Loneliness and the Workplace

HR Managers Meeting – July 10, 2024

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Washington State Department of
HEALTH

The Goal for Today

- Connect
- Share information
- Teach back
- DOH show and tell

Journey to Club Lonely

A short and unfinished story by K. Darrow Brown

(all characters and their stories may or may not be fictitious)

Meet...

Darrell.

Until 2018, Darrell, his spouse, two kids and two dogs lived a life of ups, downs, and sideways in the Mid-Atlantic.
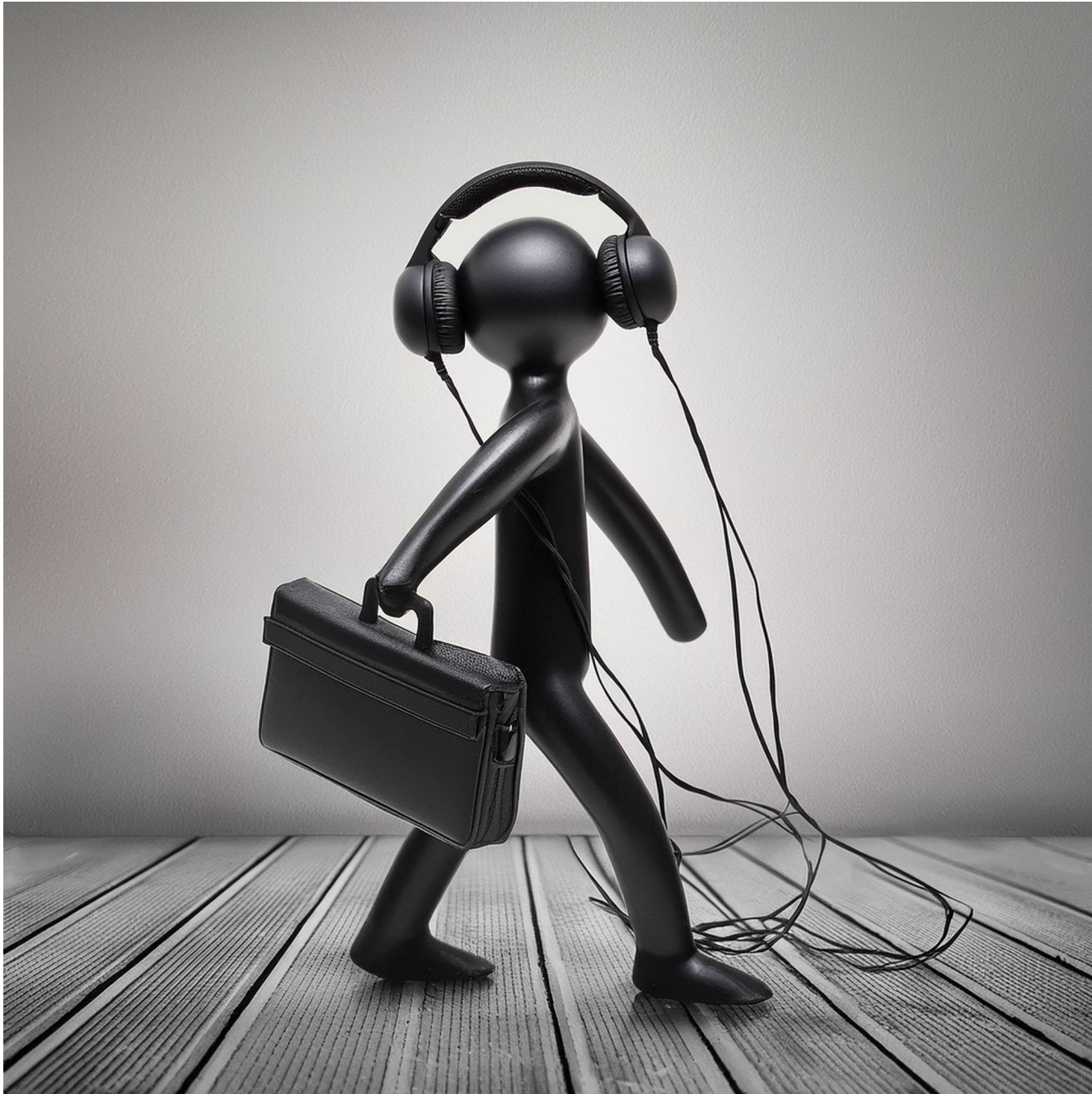
His work was busy and productive.

