna be stressed. I don't wanna be traumatized. I don't wanna be triggered. I don't wanna be treated like I'm less than."

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So anyway, there you have it. Five ways that neglecting a trauma informed approach to leadership and management is costing your organization.

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As usual. If you're interested in bringing a trauma informed leadership training or program to your organization, you can go to <https://hercareerdoctor.com/traumainformedleadership> just to learn more about how we can partner together to improve your organization's productivity, engagement, and retention with trauma and from leadership. If you found this podcast helpful, feel free to share it, send it to that leader in your life that you know is wanting to improve work culture and just have help them start to shift their lens and how they think about and interact with employees and leadership.

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Thanks again 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.

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Also let's continue the conversation, take a screenshot of this episode and share it on Instagram, tag me @HerCareerDoctor. And let me know your main takeaway. Thanks again for listening and I'll capture in the next episode.