

Some Days You Move Mountains and Others the Denny's Waiter Calls ...

Kari Murphy | Ball State University
Breanne Scogin | California State University, Fresno

Day to day work as a campus based professional, headquarters staff member, or graduate assistant is often described as *unpredictable* — you never know what the day will bring, or every day is a new adventure. While these are reasons many of us enjoy the profession, the unexpected can also lead to stress, sleepless nights, and burnout. Our work is demanding and can be overwhelming; we need to be able to cope with these times.

Everyone has that one story, you know the one, the one you bust out when the conversation turns to unbelievable situations that have occurred, and you survived, at work. Maybe a waiter from a local Denny's calls because students ran out on a tab, and he assumes they are fraternity members because they were all wearing the same green bowtie. Or the local paper covers the music video that was filmed by a B-list rap group at the campus-owned fraternity house and featured scantily-clad sorority women twerking. Or maybe the VPSA calls and asks that you produce a composite picture of an obscure member of a fraternity from years ago that is now being vetted for an advisory board position. These situations — the bizarre ones, the ones that make you go 'hmm...', the ones you just know no one is going to believe happened to you today — make great stories we love to share with those closest to us and our colleagues in the field. Why is that? Besides being able to make someone else roll their eyes and laugh, we share because it's cathartic.

Storytelling is one mechanism for managing stress and navigating burnout. Research shows that storytelling is an important part of our ability to process situations for three reasons:

- **Reflection:** telling a story allows us to actively reflect on the situation and how we handled it;
- **Connection:** relating an experience to another person via storytelling allows for relationship development over shared experiences; and,
- **Resilience:** regardless of the magnitude of the obstacle in the story, being able to share 'survival' of the obstacle helps develop self-efficacy (*East, Jackson, & O'Brien, 2010*).

So, the next time you pick up the phone to call or text a friend or colleague because you just have to share the unbelievable story, know that your instinct to do so is healthy and assists in navigating stress and burnout.

Sharing with someone about the absolutely *bananas* situations that occur in our work is helpful, but how do we keep from going *bananas* through it all? The progress principle and the idea of celebrating small wins.

The Harvard Business Review (2011) conducted a study and asked 669 managers to rank five managerial tools — clear goals, incentives, interpersonal support, recognition for good work, and support for making progress in the work — in order of importance that affect employee motivation and emotion. Only 5% of the managers ranked *support for making progress in the work* as the lead factor, and many of the managers listed it last. The reality is this is the number one factor affecting employees' emotions, motivation, and perception of the workday. Perhaps asking if you believe your work is meaningful is the first step.

If we agree our work is meaningful, the next step would be understanding if we are making progress. That can be difficult as many of us want to check the large items or programs off our to-do list, but that doesn't happen each day. Celebrating the smaller wins is the key to continuing the forward momentum. Small wins are "concrete, complete, implemented outcomes of moderate importance" (Weick, 1984). Meaning you don't have to check Panhellenic Recruitment off your to-do list in order to feel progress; be sure to add the smaller tasks to your list. The effort of tracking small achievements each day enhances motivation and recording those small wins helps us track progress towards the larger goal and boosts our self-confidence (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Take some time at the end of each day to reflect on the things you did accomplish — maybe you booked the busses for Panhellenic Recruitment or reserved the space for the NPHC Step Show — these smaller tasks are pieces of the larger task and accomplishing even one small piece moves us closer to completion of the larger task.

Many of us are guilty of saying things like, "Our work isn't rocket science," or "We aren't solving the world's problems." Too often we focus on what we aren't doing to help decrease pressure or stress in our work. However, shifting that narrative to a positive can impact our day-to-day outlook on what we are doing. We are assisting in the development of students during their young adult years. We are teaching conflict resolution and supporting students through life challenges. We are mentoring, guiding, and supporting young adults in many of their life aspirations. We are celebrating students as they mature and grow as a result of their involvement in our organizations. The summer is a great time to reflect on how you can change your narrative to reflect positivity, share stories with peers, and feel accomplished each day.

Kari Murphy

Kari Murphy currently serves as the Director of Greek Life at Ball State University (Chirp Chirp). In this role, Kari works directly with NPHC and the Panhellenic Association and serves as an advisor to Ball State University Dance Marathon. She holds a bachelor's degree in Public Relations from Valparaiso University and a master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of the Pacific. Kari is a member of Kappa Delta and currently serves as the Chair of the Chapter Advisory Board for the Theta Nu chapter at Purdue University. Outside of fraternity/sorority life, Kari enjoys running, traveling, and cheering on her Green Bay Packers (GO PACK GO).

Breanne Scogin

Breanne Scogin is the Senior Coordinator for the Center for Leadership at Fresno State. In this role, she has responsibility for leadership programs as well as fraternity/sorority life. Breanne has served as a student affairs professional for fourteen years, primarily in fraternity and sorority advising. When she's not having conversations about leadership (or inevitably risk management!), Breanne enjoys spending time with her children riding all of the best rides at Disneyland.

References

- Amabile, T. & Kramer, S.J. (2011) The Power of Small Wins. *Harvard Business Review*, May 2011.
Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2011/05/the-power-of-small-wins>
- East, L., Jackson, D., O'Brien, L., et al. (2010) Storytelling: an approach that can help to develop resilience. *Nurse Researcher*, 17(3), 17-25.
- Weick, K.E. (1984) Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Problems. *American Psychologist*, 39(1), 40-49.