

## Take-Away Scenarios

*We have put together a brief collection of scenarios that can be taken back to your department as tabletop exercises. Each scenario is based on actual experiences each of us have had within our professional settings.*

*We have divided up each scenario into two pages. It may be helpful to hand out the scenario first and then follow with a discussion of how staff would handle these situations. On the second page of each scenario, we discuss from our own perspectives how we would approach the scenario.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Scenario #1: The Dean Stands Alone.....</b>	<b>2-3</b>
<b>Scenario #2: They are Going to Slash my Tires.....</b>	<b>4-5</b>
<b>Scenario #3: Maybe This Isn't for Me.....</b>	<b>6-7</b>
<b>Scenario #4: I Need to Get a Boat and Get Out of Here.....</b>	<b>8-9</b>
<b>Scenario #5: The Cup Overfloweth.....</b>	<b>10-11</b>
<b>Scenario #6: I Thought We Had a Deal.....</b>	<b>12-13</b>

## **Scenario #1: *The Dean Stands Alone***

*You have recently been appointed Dean of students after serving for several years as the director of housing at your school. You have risen through the ranks of housing staff and all of your hard work has finally paid off. You are now supervising a group of directors in athletics, housing, counseling & health services, campus police and student activities. You have always enjoyed a close relationship with staff, but have recently found yourself left out of conversations, feeling isolated and having trouble balancing your new role as “boss” with your previous experience as “one of the team.” You realize your new position requires a different degree of responsibility and separation from your staff, but struggle with the feelings of isolation and being separated from the others. You find yourself becoming bitter, frustrated and angry at yourself and your staff.*

## **Scenario #1: *The Dean Stands Alone***

### **What not to do:**

Ignore the growing divide between you and your staff.

Do nothing and just “suck it up” realizing this is the price you have to pay to be the boss.

Complain to your boss about the shift in friendships

### **Van Brunt**

The key here is to be aware of the growing divide between you and your staff. You can't address a problem without having a basic understanding of how the problem is impacting you. Realize the feelings you are having are natural – everyone likes to be connected to their co-workers and to feel like they are part of the team. The key in this situation is to realize that you are going through a period of change. While your relationships may not ever return to what they were, you must learn to appreciate the new nature of your position. It may also be advisable to seek new professional connections in your current position (Deans, VPs) through local connections and regional organizations

### **Raleigh**

The adjustment is just as great for the staff as it is for you. They maybe experiencing a sense of loss or fear that you know more about them then they feel comfortable having a ‘boss’ know. Reassure them that the friendship may change but it will not end. Explore the boundaries of supervisor and friend, be specific like ‘remember when we would go out drinking together and trash the boss, well...’ I agree with Brian that seeking out and finding new professionals to connect with, possibly even a mentor at a different institution who has been through a similar transition.

### **Reynelli**

Also remember that this is a change for your staff on a basic level – you are no longer part of the “alliance,” so to speak. Point it out, talk about it, put a name to it and accept it. Give you and your staff the space to adjust to this new organizational structure. Be clear and reasonable with your expectations, keeping in mind that expectations of people's behaviors often times are “premeditated resentments.” Set reasonable goals/expectations for your staff, but come up with these together.

Keep yourself in check, take responsibility for your feelings and try to not point the finger (or give the finger) to your staff. What's happening in terms of your feelings and their feelings is natural. Share your feelings – using I statements – and encourage and give safe space for your staff to do the same.

This may be a great time to do a staff retreat, particularly an overnight.

## **Scenario #2: *They are Going to Slash my Tires***

*You are the judicial affairs director at a large state university. You have been in your job for a number of years and know the “ins and outs” very well. This last semester has really tried every bit of your coping ability. The semester has had close to a dozen sexual assault cases (several going to a full judicial board), you have been put in charge of running the new threat assessment team and there have been several cases of violent behavior on campus that have involved student groups fighting with one another (the last incident involving gun shots and the campus response alarm system being activated and the whole campus put on lockdown from 6pm-2am). You find yourself snapping at your boss and worrying that the students will seek revenge on you for bad decisions they feel you made. You have received an anonymous threat reading “You suck and will be gone on Feb 15<sup>th</sup>.” It is January and you aren’t sure what the date means. You are having trouble sleeping, feel anxious all the time and dread coming into work.*

## **Scenario #2: *They are Going to Slash my Tires***

### **What not to do:**

Ignore the problem and just hope everything will work itself out over winter break.

