Managing Stress in Staff and Constituents During a Crisis

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Note: Audio is only available via computer, not telephone because of security restrictions in using webinar software on congressional equipment.

Part of the “Life in Congress” Project by:
Presenters

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Goals of the Program

• Strategies and communication skills for dealing with emotional constituents
• Ways of managing personal emotions in this stressful time
• Resources to turn to for support and other key tools for managing this crisis and serving the public effectively
Challenges Facing Us All

- The nation
  - 632,000+ cases; 31,000+ deaths
- The district
- Your constituents
- Your staff
- Yourself
Currently, how many of your staff & constituent interactions are related to the health/economic implications of COVID-19?

- Most of our interactions (75% or more)
- More than half of our interactions (50%-75%)
- Less than half of our interactions (25%-50%)
- Few of our interactions (25% or less)
The Importance of Your Work

• The world has changed and our normal ways of operating have to change

• You will be dealing with death

• You will be responding to people who are suffering, angry, frightened, who have lost everything including family members and dreams

• You are vital now more than ever
The Importance of Your Work

- You have to take care of each other
- You have to take care of yourself
- You probably have to develop and apply new skills
- This is going to be hard work for a long time but it MATTERS
- You CAN do this
Practical Suggestions

• Consider shifting resources to casework
• Train the whole team rapidly on what is and is not available
• Know what the stimulus package included and how to access information (but for goodness sake don’t make this political)
• Know what other resources are available federally and locally and build relationships
Poll 2

Which of the following do you personally experience on a daily or near daily basis? (Click all that apply)

- Wanting to do more for constituents who lost jobs/businesses
- Feeling the emotional pain of constituents w/health concerns
- Fear for my own health or the health of my loved ones
- Worries about my personal financial future
- A sense that the world has changed/uncertainty about future
The 6R Model of Communication

1. Readiness
2. Receiving
3. Relating
4. Reasoning
5. Responding
6. Repeating
The 6R Model of Communication

1. Readiness

- Quieting your mind
- Holding the habitual responses
- Meeting people where they are
2. Receiving

- Not just listening
- Taking in everything the person is saying and feeling
3. Relating

- This may be the most important thing you do to help
- Feeling what they feel and letting them know you do
- The power of listening, silence and reflecting
The 6R Model of Communication

4. Reasoning
   - Think before you speak
5. Responding

- Deciding what the best response is
- What does this person need most right now from you
- How you say things is as important as what you say
The 6R Model of Communication

6. Repeating
   - The cycle of Rs is ongoing
Taking Action But Managing Expectations

• Knowing well exactly what you can and can’t do but doing absolutely everything you can

• Building connections with those who can help
Poll 3

Since the outbreak, have you learned of or noticed staff showing signs of stress or displaying feelings of being overwhelmed?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure
Congressional Staff Comments

Question: How are you doing? What’s on your mind?

“Each day is a new adjustment either to work load, constantly changing circumstances, or general unknowns.”

“Difficult prioritizing all the challenges constituents are facing right now.”

“Okay, but stressed and sometimes annoyed with sick husband.”
Secondary Traumatization

• What is secondary trauma?
  ▪ A set of emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioral reactions to working with people who have experienced traumatic events.

• What are the signs?
  ▪ Feelings of sadness, anxiety, frustration, tension, helplessness.
  ▪ Sleep disturbance, fatigue and sometimes isolation or even confusion can also happen along with deeper questions about life and the world.
Self Care

- Physical health (and safety)
- Breaks from the phone or screen
- Healthy food
- Spiritual health prayer/meditation/other
- Cognitive health
- Family and loved one care
Team Care

• Challenges of supporting your team remotely
• Increased importance of supporting your team
• Keys to helping remotely (6Rs)
• Ethics
• Building a lasting culture of support
• Being a resource for others
U.S. Senate Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

• **Goal & Mission:** Increase resiliency throughout the Senate community by helping to support happy, healthy and productive employees in DC and in State offices

• **Free & Confidential Services:**
  - Individual assessment, short term, solution focused intervention and referral services for the full array of personal and work issues that may be impacting an employee
  - Assist managers and supervisors with navigating through challenging workplace issues

• **Contact:** 202-224-3902, [http://webster.senate.gov/eap/](http://webster.senate.gov/eap/)
U.S. House of Representatives
Office of Employee Assistance

• Free & Confidential Consultation, Counseling and Information for the House community
• Management Consultation
• Executive Coaching
• Transition/Career Planning
• Training, Presentations and Retreat Facilitation
• Critical Incident Response: Organizational consultation and Management of crises impacting DC and District offices
• House Wellness Center

202-225-2400 · employee.assistance@mail.house.gov

Information available on HouseNet.house.gov under Personnel
The long struggle, the long vision
Q&A

Rep. Brian Baird
Kristin Welsh-Simpson
Senate Employee Assistance Program
Liz McBride
House Office of Employee Assistance
Conclusion

Evaluation and Additional Resources
Additional Resources/Handouts

- CPA Guide: *Communicating with Distressed Constituents*
- CMF Handout: *Casework Burnout & Stress*
- House & Senate training and EAP/OEA offices offer variety of services & programs – check intranets for more info
SHRM COVID-19 Resources

Visit

https://pages.shrm.org/covid-19-resources

for

Coronavirus and COVID-19 Resources

and

Government Response and Resources
“Life in Congress” Reports

• Aligning Work and Life in the U.S. House and Senate
• The Member Perspective
• Job Satisfaction and Engagement of House and Senate Staff
• Workflex Toolkit for Congress
• Congressional Benefits & Personnel Practices
Complimentary Management Guidebooks

• Setting Course: A Congressional Management Guide

• Keeping It Local: A Guide for Congressional District/State Offices