

Welcome back to Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday. My name is Cara Siletto and I am the President and Chief Retention Officer at Magnet Culture. We are an organization exclusively focused on reducing unnecessary employee turnover for organizations across the country. Now, while we've been through tremendous ups and downs these past two years, it is clear that we're not out of the woods friends. This is likely to be our reality for some time moving forward as far as the staffing crisis goes. Now with that said, I think it's time that we make it a top priority to take care of ourselves and our people as we go into 2022. That means today's focus is going to be about building our resilience and avoiding burnout in order to keep our teams intact as long as we can. We have to keep each person longer in order to get the staffing stability we need to provide great quality care and to remain a sustainable successful organization moving forward. So today I'd like to share with you some thoughts, some strategies, and even some interactive activities where you're going to get a chance to think about your own situation and your own past and future. And I'm going to take some strategies from our resilience classes that we teach so that we can share that with you. And I encourage you to, if you can take notes, not if you're driving, but jot down some of these activities and questions and thoughts so that you can cascade those down and share them with your team members as well. Because not only do we have to take care of ourselves, we're going to have to take care of our team members as we sit in those leadership positions. You know what they say on an airplane, you have to put your own mask on first, before you can help others.

So I want you to really take this time to focus on yourself, your own self care, your own priorities, but then before we close up, we will shift that conversation over to, how do we take these thoughts and strategies to our team? All right. So let's get started by thinking back, think back about when in your life you have been most resilient. Now for some of you, it might be here in this last two years, but for many people that I talk to when they really dig deep as to when in their life, they've had to be the absolute most resilient. When was the toughest situation in their entire life? A lot of folks are going to go back to a life event that happened, whether that was a loss of a loved one or medical diagnosis that was unexpected. Maybe it was a divorce or other things that have happened, other tragedies.

And even if you have not dealt with trauma and tragedies in the past, there have probably been some times when things got tough. Let's not compare here whose trauma was more traumatic than another person's. But for you, think about the tough times you've been through in the past And how did you get through that time? Okay. How did you manage at that time? When I have an opportunity to do this exercise with folks in a room, I often hear them discover their real coping mechanisms. And it's different for everyone. They're not the same answers. I actually just did this activity a couple of days ago with a group, and they brought up things like family. Obviously that they would get up every day because they knew they needed to take care of their family, or they had support from their family. Many folks will mention their faith, and that that really drives them and supports them through the difficult times.

Some people have to take a short-term focus of one day at a time getting through a difficult time and not worrying about the future. Just getting through the day. I had one gentleman recently that said he gets through hard times because he knows he's a role model to his children, and he doesn't want to show them that he would quit in a difficult time. So maybe it's more about your goals that you have set for yourself or want to show that to your family. Sometimes other people will absolutely use comforting

mechanisms to cope like food or even alcohol or other substances, right? Those kinds of things that sometimes we will go to those other external things for that comfort. Many times, people will use connections with others, maybe even humor or some kind of distraction, a hobby that they have or binge watching a TV show and things like that.

So there's a lot of different coping mechanisms out there. And what I just mentioned is merely scratching the surface. But I'd really like for you to take a moment and think about what are your coping mechanisms that you have used in the past, through difficult times to get you to the other side. And I like to start here because you've done it. You already have so many coping mechanisms within yourself that you have deployed in previous days. And so I want you to remember that those are still there. They've worked for you in the past, and that there are even more coping mechanisms and self-care techniques that are likely to help you get through the next six months or the next 12 months. If you're like me, I have found that some of my previous coping mechanisms that were short term, aren't working right now in this longer term coping situation.

And so I've really had to rethink what will work for me. And I've even had to try some things that I've never tried before. Other coping mechanisms that work for other people. And so today I'm going to share with you several different things about our mindset and even physical and mental stamina that you might be able to employ and use moving forward. All right. So as we look at this list of some things that we can do, today I'm going to talk about ways to maintain your perspective when times get tough, how to make sure we re-engage and connect with others during that time. A big one that's a difficult one for a lot of folks is asking for help. And then finally, I have several ideas around effectively managing the stress that you're under on any given day. Now we do know that stress is not only hard on us mentally and emotionally, and we might be losing sleep because of it.