Continue to snap at students and your boss.

Quit your job and move to the Florida Keys, listen to Jimmy Buffet, drink Margaritas.

### **Van Brunt**

While moving to the Keys might be a nice break from work, it probably will not fit with your overall career plan. The stress you are experiencing is normal considering the extreme nature of what has been going on at the college this semester. The very idea that you have managed your stress levels and enjoyed your job prior to this semester indicates that the problem is more environmental – perhaps related to the high number of sexual assaults and violence cases (particularly following the NIU and V-tech shootings). It is important to seek a place to bounce your feelings and ideas off of that is private, confidential and won't come back to get involved in the cases you are supervising. It is likely that your boss isn't very available with the busyness of the semester. It may be advisable to explore your schools EAP program and try talking to a private and confidential source. It may also be worth developing a professional connection through a group like the ASJA or other professional student affairs organizations.

### **Raleigh**

At the risk of stating the obvious, report the threat to the appropriate authorities at the college. Remember to take reasonable safety precautions. Although this is most likely an idle threat, there is no reason to ignore the risk you are feeling. You may also need some time away from the job. Dealing with pain and trauma on an ongoing basis takes its toll on us emotionally. Even without a written threat the amount of 'low level' but prolonged stress can be wearing. You will need to take a break. If you can't take a vacation day, try finding quiet and restorative experiences in the work environment. Go for a walk during lunch, get out of the office and into a natural space without your cell phone. Eat lunch at a local park away from campus etc. Create a sleep routine and find ways to get good quality sleep. Without periods of restoration (including sleep), we are not physically or emotionally able to handle stress.

### **Reynelli**

This is definitely the time to reach out and keep things simple! Take care of first things first... YOU! Treat yourself with all of the kindness, care, gentleness and love that you would a child who is very scared. Take care of yourself on the three basic levels – mind, body and spirit (emotional, physical and spiritual). Emotional = EAP, private therapist, support groups, professional organizations or think tanks. The professional organizations or think tanks will help you to remember that you are not alone or unique, that people have experienced these types of things before, and have survived/recovered.

Physical = exercise, take a hot shower, get a massage, listen to music or whatever else it is that brings you pleasure. Avoid drugs and alcohol at all costs!! Also be aware of the less taboo addictive responses such as food, sex, shopping, people/relationships, etc. Remember, your body's natural response is to protect you and it sometimes does so through courses of distraction which may not be healthy.

Spiritual = meditate, volunteer, get outside yourself and your immediate problem, journal, read self-help books, visit an animal shelter for puppy/kitty therapy, etc

### **Scenario #3: *Maybe This Isn't for Me...***

*Irene is a 28 year old Latina women raised by her father with a younger brother. The younger brother is 19 and attending college. Her mother left the family shortly after her brother's birth and currently has no contact with the family. The father is a civilian engineer at the Naval Air Station.*

*Irene graduated from her master's degree program in counseling and after a brief internship at college counseling decided that she would like to work with this population. She has been working at a college counseling center for 14 months; she just completed her first year as a full time therapist. At first she felt very confident about her abilities and enjoyed her work very much. More recently she has been dealing with some difficult cases. Irene carries a weekly case load of 25 clients. One case dealing with a young Latina women being abused by her boyfriend was very hard for her. She found herself thinking about the client, worrying about her at night and fighting an impulse to take the student home to a 'safe place.' During supervision her supervisor was not empathetic with her issues and simply recited the ACA ethics code pertaining to dual relationship and advised her not to take the student home.*

*To friends Irene is expressing feelings of being overwhelmed by paperwork, feeling emotionally hollow and fears that she is being an ineffective therapist. These fears are particularly evident during her weekly supervision. Irene has taken no vacation time and finds herself relieved when a client 'no shows' for an appointment.*

*She is beginning to express fear that she has chosen the wrong profession and is simply not cut out to work with college students.*

## **Scenario #3: *Maybe This Isn't for Me...***

### **What not to do:**

Give up and embark on a career as a bar tender.  
Jump to a new career without exploring the idea of balance.  
Personalize things like no-shows.

