

Transcript for [Prioritizing mental health in the newsroom: How to create a culture of well-being](#)

00:04

Naseem Miller: Hi, everyone. Thanks for being with us. Today I'm Naseem Miller, I'm a senior health editor at The Journalist's Resource. If you haven't checked us out before, our website is journalistsresource.org And you can find a ton of tip sheets and story ideas on a wide range of topics there.

00:21

So today's topic is about mental health in the newsroom. Many of us who go into journalism thrive under pressure of deadlines and we want to be there when the news breaks. But I think we are facing so much more than just news coverage these days. There are so many changes in our industry. There's a 24/7 news cycle, online harassment of journalists, attacks on the media, that pandemic and tragedies like mass shootings, and the definition of newsrooms is really changing since the pandemic started. I think each of us probably know at least one news outlet that's lost its building. So, many reporters are now working remotely and so are freelancers who have always done that and in addition to being isolated, they lack support of a typical newsroom, so more than ever, we are aware that journalists are under stress and can burn out.

01:13

And I have to say a lot of credit goes to the younger reporters today who are normalizing discussions around mental health but many of us didn't learn about how our work can impact our mental health. And we kept it to ourselves. And for me, the wakeup call came after I covered a mass shooting about six years ago. And since then, I've been learning more and more about journalism and trauma. And I'm very encouraged to see that there's so much discussion about this topic. You're hearing a lot more about journalists' self-care practices.

01:44

At the same time, we know that there is so much that an individual can do. So there's a responsibility for news managers and newsrooms to create an environment where journalists feel safe to express their need for a break or a change in the type of assignment that they cover and not get stigmatized.

02:04

So our goal today with this session, it really is to give you some tools and tips so you can create a culture of well-being in your new newsroom.

02:13

And before why I began I wanted to thank The journalist's Resource program director and editor-in-chief Carmen Nobel who's also my boss and she's been so supportive of me pursuing this topic. She's helping me today and you'll see her dropping links in the chat. I also wanted to thank Laura Manley, our executive director at the Shorenstein Center and Nancy Gibbs, faculty director at the Shorenstein Center, both of whom have been champions of mental health and well-being at the center.

02:43

We have a great panel to lead the discussion today, and I'm going to quickly introduce them before we start.

02:50

[Scott Blanchard](#) is the director of journalism at the public media station WITF, and a board member for the Trust for Trauma Journalism. He led a team that created a trauma awareness and peer support program and has helped coordinate and lead trauma awareness and peer support training in several newsrooms. He will share his experience with us.

03:10

[Sewell Chan](#) is the editor-in-chief of Texas Tribune. He recently led his newsroom in coverage of the Uvalde school shooting tragedy. And as a reporter he's also covered mass tragedies, including the 9/11 tragedy and he'll reflect on his experiences throughout his career.

03:27

Dr. [Elana Newman](#) is research director at Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma and McFarlin Professor of Psychology at the University of Tulsa. She's a journalist ally and a PTSD expert. She provides training and consultation to journals about trauma science, interviewing survivors, source development, self care, resilience and trauma related newsroom practices. She'll walk us through what it means to have a trauma-aware newsroom.

03:55

And [Dave Seglins](#) is an investigative journalist and a well-being champion at CBC News in Canada. He recently co-authored a study on the mental health and well being of Canadian journalist and he will talk to us about the work that's being done in Canada and also the findings of the study.

04:13

We should hopefully be able to open the floor for your questions by 12:30 or so. I would like to encourage as much conversation, discussion and questions as possible from everybody watching online today in the chat and the Q&A box. The videos and audios for you all are turned off from our end, but the chat and Q&A are open. So please type your questions in the Q&A box. You have the option to remain anonymous. And I won't read your names either. But please use the chat option for chat. My colleagues are gathering your questions from the Q&A box but not the chat. They are not monitoring the chat for questions. And please keep conversations in the chat on topic. We love it when you share your experiences but please be mindful of other people's trauma.

04:58

We are recording this session. So we'll share a link to the video in the coming days and also post it on our website. And we have a tip sheet for you with link to many resources, which you're going to see the link drop into the chat shortly.

05:12

So let's begin with a question. Sewell, let's start with you. You've been in the industry for more than two decades, first as a reporter and now as a news manager. Can you talk to us about the lessons you have learned along the way in your career about mental health in the newsroom and how you handled the coverage of Uvalde school mass shooting tragedy in your newsroom?

05:36

Sewell Chan: Well, thank you Naseem. It's really an honor to be here and engaging on this really important topic and I'm very eager to learn the insights from my fellow panelists, including Elana, who has been very helpful to us at the Texas Tribune and to me personally in the past, so very grateful to be here.

05:51

You know, I started my career in the mid 1990s. And it was it was a different time in many ways. Not just because the distribution of news was so different in the how news is gathered, how it's produced, how it's promoted was so different. But also I think, you know, attitudes toward you know, covering trauma.

05:53

It was just a very, very different world in my view. I remember some of my first experiences as a summer intern, and this may be becoming more rare actually, unfortunately, because local news is kind of withering, but it was very common to give the interns you know, the cop beat and to have us cover frankly a lot of serious violent crimes, including homicides and fires. And the idea at the time, I guess was well, these are important stories to be able to write and do well. They follow a fairly basic format so it's good to have the, you know, your trainee and journalists working on them.

06:51

The idea wasn't necessarily so bad, but I think there was really no thought, if I can be honest, that police beat and criminal justice are actually a really complex beats on their own. And that it's actually hard to write about a homicide or a deadly fire, even if you're an experienced journalist, and there just was not much kind of awareness. It was like, well, the interns, we're going to have them cover the fires and the murders and it just felt like a very basic thing that I think we didn't really question or assume.