But science tells us that stress can also lead to physical deterioration. It will absolutely weigh in on your body and on your future health in all ways, in all capacities, if we don't maintain a healthy level or be able to use coping mechanisms to get through some of this time. All right. So I'm going to start with maintaining perspective. One thing to think about is focus on what is truly happening in the moment. In the one-time I had a panic attack before I got on an airplane to go overseas. Now, I fly a lot, but I had not, at this point, been on an overseas flight that was going to be a lot longer and over water. And I was just really afraid. You know, what happens if, what happens if something happens when we're in the air? You know, even just, I get sick, I don't feel good on the airplane or something, right? And I actually went to a therapist and she taught me to focus on when I'm freaking out, focus on what's really happening right now, the current situation. And she said, tell yourself in your brain, internally or out loud, say, "the person next to me isn't freaking out, the person next to them is reading a book right now, the person walking down the aisle is just checking their bag. The flight attendants are doing normal protocol," so there's not an emergency happening around us, right?. So sometimes to maintain perspective, we have to just come directly into the exact moment and stop worrying about the future. I know it's easier said than done, but sometimes we have to just repeat in our mind or out loud, what's happening in the moment. Don't worry about tomorrow or an hour from later, or what someone else might be thinking or doing, but just tell yourself what is the true and current situation that I'm in right now.

And that can often bring our heart rate down. You can breathe better and that can bring your stress level down. Now, a lot of times in our situations, we get in a situation where we see the negative, right? We go directly to the negative and think how terrible this is. And, "oh, I'm never going to get through this," and whatnot. But I encourage you if you are not already good at this, if it doesn't come naturally for you to work on reframing. Reframing your mindset from a negative, initial reaction to a much more positive reaction. And I'll give you an example of that. My mom is an uber optimist. She always has been. And when we would get stuck in traffic, behind an accident on the highway, for example, she would say to us kids, "well, at least we're not the reason that the traffic exists. We are not in that accident. We are just sitting in traffic behind it." So she would always find the silver lining behind it. And she might even add in, "well, now we have a few more minutes to chat," and find something positive from that. So I encourage you to, if your mind is typically going to the negative situation and the negative response of a situation, work on reframing it. Is there any kind of silver lining that you can find? Is there anything good that can come from that situation that you maybe didn't think of at first, but it could be better in the end. All right. Now, speaking of the positive, another way to really rewire your brain, if you tend to go to the negative on a regular basis, is by showing more gratitude. Focusing more on the things you do have and the things that you are really grateful for.

Okay. So it has been shown that if you really feel gratitude, now I'm not saying, think about gratitude, like the old Thanksgiving activity of what are you thankful for? What are you thankful for? I'm thankful for my family. I'm thankful for my job. I'm thankful for my house or those kinds of things. That's like just making a list and blurting it out. And that's not feeling gratitude. That's just saying what you're grateful for. But science shows that if you actually spend three minutes a day, only three minutes, three minutes a day, feeling the gratitude that you have for your family, for things around you, for your job, the residents, the mission you serve, whatever it is that you're truly grateful for. If you spend three minutes a day, really feeling that gratitude, it will absolutely retrain your brain to go there much faster and much easier moving forward.

You know, there are some people who, they're always grateful, "aww look at that sunshine, and I'm in such a great mood because it's a hard day, but I'm still thankful to be alive." And you know, all of that. And that's how their brain is wired, but it really is something that you can train your brain to get closer to. All right. Maybe not enjoying rainbows and sunshine every day, but at least not going to the negative. All right. So that's a really great strategy and you might want to practice that as well with your team during a huddle and have everybody just silently, quietly, truly dive deep and dig really deep down to feel the gratitude that they have for three minutes. It's pretty powerful. It's amazing. The second thing here is to make sure and have strong connections with other people. The last thing we want to do right now is to isolate ourselves and to retreat from doing things with others. Retreat from talking with friends, because we're really stressed or even go into a state of depression.

And I encourage you. If you feel yourself going into that isolated space or that depressed mindset, I encourage you to reach out to your connections. Again, it is proven that if we stay connected to others and we spend that quality time with family and friends, it can pull us out of the mindset of isolation and or depression. So there's a very strong power in the connection with other people. And we may have to engage that even more than we might like. Right? Of course, we want to go sit on our couch and we

want to say, “nah, I just don't feel like going out to dinner tonight.” Or, “I don't feel like golfing or whatnot.” I'll tell you, I have family members that sometimes when they go into a lull, I will really try to encourage them and even push them to go out and see their best friend or call somebody.

