

Resource Guide

Experiencing Emotional Labor

According to Mastracci, Guy and Newman (2015) emotional labor is the analysis and decision making process in the expression of emotion – whether we actually feel the emotion or not – or the suppression of emotion – regardless of our actual feelings – when interacting with others in a work setting. In the past this concept has been more associated with first responders, rescue workers or crisis counselors, but more recently, it has been recognized that the teaching profession – particularly faculty who are BIPOC or members of the LGBTQA+ communities – also perform emotional labor. Whether we are talking about the trauma induced by COVID-19, some other national tragedy or the sudden, tragic loss of a student, we are often performing emotional labor when interacting with our students and colleagues. We typically need to quickly negotiate all or some of the following: analyzing the affective state of others and using that information to inform our response, analyzing our own emotional landscape and comparing and contrasting to others, evaluating and judging how responses will impact others and selecting the best response, or behaving in a way that enables others to express or suppress an emotion within the context of the situation.

The constant need to perform emotional labor can lead to exhaustion and burnout. Below are a few strategies that may allow us to navigate the emotional labor we take on as post-secondary educators.

- Acknowledge the emotional labor – naming this labor and identifying its practice helps us to understand ourselves better. Perhaps there is a reason we are exhausted even though we've not had a particularly busy day. You may ask yourself about the amount of emotional labor you performed that day.
- Consider guidelines for responsive relationships – for example, when responding to students, consider setting guidelines. For instance, commit to being genuine, compassionate and empathetic even if the situation is trying, or to avoid being defensive even though you may feel you are being attacked.
- Exercise self-care – find ways to work through the stress of emotional labor. Whether that is meditation, exercise or talking things through with someone you trust, finding ways to mitigate the stress brought about by emotional labor may allow us to cope with it more easily.

During times of crisis or trauma every member of a community is doing even more emotional labor than they typically do. Members of communities already performing additional emotional labor – for example BIPOC or members of the LGBTQA+ community are adding to

that additional labor to an even greater extent. Acknowledging and self-care are even more important in these circumstances

Resources

Mastracci, S. H., Guy, M. E., & Newman, M. A. (2014). *Emotional labor and crisis response: Working on the razor's edge*. Routledge.

Harvey, A. (2021, September 13). *Seven strategies for embracing the emotional labor of TEACHING: Faculty Focus*. Faculty Focus | Higher Ed Teaching & Learning. Retrieved September 21, 2021, from https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/philosophy-of-teaching/seven-strategies-for-embracing-the-emotional-labor-of-teaching/?st=FFdaily%3Bsc%3DFF210920%3Butm_term%3DFF210920&utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Seven%2Bstrategies%2Bfor%2BEmbracing%2Bthe%2BEmotional%2BLabor%2Bof%2BTeaching&utm_campaign=FF210920.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).