07:19

I think about one of the major events. I feel like I remember, I've learned from a few major events that I helped cover as a reporter. One of course was 9/11. Right? And I was in my second year as a full-time journalist at that point only so I was just, you know, 24 years old. And that morning, I was sent to the Pentagon, like so many other journalists, and came upon the scene of this literally continuing burning and smoking tragedy, and filed stories.

07:50

And it was not a time where I think mental health concerns were necessarily dismissed. But I think that one had to very actively surface them if one wanted help or resources. There was no one proactively -- and this is what I'm going to get to when the management side of this -- there was no one really proactively saying like, you know, we're going to find counseling and services. If you've been involved

in covering this, we're going to really insist that you talk to someone, you know, this is really, really important and we're going to insist on breaks. It just was a different time. I don't think it was ill will. It was just less awareness.

08:25

Later on in my career, I ended up covering the war in Iraq for a few months. And then Hurricane Katrina in 2005, among other events, and you know, I didn't realize this until recently that we've been paying a lot more attention to this issue, but I had actually in a way been searching out resources on my own as a young journalist. I remember reading a book called [The Bang Bang Club](#), which is a very powerful journalistic account of four conflict photo journalists who had worked in South Africa, and I don't want to give it away, but it's an incredibly powerful book about the toll that covering conflict and violence takes on people and on those who document and observe and chronicle. And then later on, the psychiatrist named Anthony Feinstein wrote a very, very important [book about trauma and journalists](#), which has also influenced me.

09:11

So fast forward to our coverage of the Uvalde shooting. You know, we're a public policy focused newsroom, which means that many of our journalists had not covered local crime before. Many of them had not covered a murder and suddenly, we were putting early career journalists in a position of having to cover really a kind of national mass tragedy.

09:34

We did several things. I'm sure we did not do enough. But we did several things from that very week. We were in touch with [Bruce Shapiro](#) with the [Dart Center for Journalism & Trauma](#). I became aware of the [Trust for Trauma Journalism](#), which is relatively new and absolutely worth supporting. We insisted on the people who kind of only been on the ground for a certain number of days before they had to come out even if they wanted to stay on this story. We actually did, very, very proactive in getting sessions that were really required for the whole staff to come to talk about processing what we had just seen and observed. And then later on, we actually brought in a counselor to help smaller set of journalists who were dealing specifically with very graphic material footage that had emerged.

10:29

Because I think we've all come to recognize that even though our journalists were not there during the mass shooting itself, they arrived in the immediate aftermath, that doesn't mean that their exposure to all this kind of grief and horror is any less.

10:43

And in particular, when it comes to graphics and videos and photo images, I think we've learned a lot. I think about a journalist, I once sat next to him for a number of years, whose job included processing images from the Syrian civil war. And I think back in the old days, we would think, well, this person's you know, in a Western country, far from Syria, it can't be that bad, but actually I think about the toll of looking at those images every day, and figuring out which ones to select which ones to publish. And I think that toll is as serious or and differently serious, perhaps, but as serious as it is for someone who's on the ground.

11:22

So you know, my general observation is that newsrooms are getting better at this, but we need help. And we need to continue to have these conversations. And it's really important in my view, that they've been led by management, that that this is not something where we should be waiting for people to surface these issues. We should recognize and our default should be that covering a massively traumatic event demands that we think about the processing of it and the aftermath of it, and offer people to help, rather than waiting for them to come forward and say that they need it.

11:57

Miller: Thank you. Dave, I wanted to ask you, you have a personal story, as a frontline journalist and the past two years have really taken a leadership role in educating journalists and newsrooms about the importance of mental health, including the study that you co-authored. So can you talk a little bit about your story? And also the study you have conducted?

12:20

Absolutely. But first, I want to say Sewell I want to come work for you. Sounds like a psychologically-safe and healthy kind of newsroom approach. And I'm grateful that we're hearing all these words above responsibility and proactivity on the things that we can do.

12:35

But my personal story, I'm going to keep it short, but a decade ago I was a frontline investigative reporter. I was always the racehorse out there wanting to cover the big, tough stuff. And I covered a really a horrible case about a Canadian military commander who had turned into a sadosexual serial killer. And the trial was graphic, and it was horrible to sit through. And afterwards, a couple days after the sentencing, I had a total break, which I wouldn't have used that word at the time. I just thought I was dying and I couldn't get out of bed and I was having all of these responses that I did not understand.

13:17

I did call my EAP. My employer and said, 'Oh, this was a tough story. If your needs you know, help call the EAP.' The EAP wasn't particularly helpful, to be honest. They didn't have trauma counselors on it. So I wound up going through a family doctor, got referred to a trauma specialist and explained what I'd covered. And she said, that sounds pretty normal. You're having a post traumatic stress response. And I was like, 'What? this is normal?' It was reaffirming that, you know, it wasn't me that was broken, necessarily, but things that I've been through, had had built up and I could no longer process the stress.

13:58

And then she asked me, 'Well, what have you covered for the last 10 years?' And as I recounted the kinds of stories about child abuse and sexual violence and murder and mayhem. It's like, 'Yeah, you have PTSD.'

14:13

So that's my personal story. I spent a lot of time healing. But as I came back to work, no one asked me about it. There was conspicuously a lack of conversation about mental health. And that always bothered me.