Because I have seen firsthand that it will snap that person right out of that isolated and negative space they were in just by having that phone call or going golfing or touching base with somebody that maybe they haven't talked to in awhile. All right. It's really really powerful. Now, as far as relationships and connections as well, we want to, at this moment avoid comparisons. We know that people paint a pretty false picture, let's be honest on Facebook and other social media about who they are and how great their life is. And I don't know about you, but all my friends seem to have a perfect marriage, and perfect little puppy, and a perfect child, and perfect job and all this stuff, because what do people put on social? All the perfect things, or at least the facade of these great things that they have.

I travel for a living. I'm on an airplane all the time and I'll tell you so many people have said to me, “oh, it must be nice. You get to travel and see all these really great places.” And then I let them in on the, behind the scenes secret here, you know what I get to see? I get to see airports. I get to see hotels, and I get to see conference centers, and that's about it. I never stay an extra day, like some people, because I have a seven year old at home and I'd like to get back to him as quickly as I can. So I don't even get the joys of seeing these beautiful cities and locations that I get to visit and speak at. I just want to remind you that not everything we see out there should be compared with our lives because of course, people aren't putting down their child with the bed last night and their other child had a meltdown, about, “I don't want to wear pants,” or, whatever those things are, or that their boss just yelled at them and times are tough at work and things like that.

So we don't see as much of that online. And I want you to know that everybody is dealing with their own stuff. Okay. So definitely make sure to avoid any kind of comparison. And like I mentioned earlier, your trauma and your level of stress shouldn't be compared to other people. One person may be able to handle more stress than another person or just in life we're dealing with different things. So it is also okay. And I want to make sure, you know, you have permission to feel what you feel, okay. Even if you feel like, “well, but somebody else is dealing with a sick husband on top of all the stuff happening at work, so I shouldn't feel bad because she's in a worst position and that makes me feel bad that I feel stressed,” and that kind of mentality, all right.

It's okay to feel what you feel. And we don't have to compare ourselves to others at this point. All right. Another thing that we often struggle with when we're in stressful situations is asking for help, okay. Asking for help is one of the most difficult things. In the workshop I just did, I asked the group, “why is it so hard to ask for help?” Because honestly, this is one that comes easily for me. I'm a natural born delegator, okay. In my professional life and my personal life, I think the opposite of a control freak, because I want to get everything off my plate. And I ask for help all the time. And so I haven't dive into this issue because a lot of people are not like me and they really don't want to ask others for help. So they explained to me that it's lots of things like feeling weak.

"I'm going to come across as weak to others. I don't want to admit failure, that I can't do it myself." I don't want to burden anyone else with having to help me. But what was the most interesting thing, now, this group, it was a group of leaders that often work together with one another. And as they mentioned why they don't want to ask for help, everyone else around them said, "please ask me for help. I'm not going to think you're weak. I would never think you're a failure for asking for help. I would never feel burdened because you needed an extra pair of hands, or you needed a shoulder to cry on or anything like that." So it was incredibly beautiful to see the leaders around the room, just rally together and support one another and assure the other people who were afraid to ask for help and to really encourage them to do so. To really step out of their comfort zone and ask for that help.

Because a lot of other people want to help. They want to be helpers and to support you through that time, okay. So if that's an area that's difficult for you, I encourage you to talk to some other people about what that might look like. I do find that if we just say as a helper myself, for example, if I just say, "how can I help?" Other people are going to say, "I'm good, I'm fine." But if I'm more specific in asking for help, "hey, I know your husband just had surgery. Do you want us to mow your grass?" You know, or "hey, I know something just happened. Work is tough or somebody had a baby or whatnot." So, what night can I bring your family some dinner? And would you rather, I don't cook. So would you rather have Chick-fil-A or something else?

Right. So I asked you what restaurant do you want it from? That type of thing. So definitely if you're on the side of offering help for people, try to be a little bit more specific in that. If somebody is just saying, "nope, I'm good, I'm good. I don't need any help." And if you're the one saying, "nope, I'm good, I'm good. I don't need any help." Then I encourage you to open up a little bit and see if there's just one thing that you can ask for some help or to delegate out and get off your plate so that you can be a better leader for your team that next day. All right. So next on the list is effectively managing our stress. And I've got a little smorgasbord here of several pretty simple things. You know, none of this is rocket science, but a lot of it is the fundamentals that we just forget.