### **Van Brunt**

I'd suggest some burnout prevention tactics here. Perhaps looking at trying to work some breaks into the day and not work so hard with the clients she is seeing. The problem might be less the population she is seeing and more her learning to adjust to her work load with any clients, not just college students. It might also be helpful to use supervision a bit more productively, trying to work through the issues that are keeping her from working at her full potential. Keep in mind this is a new experience for her and she needs to give herself a chance to adjust to the career choice she has made.

### **Raleigh**

It is normal for every therapist to hit that moment in their career when they feel overwhelmed, under prepared and out on their own. Seek support through a mentor, colleagues, personal therapy and setting boundaries. If possible reduce the weekly caseload for a few weeks until the more demanding cases are less stressful. Let your supervisor know what you are seeking in supervision, as this may be an issue of mismatched expectations.

### **Reynelli**

When you're in a profession to help people on a deep level and you get excited when a client "no shows," that is like a business owner getting excited when no customers show up...it effectively defeats the purpose.

Perhaps this isn't the right job at the right place at the right time with the right supervisor at the right school, etc...but what is certain is that it is not the right time to make that evaluation, let alone that decision! To quote a refrigerator magnet, "Never make irrevocable decisions when Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired or Stressed." So maybe the fridge magnet needs a bibliographical reference...HALTS is a tool commonly used in 12-step recovery programs. In any case, as an outsider, it is clear that this clinician needs take care of herself. She is being triggered on multiple levels. She needs to exercise the same kindness and care toward herself as she does with her clients.

Much later on, it is advisable to discuss with the supervisor that, while appreciated, the reminder of the ACA ethics code when in emotional turmoil is not the best way to get through to her.

## **Scenario #4: *I Need to Get a Boat and Get Out of Here...***

*John has been a therapist for a university mental health center for over 20 years. His paperwork and overall therapeutic work are fine and he expresses no concerns about his work environment. John grew up 90 minutes from the campus he currently works on. John married his high school sweet heart and raised four children in the same town he grew up in. He completed his master's degree in counseling in the 1980's and has completed one advance certification since completing his degree.*

*John has stopped reading professional journals, does not attend conferences, is not interested in learning new therapeutic technique and frequently makes comments referring to students as 'kids' and 'being all the same'. His current supervisor has repeated tried to engage John in meaningful conversations about counseling, he encouraged him to teach courses at the college and has asked him to take on a mentor role with the new therapists in the center. John has been hesitant to take on the role. After six months of working with the new staff he was asked to resume his full caseload and remove himself from the supervisory task. New staff members complained that he was negative, highly critical and not well informed of new theory or technique.*

*When confronted by his supervisor about these issues John become defensive and feels that he is not being appreciated for his long commitment to the field and the good quality of his therapy work. John's clients speak highly of him and he has some of the lowest 'no show' rates in the office. However, John finds himself dreaming of retirement, being increasingly dissatisfied with his quality of life and questioning if he can last in this profession much longer.*

## **Scenario #4: *I Need to Get a Boat and Get Out of Here...***

### **What not to do:**

Fire John

Relegate him to non-essential personnel and make him do all the intakes

Judge his behavior in the same way you would look at staff new to the field

Expect him to have the same passion for the work that you do

### **Van Brunt**

I liked the plan of getting John more passionate about his work by getting him connected to some new professionals. Unfortunately, the best laid plans often lead to disaster---and it may be that having John focus on his case load and play to his strengths might be the best case scenarios. In contracts to new professionals, it may be that the process here for John is helping him ease into retirement and finding ways to play to his strengths. While I hate to believe in clichés the “teaching old dogs new tricks” may apply here. Depending on his retirement plans, this might be a situation where helping John develop an exit strategy is the best approach.