14:28

Flash forward a decade, I'm now in a position -- I'm a senior investigative journalist -- and I wanted to do some training and thought it's time to get back in my industry and somebody asked me, 'What do you think we really need around here?' And I said, 'Well, how about we do some stuff with mental health and trauma exposure?' And then 'Oh, that's great buddy and teach that?' I said, 'But what do I know about nothing?' And so they sent me to school. I took a course through Harvard Medical School, just an [online course](#) to introduce me to the concepts of global mental health and trauma, the brain science of stress and trauma very helpful. I was fortunate enough to join Elana and become a [fellow of the Dart Center](#) this past summer. And at the CBC, we have built, using experts and best practices from around the world, a curriculum to train managers and frontline staff on the science of trauma, what happens to the journalist brain, how we can mitigate it, protocols in the newsroom that we can do better to prevent and try to mitigate risks and big trauma stories, how we can better support people how we can talk about self-care among journalists who are notoriously bad at self-care, don't eat lunch.

15:49

So this is how I got to know us about the study. In my early work, I went knocked on the door of the CBC, folks who would deal with HR and all of that, and I asked, I said, 'Do we have stats on mental health, injury or illness among our journalistic colleagues?' And they sort of, you know, sat back and said, 'Well, maybe.' I said, 'Well can I see it?' And they were very uncomfortable with that, because I think news organizations fear that disclosing this kind of information may have some sort of negative effect. But if you're a well-being advocate, you need that data. So I partnered with a professor at Carleton University in Ottawa. We conducted a national survey in Canada reached 1,200 recent media workers, because journalists could be everything from the reporter in the field, to the video editor, to the video librarian that's digesting this endless stream of images, to the managers, the people who are responsible and feeling a great sense of responsibility.

16:50

We got 1,200 responses. The results in a nutshell: incredibly high rates of anxiety, depression, burnout, higher than, you know, the populace average. Incredible routine, cumulative amounts of trauma exposure in the work that we do. Pronounced lack of training and literacy within newsrooms.

17:16

And so we have data. We know that this is the state of affairs. Now, what are the solutions? I know that we're going to have lots of time to talk about this. I just want to run through a list, because somebody early on said this is all about literacy. And I really liked that idea. The smarter we can get the more literate we can become about mental health, the brain stress trauma, the better we're going to be as newsroom leaders.

17:44

So we start by talking about it. Wonderful that we're having this event. People can hold panels in their newsrooms. They can have town halls, seminars, discussions, that's making it okay to talk about it. Ask about it. Conduct employee surveys, have opportunities for input, develop training, and make it mandatory. Develop protocols in newsrooms. How do you plan for big trauma stories? What are the steps that you must take but before during and after? Don't make it voluntary? Do it. Make sure that managers actually have a system to monitor how many people have been working on a constant stream of trauma stories? Maybe they need a break. And then if people do need a break, what is the protocol? Right if somebody needs to put up their hand do they say they feel safe enough to do that? Or does the manager have the responsibility and the supervisor have the responsibility to say, 'You know what, I think you've been on that big tough story for a long time. I know you don't think you want this but I'm going to take you off.' So developing firm protocols.

18:50

Other best practices include getting expertise in your newsrooms. I've pitched a job. I'm a journalist and well-being champion. So I'm a pain in the ass. CBC has agreed to hire me as an advocate internally, and I'm poking and pushing this along. So that's an interesting model, but there are other models.

19:11

ABC, Australia, BBC, they're big organizations, but they have occupational psychologists working with the newsrooms. The BBC has a chief medical officer of health.

19:23

And Scott, I'm keen to hear more about peer support programs, the best thing, colleagues helping colleagues, a safe space where you're not having to talk to a manager, you're not having to take time off to go to see a professional therapist, but having your peers like to talk to you and work through issues. Look, there's a list of a few practical things. I look forward to furthering the discussion but thank you very much for the invitation and keen to hear from others.

19:52

Miller: Thank you so much. And Scott, you have led trauma awareness and peer support training in several newsrooms. So can you talk a little bit about what those programs are like, how did they come about and how did you come up with it? And what resources did you need? What challenges did you face?

20:13

Scott Blanchard: Thank you. Glad to, and, you know, we're hearing this theme emerge from the from our panelists so far, you know, I'm sure you'll hear with a lot too about culture change in our business in our newsrooms, and that's really where our effort started. To Sewell's point and I think related to Dave's as well, we got to a point in our newsroom where I said, 'If I'm going to be the editor, who on a Saturday morning asks the weekend reporter to call the family of the person who drowned in the lake overnight, I better be able to deal with the other part.' What could come back, you know, after the reporter does that work? So that's kind of where our effort got its start.

20:59

And, I love this panel, and this. I'm so happy that we're doing this because it's part of the culture change that we need to have in our business and I'm seeing more signs of it. I will say, you know, when I was helping the Trust for Trauma Journalism put together that [the seminar](#) that we did in Indiana in October, which you and Elana were at, Sewell emailed one of the organizers, just really out of the blue, and said my newsroom is covering Uvalde. I think it would be really good if we were able to have someone involved in this in a seminar. And so there you have a top editor at a major news organization understanding that issue and what's at stake and to me, that's huge. And the fact that everyone's here on this today is also big.

21:49

So we created a trauma awareness peer support program for the York Daily Record and Digital First Media newsrooms, later Gannett. We worked really closely with the Dart center and Bruce Shapiro, and Elana as well.

22:08

We had a committee drawn from a half dozen newsrooms on the East Coast. We met, we developed an actual physical guide about how this trauma awareness and peer support effort would operate. We dealt with issues that anyone wanting to do this will run into, for example, the issue of confidentiality, and if a peer supporter is talking with a colleague about something that's really difficult, you know, we didn't want that conversation. We didn't want that peer supporter to be somehow obligated to take that conversation out of the room and to the supervisor unless the reporter wanted that to go in that direction. And that case, the peer supporter could go with them. So we dealt with those kinds of issues.