Darrell had close friends who enjoyed taking selfies and making peace signs at random moments of the day.

He was part of a large and vibrant community of dancers, music aficionados and artists, among others.

Life was pretty good.

One day, there was an idea.

"To the Pacific Northwest we will go!"

Kids first, for a 10-day stay with uncles.

While boxes were packed,
and trucks were loaded.

Thus began a 3-day, 2500-mile adventure.

They arrived and experienced the wonders of the Pacific Northwest summer.

Rain came.

Then a pandemic.

And more and more and more rain.

With friends, work and his vibrant community thousands of miles away...

Darrell deeply felt his otherness and his disconnection.

And found himself back at a familiar place.

Club Lonely.

Loneliness

A subjective distressing experience that results from perceived isolation or inadequate meaningful connections, where inadequate refers to the discrepancy or unmet need between an individual's preferred and actual experience.

[Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation 2023: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community](#)

a feeling of social and emotional disconnection from others

+

a longing for social and emotional connection to others

x

a sense of futility

to the power of

hopelessness and helplessness

=

loneliness

$$((FSED + LSEC) \times SF)h^2 = loneliness$$
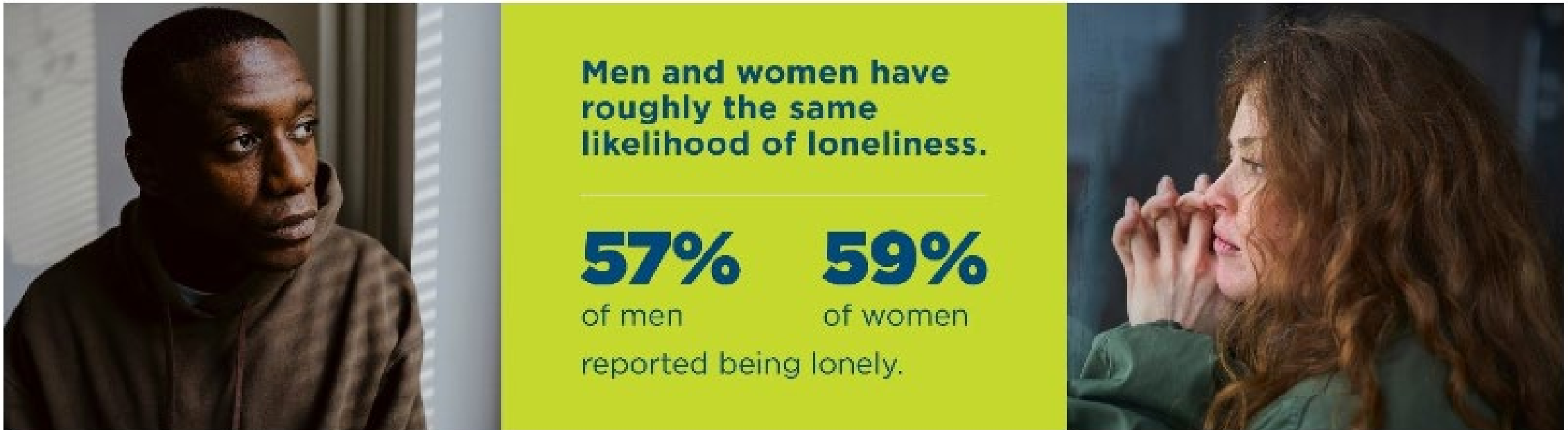
Entirely made up by K. Darrow Brown

An Epidemic

Epidemic refers to an increase, often sudden, in the number of cases of a disease above what is normally expected in that population in that area

Center for Disease Control and Statistics

Some Data

- [The Loneliness Epidemic Persists: A Post-Pandemic Look at the State of Loneliness among U.S. Adults | Cigna Newsroom (thecignagroup.com)](thecignagroup.com)

Men and women have roughly the same likelihood of loneliness.

57% of men

59% of women

reported being lonely.

Source: Morning Consult survey of 2,496 U.S. adults, December 13–19, 2021; commissioned by Cigna Corporation.