And especially when we get busy, we just go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go. And we sometimes let go of some things that we know we should be doing. There's just not time or we're not making that a priority. All right. So one thing, first of all, is to reevaluate. Is there any way to simplify your life? Is there anything you can do, some change in your schedule? I know a lot of parents want their children and all kinds of activities to get ahead in life. And so they're going from practice to rehearsal to this, to that. And so maybe it's time to put a cap on those, or take one semester off, you know? And not have your children in all kinds of things or whether it's a hobby. You have, if it's a self care hobby, that's great, then do a little more of that.

But if it's something else that you're obligated to do, or if you sit on any boards or, or other committees or things like that, that you can just ask for a pause, ask to step back from that. And I encourage you, if you know that you need to do this, you know that you're overburdened and you've said "yes," to too

many things, then sit down and write down where your time and energy is going. Do a little audit of your time and energy and think about where you can cut back on some of those things that are taking your time and your energy. All right. That's a really helpful activity to do. And then try to identify some boundaries. This is something that people talk about all the time with time management and work-life balance and things like that. For me, for example, I have explicitly asked my family, please don't call me during the business day, unless you just need something or have a quick question.

And even with that, it's probably better to text me and I'll get back to you when it's convenient, but please try not to call me during the business day because I'm really busy and I try to stay focused at work. All right. And so my family knows if they call me at two o'clock, I'm going to answer the phone and say, "hey, what's up? What do you need?" Because they better have a question. It better not just be, "well I'm driving and just wanted to chit-chat because I'm very compartmentalized." Okay. I really try to do as much at work as I can at work and stay very focused during that time so that I can then hopefully, when possible disconnect from work and focus on my home life, right? I'm a mom, I'm a wife, I'm a sister, I'm a daughter, I'm a friend, a volunteer, all these other things that I have to do those nights and weekends.

And so for me, compartmentalizing really helps to reduce the stress of trying to be all things to all people at all hours of the day. Okay. So making sure that we set some boundaries, and if you are a leader that's getting contacted by your workforce at night, evenings, and weekends off your shift and whatnot. Sometimes I find that we have not put the right supervisor structure in place and that the staff feel like I've got no one else to go to. So I have to call the department director, I have to call the administrator, for example. All right. And so we really need to make sure that if work is calling us too much outside of those regular hours, that we have some stronger supervisors in place and that we're empowering them and delegating to them to make better decisions or make more decisions, on their own, that we're empowering that in the workplace.

All right. Also, as far as boundaries go, it is okay to cut out toxic people from your life. All right. That's a big one right now that if we have this marathon to run still, we've got, who knows? Six months, 12 months of this workforce crisis that we are dealing with right now, we have got to manage our energy and our time. And if any toxic people are sucking the life out of us, it may be time to make that very difficult decision and say, "I cannot have this relationship in my life right now." Okay. It's a really critical one to think about. So then let's talk about maintaining our physical health and stamina so we can get through this next six to 12 to 18 months, who knows, right? Moving forward I've got some basics for you, my friends. And I'll tell you, this is the area that I struggle with the most, and that I know I need to do better.

And I'm making some conscious decisions right now to do better in this space. And that is eating in a more healthy manner. I'm a snacker and I will absolutely go to some foods for comfort. I will absolutely, eat late at night or pick a worst meal over a better healthy meal. Especially when I don't feel good or don't feel positive, or I do feel stressed and overwhelmed and whatnot. So just a reminder that it may be time for you to really kick it into high gear at saying "no" to snacks. saying "no" to second helpings,

saying “no” to the foods that don't make your body feel good, that are going to bring you down and make you tired and things like that. You may also want to consider any kind of vitamins or supplements, you know, talk with your doctor

if you have a lot of fatigue and, and are losing energy by the end of the day. Drink lots and lots of water. We know that this is proven to help us maintain the energy level that we need to keep going. So figure out some ways to drink water. I'm a big fan of those waiter, the waiter? The water flavors. I was trying to say both of those words together. Water flavor-ors, if that's even a word, where you just squirt a little bit of the flavor into your water bottle. And I love those because I'm not a big fan of the way regular water tastes, so I had to find a workaround with that. So you may have to do that. And they've got really cool water bottles now that will blink at you if you haven't drank within 30 minutes or an hour. And then there's other water bottles that show how much you should be drinking each hour.