22:57

We produced this physical guide and included journalistic best practices in a sort of a how to for structured peer support conversation, recruited contact list for peer supporters, which were basically the people who were on that committee. We followed that with a daylong training in our newsroom for Central [Pennsylvania] sister newsrooms. Elana was there with us and several others, including a psychologist with a local healthcare system, who we had gotten to know and who became an advocate for what we were doing. That training included role-playing peer support, which we felt was important to do because it's a lot of people I think, are skilled and having good, heartfelt conversations and productive conversations, but we had this structure that we were trying to train people.

23:52

We then held another training, which was led by Bruce Shapiro from Dart for a broader East Coast newsroom cohort.

24:03

In our own newsroom at the York Daily Record, we integrated it into the newsroom in different ways. We created a what we call the baseline-skills training, sort of a packet of training that every new employee would get like how to work here, because we didn't want people going six months into their job and somebody asked me to do something and they would say not no one ever told me how to do that. So we tried to cover the bases and we included the trauma awareness and peer support training in that as a as a basic thing that you would need to know if you've worked in that newsroom.

24:36

We did ongoing training in different ways. [Dart Center](#) has a lot of great resources and videos we would watch those and discuss and dissect. We invited some contacts that I've made through the Dart Center and my fellowship there to come into our newsroom and do presentations. We would come together as a staff to talk about particularly difficult stories or stretches of stories. Anybody who's on here and you know in newsrooms, particularly in local newsrooms, particularly in smaller markets knows that sometimes you'll get a week where you know, six different things happen and it's just one after another and we brought people to come together to talk about those.

25:18

And then we would look at other material that's out there. One time we had a staff gathering about this, I don't know if y'all remember, there was a huge fire in [Oakland nightclub](#). I think and the proprietor of the nightclub came under fire for his actions. And there was an interview on national TV that was really combative. And so we looked at that for purpose of interviewing.

25:44

And then very quickly, just to know my time is running up, but the challenges that we face and I'm happy to talk about these later, you know, any cultural change is hard. So there was just figuring out ways to keep it going and keep it alive and breathing in the newsroom and make it part of the conversation. As Dave said make it okay to our goal was really make it okay to talk about this. We faced a little skepticism not very much, but a little bit. Challenge was also getting buy in, you know, from all levels of the newsroom.

26:19

Time is always a challenge and we just looked at it as, you know, we have to figure out a way to work this into what we're doing. And if you're leading it, you know your time is going to be taken up by your staff. And then the challenge, you continue to explain why this is important before, during and after. You know and not just as Sewell was saying, not just waiting, you know until something happens and then doing it. Money is always an issue. We will always like to do more. But budgets are tight. And so that's kind of where we ended up, and again, happy to talk about any of those as we get into the Q&A, if anyone is interested. Thank you.

27:05

Miller: Thanks so much. And Elana. You know there have been a lot of discussions around trauma-aware journalism. Can you talk about what a trauma-aware newsroom looks like and why it's important for managers to consider it? And what practices do you recommend? What resources do people need? Are there simple actions even newsrooms can take to create a safe space for reporters?

27:31

Elana Newman: Well, I think that my esteemed colleagues have already sort of said some of that and I just want to start by thanking them. I think having champions in the newsroom, having people who share their stories are really important. And as you were talking, I was reflecting that was [Chris Cramer](#)

[of CNN](#) many years ago, who was one of the first journalists to say I have PTSD and I'm struggling, and that really moved this along. And as I've been thinking about that. I'm thinking about the legacy of all the journalists who have continued to move this on. And I appreciate you as news managers. I think all three of you are visionary news managers doing this work.

28:08

And I think that is the example of what a trauma-aware newsroom looks like. It is a newsroom that is struggling to figure out 'In my particular culture, as Scott said, what ways can I improve the health, reduce the risks, and improve the reporting in my newsroom about trauma and victims?'

28:30

And I think that is what a trauma-informed newsroom is. It's both focusing on the craft. How can I tell better stories, as well as how can I enhance and make sure that my staff stay with me, that we keep retaining the talent to tell these stories? And how can I help them stay healthy-enough to keep doing this work, and making good ethical choices, making good news decisions? And I think that's what we think about.

29:02

To add on {...], employee surveys, protocols, plan system monitoring, expertise, internally training, peer support, talking about this. This is just from you guys. Town halls, seminars, a culture change, peer support, making sure that those are embedded with other resources. We have a list already of many other things through there.

29:25

But the idea is you can start small. You're a small newsroom? What is one thing that would change the quality of your life. This kind of a model that's often used in health now to make people healthier, it's comes from [NIOSH](#), it's this idea first you want to eliminate the risks and reduce the risks. Then you want to substitute health enhancing policies, programs and practices. Then you want to redesign the work environment somehow to continue to do great work. We're not talking about diluting work, but redesigning the office. So you can enhance health and well-being, which is figuring out a protocol. Somebody wants to take a chunk of a break that isn't humiliating, that is satisfying. Education, and then focusing on personal change. And in this field, so far, we've really focused on personal change because it's easier in many ways, but now the next chord is changing organizations. And I think I ran through all the things you asked me about.

30:26

Miller: And one of the things I wanted to ask you to, especially when it comes to terminology, you know, talk about stress, trauma, burnout, is there a difference between these? How should we understand these better to understand what's happening, you know, among the editors and reporters?

30:50

Newman: OK. So I'm gonna get into my geek hat now, academic hat, but I think it's a really important, one, because there are really big differences in distinguishing between stress, trauma, burnout, and actually resilience.