### **Raleigh**

John has solid therapy skills but has lost his love or passion for the work. As a supervisor the challenge is to find something that John loves to do, a passion that he can channel into his work life. If he loves to sail, find a way for him to integrate that into his work – maybe teaching a sailing class or conducting mental health outreach on the restorative qualities of being near water? Thinking outside the box is critical in getting John re-engaged in his work. John needs to feel valued, he is reaching that point in his career and in his life when he is wondering if he made a difference to the world – does his life matter. Reward his solid work with students and if possible place him in a less formal mentor role.

### **Reynelli**

Denial...it's not just a river in Egypt anymore! It seems like John feels like his life is about the size of a postage stamp and he's trying to “white knuckle” it through to retirement. Simply put, John is miserable...specifically, he's miserable on a spiritual level – everyone is out to get him, no one appreciates his dedication, all the Kids are the same ... he might as well go to the garden and eat worms!

John is holding on to certain expectations – that other people will respect him, that he will retire in this job, that his 20-year old techniques are just fine, etc. He is also under the illusion that he is in control...he wants to exercise his own will instead of the will of the greater organization.

John needs to take some time to heal himself spiritually. Assuming that he doesn't want to continue being miserable, he needs to find the roots of his misery...and simply pointing the finger at those around him won't do. Because even if these others around him are actually making him miserable, there is nothing he can do to change them...we can't change people, places and things...but we can change ourselves. So then the question becomes HOW do we change ourselves? We have to be Honest, keep an Open mind and be Willing.

## **Scenario #5: *The Cup Over-Floweth***

*You are a hall director at a small private college. It's the 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend of the spring semester and you are on duty. There is nothing special about this weekend and you expect that it will be business as usual. Come Monday morning, you are sleep deprived from the weekend due to two physical assaults one of which was an assault on an RA, three alcohol situations which required hospital transport, and two suicide attempts. Not only were you dealing with the events as they unfolded, and some of these situations happened simultaneously, you also served as the point person for communication organizing the services from your department, Safety, and the Wellness Center. Then, as if that wasn't enough, your supervisor, his supervisor (the Dean) and the Vice President continue to call you in the days following the incidents needing updates on the condition of the students. You are feeling physically tired, overwhelmed, are experiencing difficulty in keeping the facts of the various incidents clear in your head and are beginning to feel as though the Dean and the VP don't care how tired you are.*

## **Scenario #5: *The Cup Over-Floweth***

### **What not to do:**

Do not act out toward your supervisor, dean or staff.

Do not shut off your phone just to get some much needed rest thereby ignoring your on-going responsibilities

Do not yell at your cat

Don't take it out on those around you, focus the frustration and express it to your supervisor, not your subordinates.

### **Van Brunt**

Too many times bad things happen to good people. Here the problem we see is a recipe for burnout and disaster. Too often we ignore the limitations any reasonable person can handle and just keep piling on emergency after emergency. After a certain point, we all snap. This situation demands a change in how the call and leadership situation is set up on campus. The same person cannot be responsible for following up on all these different scenarios. It is probably time for a heart to heart with your Dean about how many crisis situations one person can reasonably handle. If the college is struggling with such a large amount of emergencies, they need to invest in additional staff or, at the very least, divide up some of these emergency situations once you go beyond 2-3 crisis situations over a given weekend.

### **Raleigh**

Set good boundaries, get rest and delegate what you can to other staff members. If you live on campus it is even more important to set clear boundaries or quickly home is no longer your 'safe place' to recharge and rest. Simple techniques like, keep a set of notes by your phone so when someone calls you can give accurate information quickly or set up a specific time/place for updates and try to keep information restricted to those venues.

