Compassion Fatigue's Path

ZEALOT — We are committed, involved, and available, ready to problem solve and to make a difference. We are willing to go the extra mile.

RENEWAL vs. PATHOLOGY — Leaving the profession, physical and mental illness, chronic symptoms **or** hardiness, resiliency, transformation.

COMPASSION RESILIENCE

LEAVE PROFESSION

Renewal vs. Pathology

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(Cycle is from work of Eric Gentry, PhD, 2012)

IRRITABILITY — Anger and cynicism, diminished creativity, sadness, feeling helpless or hopeless.

ZOMBIE — A sense that you can't ever do enough, inflated sense of importance, sleeplessness, sense of persecution.

WITHDRAWAL — Overwhelmed by complexity, chronic exhaustion, physical illness, difficulty empathizing, feeling numb to other's pain, absenteeism.
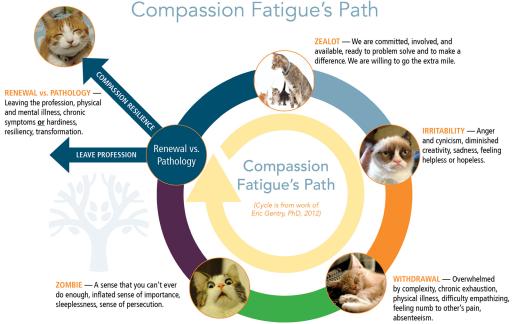
Path of compassion fatigue

This section introduces the path of compassion fatigue. Effective leaders see information from four vantage points; the individual, the team, the organization, and the systems in which the organization operates, such as government, healthcare, and social services systems. The experience of compassion fatigue is influenced by each of these. As a leader, you can help your team to identify the breadth of what might be impacting its members and guide them towards the relevant resources that build resilience. For example, a team member may have been less engaged in the work over the past few months. When talking with the team member, you may learn that they are feeling overwhelmed with the complexity of the needs of the students. Understanding the path of compassion fatigue allows you to look back on the growth of the team member from some naïve thinking that they "had what it takes" to meet the needs of the students, to this new place of understanding the complex nature of the challenges students face. The overwhelm may come from a broader understanding of the imperfections in the systems that surround the student, the intersectionality of all aspects of the student's identities, and the growing relationships with team members that reveal human frailties in co-workers, etc.

Your job as a leader is to underscore that, while such realizations are unsettling, they are crucial to effectiveness. Decision making needs to be based in the reality of student's lives and the workplace. The task now is to discover the next best steps to take. One rarely discovers that alone. In the face of complexity, rather than pulling back (other than for any needed self-care), the path to resilience eventually involves leaning in to connect with the team and to other resources to build the skill and competence needed.

As the leader of the team, ask yourself if you have created an environment where fatigue can be named, explored, and addressed. Consider what you model when it comes to self-awareness and self-care. Has the team experienced you coming to them to help you work through a complex challenge? Are the resources available to build team members' competence?