31:02

So we all use these terms, like they're the same thing, and they're part of it, but each one has a slightly different strategy. So stress is not being able to meet the demands at that time. And we all have stress and stress can make traumatic stress, which I'm about to talk about, worse. And in fact, I have research with my students that I have discovered that it's trauma plus a toxic organizational environment for journalists, that's the lethal combination. And that's why we can't always reduce the exposure, but we can make the organization safer.

31:34

But, traumatic stress is life threatening, perceived life threatening events. And that's when our body's going to alarm and we may need something different when our bodies can't stop and our brain changes. I'm not going to go into all of the details about that now. So there's traumatic stress. There's everyday stress.

31:52

There's burnout. Burnout has nothing to do with trauma. It can be related. But burnout is when you have just too much to do and it overwhelms your resources and it usually leads to exhaustion, cynicism. And burnout has its strategies. How can you help somebody with burnout? That's a separate issue.

32:09

And then what else do I say, the other my pet peeve also is that we're calling everything resilience training. I mean, this is an all of America. Resilience is bouncing back. And I think we need to distinguish two things. There are well-being programs and I'm for them, and there are resilience programs, which is about bouncing back and I also think we need to be thinking about those all differently. So when we start really looking at specifics, just use your investigatory journalistic frames to say okay, what exactly is the problem here? And what am I trying to solve?

32:42

Seglins: Can I jump in and just ask a question of Elana, because I see it's coming up in the comments, too. When you talk about traumatic stress, can you also talk about what vicarious trauma is and how it's relevant to journalists and why it's so important our profession understands this?

33:01

Newman: Yeah. Okay. So vicarious trauma is used in kind of two different ways. First of all, you know, I think you folks, you journalists are being attacked directly, your livelihood and your physical being. On scenes. There are real threats. And they're getting worse across the world. That's one issue. But there is also something you are professional bystanders, you are absorbing the stories, your community issues, you are vicariously, indirect, you have indirect exposure, and that's just as bad and it has just as much of an effect. And I know often you think, Oh, well, I'm not the victim. This isn't happening to me.

But you have a constant diet of being a professional bystander, and not getting those skills. When I train my clinical students, I train them at least in some things that can help them be a witness. And we talked about skills who are excellent interviewers, but the self part of it isn't fair.

33:59

So vicarious traumatization refers to changing your worldview. And it's both actually technically refers to both positive and negative ways that your worldview may be changed. You may see danger everywhere. You may see the world as only a terrible place. And it's about sort of deformation of worldviews that change your world. And of course, you are exposed to things. The world is a dangerous place, but there's also safety in it. There's also beauty in it and trying to keep that balance is important.

34:36

Miller: Thank you so much. So let's start with the audience questions. First one, and please feel free whoever wants to answer, are journalists and emotion-phobic. They cover so much in the way of stress and traumatic events that happened to human beings, including interviewing many victims, and yet they never seem to talk about their own emotions. They certainly don't write about emotions, maybe if they talked or wrote about them in their articles, that would help them deal with it. Otherwise, they may keep them suppressed. And maybe journalists need their own support group where they could vent. Elana

35:18

Newman: I would just speak to this conceptually and then maybe my colleagues can speak to it practically. When I talk to journalists, journalists usually start talking about a motion when they talk about presentation of news and not in the acquisition of news and when I train clinical students, we talk about how do they how does their emotional state affect the questions they ask ahead of time about how they're going to approach a client and how they get that information.

35:52

And I guess for me, one of the things that I would encourage is that journalists in the service of objectivity, think about emotions affecting the questions they ask, and the way they approach a news story and what they do not at that point, and I think that is probably the issue.

36:10

There's a lot of theoretical work also being done right now on journalists. There's a whole bunch of really interesting young scholars who are looking at something called emotional labor. And that's talking about the cost of having to blunt your reactions. And so there are all these young scholars that are writing about journalists and emotional labor. So when you interview someone, you're spending all your energy monitoring yourself and not displaying anything and the burden in the field of emotional labor. And so there are all these young scholars who are starting to look at emotions, and what role does emotion have in journalism from that kind of theoretical sense Now, let's get practical. Others?

36:54

Sewell.

36:55

Chan: Well, I have a couple of practical thoughts on that it's more than just kind of like, 'Oh, have a stiff upper lip.' I think journalism has historically had an allergy to two things. And there's a rational basis for these allergies. So I want to get to that, but then talk about how to combine it.

37:15

You know, one is that we you know, we editors often say and the story is not us, right? The story is about the external world and I think I think that's mostly correct. We're here to document, chronicle and observe. We're not here to be direct participants. And we're not supposed to take a side obviously, etc. But I also think that that should not I think that that's largely correct, but I also don't think that that means that we're not allowed to feel and process.

37:47

We're human beings. And I think we saw this, frankly, in 2020. And we're seeing this with a new generation of journalists who let's face it are much more diverse, and bring a set of perspectives. I see a lot of generational issues in newsrooms where I think sometimes the more senior generation is like, 'Well, we covered trauma in our times, and we were never the focus of the story.' Well, that may be true, but I also think it was a less diverse news press corps at the time. And people may have come from, I don't know different places in society where they have actually more resources to draw upon.

38:24

You know, there's a lot of people who are covering 2020 were first generation professionals, the first in their families to go to college. We did a project that the Los Angeles Times comparing how Black journalists you know, covered Watts [riots] in 1965, the LA uprising in 92 and then the George Floyd protests in 2020. I'm sad to say that there were some uncanny similarities across all three. I'm not saying they were identical, but there were some similarities across all three, which I think says a lot as well.