So that's kind of cool. If you need a tool to help you drink more water, you may want to ask for one of those for the upcoming holidays. Definitely getting back to exercising. If you used to do it and cut that out, or maybe starting with exercise. And I'm not a big exercise workout kind of person, but I have learned that all movement counts. And so I have even told myself when I'm just tired and I'm sitting on the couch, okay, well at least take this phone call and just pace around the backyard or go for a walk while I'm on the phone with somebody, or take the dog for a little bit longer walk than normal and things like that. So make sure that you're getting some more steps and getting some more movement and activity into your life. And then also enjoying nature is great.

I know during the pandemic, when things were really shut down, my family and I went out and found every park in our area, and it really made a difference on my mindset, my energy level to get out into the woods, into fresh air. And when I wasn't working, just making sure to be outside more has been very very helpful for me and my family. Another piece of maintaining our physical health and stamina is protecting our sleep. All right. So I highly recommend that you do whatever is in your power to get more sleep right now, because we know that that helps us have a better day the next day. Anything that you can do, whether that is leaving the laundry on the couch and saying, “forget it, I'll do it tomorrow,” or maybe not, and just go to bed, right? Don't worry about as much of the housekeeping and the standards that you may have had for housekeeping at your own house, right in the past.

And then the different things, like if you're a binge watcher with TV, set a number of episodes or a time, and absolutely stop the show and go to bed. No matter how good it's getting, because I've been there, right? I love to binge watch, but shut it down and go to bed. Or for my book readers do the same thing, decide on a page number or a time on the clock and then shut it down, and close that book and go to bed. All right. I highly recommend mindfulness activities as well. And this is one that I didn't do in the past, but now I'm starting to explore more about meditation and yoga and things like that. And the great thing is now there's an app for that. In fact, there are a bunch of YouTube videos for that as well. So you don't have to pay for any classes or memberships but just look up different apps that will help you sleep, whether it's for meditation or maybe it's just a white noise kind of machine, things like that.

There are so many tools out there that can help you sleep better as well. And even not just regarding sleep, but during a stressful time on your breaks, or right before you go to work, right after you're finished with a shift, think about incorporating 5, 10, 15 minutes of some mindfulness activities into your day. All right. Now there are dozens more strategies. I've got a whole list here that I just don't even have time to cover everything, but I hope that this has given you quite a list of some things to think about some information to share, some activities to do with your team and some questions to ask yourself about how you are coping and handling the situation. Now, as I mentioned at the beginning, it is so important for us right now to ensure that our team members are also coping. So think about ways, whether it's the things that we just talked about or other ways to support your team that is really stressed out, that may feel isolated, or be suffering from depression and other things like anxiety and all different things that have come up this year.

Physical health, mental health struggles, lots of things that we and our team members are dealing with. And we need to put it out in the forefront that we support our people, okay. That we are there for them. So I encourage you to do genuine check-ins, and really check in with the people who've been there a long time that may be hitting another wall of burnout, as well as the newer hires who may not be used to the pace that we operate at, right. They may not be used to this if they came from a different field or different company. And so we have to give them some tools and strategies for managing more stress than they had to manage in the past in order to keep them longer. All right. So remember that it's all about going back to the fundamentals, my friend. Back to the fundamentals, take care of yourself, take care of others and hang in there.

I hope that you got some great things from today, and I want to thank you for letting me go off of my typical retention strategy conversations to really make today personal and to really have a more in-depth conversation about how we as leaders are managing this difficult situation that we are getting through. So next month we will wrap up the year with some more retention strategies. And as always, if you need those sooner and want to learn more in the meantime, you can always grab a copy of my book, "Staying Power, Why Your Employees Leave and How to Keep Them Longer." It's on Amazon, Kindle, or Audible if you prefer listening. I'm Cara Siletto. And I want to truly thank you for listening to this week's Bridge the Gap Contributor Wednesday. Don't forget to connect with me online@btgvoice.com. If you haven't already. Have a great great day.