### **Reynelli**

Remember that this is stressful for all parties involved, RA's, you, the Dean and the VP. Be sure to take your own personal inventory and ask your Dean specifically for what you need – whether that be a few hours to get off campus, decompress, watch a movie, run an errand, etc. You know yourself best and ultimately, your Dean (and VP) want someone on staff who can take care of themselves.

Try to not take the demands for information personally. The Dean and VP are not calling you because they are trying to prevent you from getting in a 2 hour nap. They are calling because they need the information. Perhaps try a proactive approach. After you share a batch of information, express to both parties that you need a nap and would appreciate them not calling you for more information for 2 hours. Let them know that you will call to check in as soon as you wake up. Perhaps call one of your colleagues and ask them to cover for you while you nap. If you are not of sound mind, body and spirit, you position yourself to make poor decisions, which will only make matters worse for everyone.

## **Scenario #6: *I Thought We Had a Deal...***

*You are the new Director of Housing at a mid-size state school. Now in your second year, you are trying to iron-out some weak policies and procedures particularly those that are shared between your department and Safety.*

*Historically speaking, the two departments have not gotten along and you have unwittingly inherited the bad blood relations. After a year's worth of Safety pointing out your department's inadequacies and of you making the necessary adjustments, it is now apparent that Safety needs to make some adjustments. With kindness and care, you present the issues of procedural communication issues to the Safety director. At first, it is received well, and you receive confirmation that the staff has been retrained. The following weekend, you learn that your staff was not alerted when two buildings needed to be evacuated due to fire alarms. You inform the director over the phone and he raises his voice and tells you that his plate is too full to deal with your petty issues and hangs up on you. You feel angry, frustrated, unheard, hurt and confused.*

## Scenario #6: *I Thought We Had a Deal...*

### **What not to do:**

Do not call back, go over for a visit or otherwise engage with the director – space and time are needed

Do not ignore this, but rather address it when the time is right

Do not call the safety director names and SPAM their email

### **Van Brunt**

It's hard to deal with problems in the heat of the moment. People have different modalities in which they are better at communicating in. This may be in person, over the phone, email or with a third party. It sounds like this person doesn't do well on the phone. It might be that you need a meeting in person to sort out these issues, and perhaps---a meeting with the Dean to make sure that both of you are on the same page about ensuring respect and adequate communication. It might be that the issue needs a third party to sort out---and this "third-party" may need to be a supervisor who can keep expectations and communications civil, even when things are tense.

### **Raleigh**

It can be very difficult to deal with colleague who is not aware of how their actions effect you, or who are themselves so overwhelmed that they just don't care. Try to put yourself in their shoes, think about how that phone call sounded from their side of the conversation. Meet the person one on one in a neutral territory (not your office or their office) but maybe a quiet spot away from phones and computers. Let them know the things you really appreciate about working with them and approach the current issue as team. 'What can we do so our departments can support each other better?' Acknowledge the history of stress between the departments but stress that this is a new day and you are not the old director. These are today's problems and need to be addressed with new solutions.

### **Reynelli**

When you are on the receiving end of someone's misplaced aggression, it never feels good. Keep in mind, though, that this has nothing to do with you and everything to do with that person. After you get over your feelings of anger, frustration, confusion and the like, approach this situation with a sense of compassion and curiosity...much like you would a 2-year old who is having a temper tantrum. Yelling at them is sure to keep the tantrum going, trying to restrain them may tire them out (and tire you out too) but that only reinforces physical interventions and does not allow the 2-year old to develop skills to handle their tantrums on their own. However, if you approach the tantrum with compassion and curiosity and identify with their feelings, "Wow, this must be really hard for you; you seem frustrated and it's ok to feel frustrated when you don't get what you want" Validate what they are feeling. Same thing with your colleague...at a later date and time! Identify with their feeling, "it must have been frustrating to hear that your staff didn't maintain compliance with your new directive. What can I do to help?" When you turn the conversation to how it made you feel that this person raised their voice to you and then hung up on you, remember to use I statements.

Perhaps also, there is a need to address the long standing issue of the inheritance of bad blood and that may be a conversation better served from your shared supervisor. But in any case, it should be address – separate from the issue at hand.