38:59

So I think we have this allergy like, 'Oh, let's not make ourselves a story.' And again, we don't want to slip into solipsism. But I also think that yeah, it's not it's not the story isn't us, but in telling the story, we are actually going through certain processes ourselves. And I think we have to be very self-aware of that. And then I think I think the second related thing, which I've already alluded to is, there was this notion that well, how can we allow ourselves to feel if we're supposed to be objective, but I think again, that's a bit of a false dichotomy, I would argue because, yes, we should try to cover things and not you know, hopefully bring, you know, ideological, you know, presuppositions to what we're trying to cover. Of course, we're trying to look at things neutrally or dispassionately, rather, the word neutrality is tricky. But of course, we're supposed to look at things dispassionately and then try to understand the complexity and often the conflicts that we're desiring to cover. But I think sometimes that can be misread as a we're not allowed to feel otherwise that would make us not objective or, or unprofessional, and I think that's another that's another dichotomy I'd like to see broken down more newsrooms, or at least questioned more.

40:14

Seglins: I would agree 100%. And I think objectivity as a as an overriding concept in journalism has got to go and it's had its day, because I think it has impeded our ability to recognize the lived experiences as a journalists. And whether it's racial experience, whether it's your own sort of life experience of mental health issues, and or not, I think, you know, they're practical.

40:43

I'm in an interview where I'm interviewing a woman, a victim of sexual assault by a doctor, and I tear up. Is that journalistically wrong? My answer is absolutely not. I think it brings humanity and empathy to the story. And you know what I did? I'm sitting there and the cameras are rolling. I touched my eye said, 'Wow, this is really, really difficult. Are you okay to continue?' Now, I had I had problems with my own emotions, where it overwhelmed me and it was more than just, you know, I'm having a normal emotional reaction where I couldn't do my job, then I think we have a different issue where I am becoming part of a story or I am not up to handling this material and then, but honestly, if we don't have emotional responses to our material, then what are we?

41:39

Chan: You know, I'm just reminded very quickly of that scene in broadcast news, that movie from 1987 were obviously completely different situation. In that in that scenario, the broadcast journalist kind of pause the interview, conjured up his emotions, got them on camera, and kind of like, you know, it was seen as sensationalizing because he wasn't what it but that's completely different from what David's saying, which is an authentic in the moment, emotional response, but I bring up the movie only because I think for those of us who still remember it, it's it was, you know, another part of that argument that like, all feelings surely must be like, you know, self-serving or whatever. And I think that that and that takes a too far on the other direction.

42:28

Miller: Thank you. So the next question is to Scott, Sewell and Dave. Number one. What have been the main challenges you have faced as news editors and managers to develop protocols and start implementing these, and number two, how do you engage with freelancers? Who wants to start?

42:52

Chan: I can offer a couple of thoughts. We don't use many freelancers at the Texas Tribune. So that's less of an active issue for me right now. But I think our field in general needs to engage with the whole world of independent journalists, which could mean fixers, interpreters, translators, office assists. We all know that especially in overseas environments, often people with tremendous local knowledge, language fluency, and know-how are kind of really the supportive infrastructure. Right? Behind a lot of Western or global media. And there's some important work being done right now by the [Global Reporting Center](#) at the University of British Columbia, actually, on taking a look at the ethics of how fixers and these established systems are treated. You know, there are some I would argue some disturbing kind of almost neocolonial elements to how you know these kinds of so-called local hires are treated relative to the Western correspondents that they go in with. That's a whole that's a whole body of research that I'm not expert in, but I know that that's going on.

43:57

I would say that the existing obstacles, I think there are obstacles to understanding. I think there are resource obstacles, and then there are implementation obstacles. I'd like to think that in our newsroom, we've hopefully have are overcoming not understanding obstacle. I don't think there's much pushback from anyone here that we need to take mental health very seriously at all times. I think sometimes operationalizing how we do that, literally building into the budget, the idea that we might need counseling, you know, just to give a very frank example, you know, we keep saying well, this is a once in a lifetime event, but it's actually not honest anymore, because like in Texas, there's something really every year has had something usually dramatic right in 2020, just last year, obviously COVID in 2020. In 2021 it was a major winter storm and a blackout. Our own staff lost power. Hundreds of people died across Texas. In 2022, it was Uvalde.

44:58

So we can't say anymore, 'Well, these are exceptions'. You have to actually build into your newsroom protocol, that something traumatic is probably going to happen and something that you can't really predict or know in advance and it could be a weather event with more and more extreme climate change. It could be mass violence, tragically. It could be other stuff. And so I think building that into our kind of resources and processes is really, really important.

45:24

And I've gotten a lot of good ideas on this call. I mean, like frankly, you know, why is mental health not - it should be part of the onboarding of new employees. It should be part of the exit interviews when we ask people who've chosen to take other positions, why they've taken them, did they feel adequately supported here? So I'm coming away with a lot of this. I'd love to see more of this documented because, you know, under the aegis of this group or API or somebody because I think, you know, that sounds like the Canadians are further ahead of us, unsurprisingly, and that, you know, I'd love for there to be some documentation that American newsroom leaders can really, you know, follow as best practice.

46:02

Seglins: Maybe I just I have a big mouth, but so I it sounds like we're way ahead. We have some research that's helpful. I've been had incredible support from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to advance some of his work.

46:15

But you asked about the challenges: Time, staff, resources. We are incredibly good in his business to prioritize the story and the content and the product. We know how to chase the story and get it turned around. What we're not great at is managing the people and making it okay for people to be imperfect and to be affected by the work. So when it comes to trying to implement protocols, we have a long culture where we don't ask people how are you? It's just assumed that you are ready to go. That has shifted significantly and I can think and so you raised it in the wake of Black Lives Matter, newsrooms, suddenly were tuned in a very different way to the incredibly racially-charged nature of the story. And so what now more thinking with trauma awareness, ask racialized employees, 'How do you feel about covering this?' Because you may be in perfect shape to cover it and be motivated by the story and

bring your lived experience to want to cover the story or your lived experience may say, 'You know what? This is this is not healthy for me.'

47:26

So, the biggest challenge is our ability in newsrooms to actually ask each other, 'How are you?' and be prepared to make other decisions and assignment to say, maybe this isn't the best one for you. Or you know, and making it okay for people to say that. That to me is where it really hits the road because I've held lots of trading sessions within CBC and outside CBC, and people on the front lines will say, expressing your weakness and vulnerability is a career killer, because it means that I will not be put on the next assignment. And that is the crux. That is that is the challenge. That is one of the biggest obstacles that I think is getting to a safe place where it's okay that we talked about this we understand it, and we have a means of dealing with it when someone's not up for that particular assignment.

48:24

Blanchard: To me, I think one of the biggest challenges is everyone's time and staff has stretched so thin and you're asking to put a lot of resources into something that somebody else could come and say, 'Well, you know, we don't need that now, because it's not happening here. We're not really hearing anything in our newsroom that makes us think we need you know, to attend to this kind of thing and, you know, it's probably we're probably not going to have a major, you know, traumatic incident here, whatever.'

48:55

It's easy to say that stuff. And it's, it's super easy to, you know, like if your city is hosting the Superbowl, you know, it's coming, so you're going to spend all this time and effort to prepare for right, but we're asking for something to resources to go into something that you can reasonably say might not happen, but it's about the journalism, the quality of the journalism about treating survivors appropriately. About, you know, receiving someone's story and being able to tell that with more depth and context and understanding and science and all of that. It's about serving your community, you know, any organization that is taking strides to deal with this in their newsroom can be a community leader in that respect, and it's about staff strength, resilience, and you know, the ability to do this very difficult job better and then as Elana said, also bounce back from it. If something does happen, and something is going to happen, like Sewell said, so I would start there.

50:01

And then freelancers is really tough. York Daily Records and the smaller newsrooms do deal with freelancers, but not at the level that you know, national or international newsrooms deal with them. So I'm not familiar with that. And I know that organizations and newsrooms have or can have protocols about whether freelancers get brought into training with staff, you know, with full time staff and everything.

50:29

All I can say is that when we did our training at York Daily Record, we extended it as much as possible to the freelancers that we worked with. And in fact, we had a situation where on a Saturday, a freelance photographer was covering a fire and saw a firefighter collapse and die, and later found out that it was

a firefighter that he had a relationship with. And he called into the newsroom, and I happened to be on that day and we had a 45 minute conversation about it. So if it's possible, I mean, I would just bring freelancers into it or find ways or figure out creative ways to bring them into it because we hear a lot about that these days that freelancers have no support system, they're just out there. And it's a really overlooked part of our business.

51:18

Newman: As I listen to you talk - I have an interest in freelancers' issue. I also think I have an economic question, which is what is the cost of not doing this and whether that can be used and leveraged to change systems even in small systems when you're talking dollars?

51:34

Chan: I completely agree. I mean, in general, I think there's a human capital crisis in much of journalism. And this goes beyond, of course, just the mental health dimension. Economic pressures, etc. The pressures of social media, the 24/7 nonstop second by second news cycle. But to the extent that we lose journalists to burnout, like the amount of time that we spend on recruiting and bringing up to speed and onboarding, and training new journalists, like if we're losing like, if we're losing, I love hiring wonderful young people, wonderful people into the Texas Tribune, but like if we're losing people, because we have not supported them, really shame on us, because that's not only a sign of institutional failure, but also as you say, it's just not even efficient.

52:23

It's a much better to help your existing people to succeed than see a portion of them you know, not you know, leave out of frustration or burnout or whatever. And so I really hope that's being heard more frankly, by the people on the on the on the finance side of things, because you're exactly right, there's this opportunity cost, right, it doesn't seem like a cost unless you think about all the other things that you now have to do to make up for that lost, you know, work or that lost talent or that or those lost opportunities. And that's really a tragedy.

52:54

Seglins: If I can just jump in there two things. We have an industry group here in Canada. It's a bunch of leaders from different [...], some union representation but major newsroom managers and we get together and talk about some well-being issues, retention of new journalists, you know, the kind of new blood and the and the new faces and the diversity of lived experience that we're trying to bring in, we're having trouble or we're having trouble retaining because people are looking at the demands of the job, and the lack of prioritization of balance, you know, work-life, mental health, and burning out and leaving, especially in light of a lot of the online harassment that is coming along with being a journalist these days.

53:39

And I'd say one other thing. There's an [interesting article](#) floating around by one of our columnist here in Canada today, but a longtime public health reporter, Andre Picard, reflecting on the return on investment. Investing money in mental health, actually saves you money is the thesis. In health claims, short and long-term disability, having to rehire people. So there are actually economic incentives

beyond the moral and kind of labor obligations of all of this. So, I hope. I also say, well, Bruce Shapiro said early on to me something and each of you have sort of quoted versions of this. How do we fix this? It's such a big problem, and he likes to use this this story over this, this metaphor, he says, 'You know, small, attainable victories.' Right? Choose small little things and over time, they build up and they become the scaffolding that hold us up. And I really appreciate that because we can sit here and be overwhelmed by this topic. Don't be. Take some small little things and overtime, I really believe those small things add up to the culture shift that we're all advocating for.

55:00

Newman: So to add to that culture shift, I want to just list six more things that I'm not sure we touched on: Making sure that your organizations have mental health coverage, if you're living in systems where you provide mental health coverage and checking that your mental health coverage folks know something about trauma, burnout. Many EPAs, many mental health providers don't. So improving coverage. So I think that's important. Giving support to middle managers. Middle managers are often the people who get stuck. And I just want to say thinking about what training your middle managers need. One thing we haven't talked about and I think is really important, we're starting to see that ethical regrets about coverage are linked to, long-term, people leaving the field and mental health issues. Having conversations about ethical journalism and tough choices in a trauma-informed newsroom. I think those are that I'll stop there for some things we haven't talked about.

55:12

Miller: Great. We are almost at noon so we can go a few minutes over. And I think the last question, one theme that I saw on the questions I wanted to ask you guys was about young journalists and student journalists. Do you guys have any thoughts on what kind of conversations can happen in J school and very young reporters who might feel shame about discussing their mental health or how to prepare themselves to know what their career is going to be like.

56:24

Seglins: I'll jump in. Our survey in Canada found very few journalism programs have embedded curriculum little bits here and there but knows no trauma awareness, dedicated courses with the exception of one my research colleague at Carleton University in Ottawa has just started this term, a entirely dedicated [trauma-informed journalism course](#). So that's great. It's evolving. But for younger journalists, I would say expect more of news organizations because traditionally they haven't looked out for it and feel okay about that, because the change is going to come from you. And I also want to say that this is a lot of doom and gloom, right? We're talking about really difficult stuff, which sounds really discouraging. And I always have to check myself to say except that this is still a brilliant industry. It's so fulfilling. It's so exciting to have this sort of privileged place to go into people's lives and tell stories and hold power to account. So don't lose hope on that. It's just that we can do better and we're all working to make it better.

57:37

Miller: So to wrap this up, I wanted to go around and ask each of you, as you talked about, you know, start small. I wonder if you have any one tip or one piece of advice you have for

newsrooms, especially small newsrooms where you know working less or picking up fewer stories is not an option because you got five people and you got to cover the news in your town. If you have one tip or one piece of advice for them how to start creating this culture of well-being to look after the reporters, what would it be if you want to leave our audience with some tips? What would you recommend?

58:18

Chan: Well, I'll start with one, you got to prioritize your people as much as you prioritize the coverage. You know, Naseem, what you just said is a scenario we've all faced right? Oh my gosh, we have to do these five stories. Well, maybe sometimes we can only do four. And we'll have to find something else to run or find another way. We do need to be results oriented as organizations but we also need to be people centered. And if we're ultimately saying that the coverage is more important than the people doing it, that set of that prioritization will ultimately flow from the top I think, and this is something I've had to learn the hard way. I mean, I'm pretty driven and you know what, lots of stories but I really like him to really see that we will not remember, you know, the vast majority of the stories. We will remember if we have lost a colleague or injured or colleague, or failed a colleague, and that is what we will remember and so let's try not to do that please.

59:23

Blanchard: Just one of the things I've been thinking during this talk is that and I think I'm seeing some of the some of the sentiment in the chat too, that they're probably people out there who are like, all great stuff, but it's nothing like this will ever happen where I am, or you know, I have roadblocks or I am I can't get this done. I would say yes, you can. You know find a colleague in your newsroom or in other newsrooms, that shares your beliefs and your commitment and in trauma awareness and peer support. Build your case, you know, and then build it from the ground up. If you're a reporter, I think you can do that. If you're a middle manager, I know you can do that. And, you know, begin to build your allyship essentially for getting this kind of stuff done and ground it in the kinds of things that we've been talking about here. And I think, you know, we can change a newsroom by newsroom, person by person. We can change. We can make the change happen that we're talking about here.

1:00:30

Newman: And if you can't start with if you think your organization is resistant to organizational change, start with coverage, because inevitably, when we start just like this conversation, we've gone back and forth between discussing craft issues and self-care issues, and organizational issues. So pick one of those that you think makes the most sense and start small, whether it's one meeting, one training, but they all are tied together. And it's just a matter of where you start.

1:00:58

Blanchard: And one leads to another you know, you have one talk about a story and then that opens the door to you having another talk about you know, peer support or well-being and that opens the door for you to have a you know and it starts to build on itself and to create your own moment.

1:01:16

Seglins: Yeah, I mean, I'm the on-the-floor advocate. Right? One of the things that I did get to do early on is we held a town hall and we got together and we had exactly the same question: What can we do to build a culture of well-being around here? Right? And people came in and they shared their ideas. And we recorded the ideas and we also send out a tiny short survey to our colleagues and we said, 'What's working around here, what's not working, what would you like to see changed? And we published the results internally, and it began a discussion. And that's what we're trying to do, right? We're trying to enhance, create space for this discussion, and figure out where your organization, your people, are at. What are the big concerns? And then you can tackle it, whether it's the self-care whether it's the reporting on trauma, whether it's the organizational change piece that we're talking about. So there's a simple solution. If you're if you're a reporter in the newsroom, own it. Just do it. Say hey, let's get together. Let's have an event. We all know how to run a zoom call now. Doesn't take much.

1:02:25

Well thank you all for your wonderful advice, tips and information, your expertise. And thank you for all if you who attended the session today, and I hope you all found it helpful and inspiring. You will receive a link to the video in the coming days and we will also post it on our website, journalistsresource.org. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. You'll find our contact information on our website and thank you all again and please take good care.