Disparate Impacts

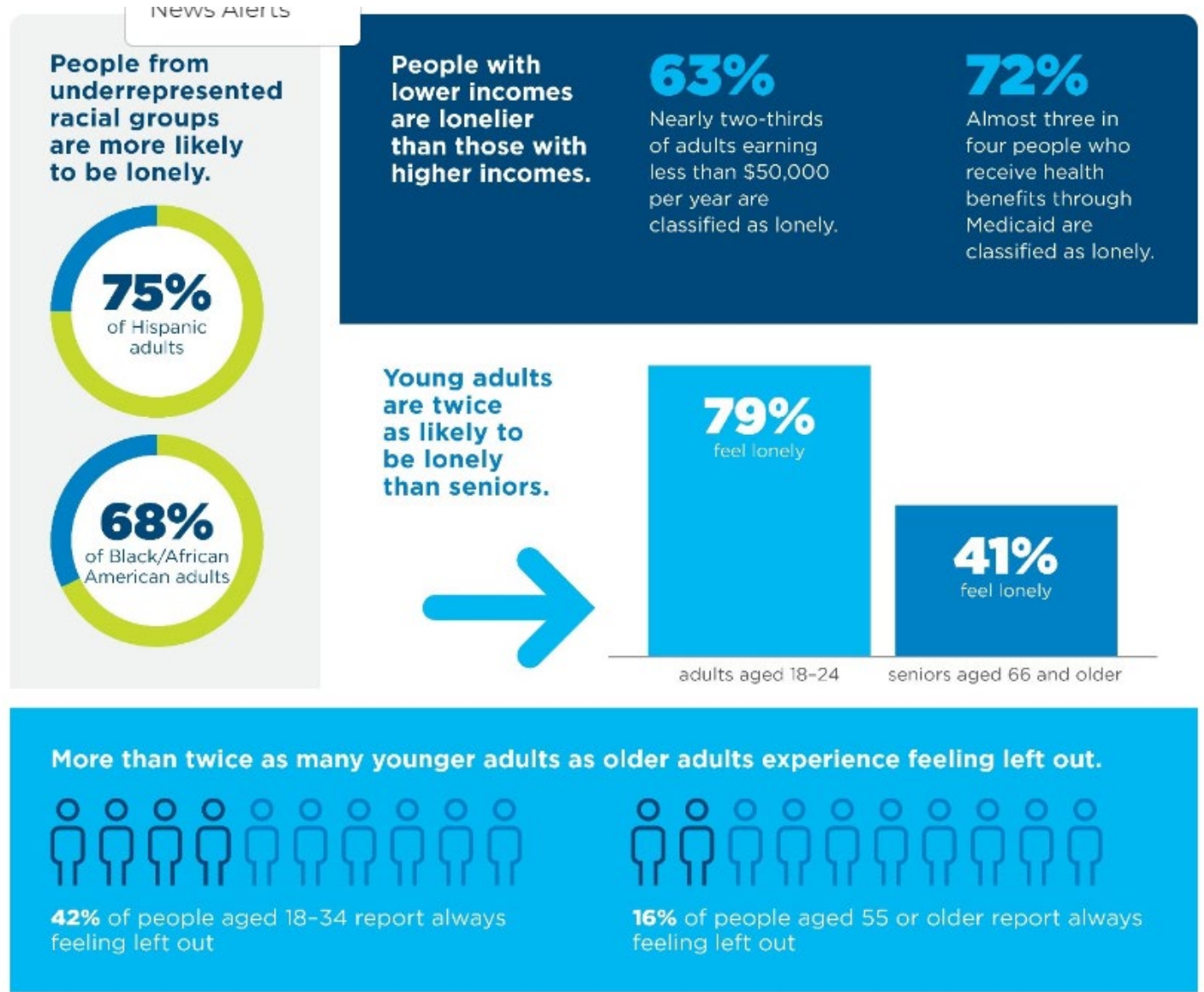- [The Loneliness Epidemic Persists: A Post-Pandemic Look at the State of Loneliness among U.S. Adults | Cigna Newsroom (thecignagroup.com)](#)

News Alerts

People from underrepresented racial groups are more likely to be lonely.

75% of Hispanic adults

68% of Black/African American adults

People with lower incomes are lonelier than those with higher incomes.

63% Nearly two-thirds of adults earning less than $50,000 per year are classified as lonely.

72% Almost three in four people who receive health benefits through Medicaid are classified as lonely.

Young adults are twice as likely to be lonely than seniors.

79% feel lonely — adults aged 18-24

41% feel lonely — seniors aged 66 and older

More than twice as many younger adults as older adults experience feeling left out.

42% of people aged 18-34 report always feeling left out

16% of people aged 55 or older report always feeling left out

Health and Work Impacts

HEALTH IMPACTS

Survival and Mortality

Cardiovascular Disease

Hypertension

Diabetes

Infectious Diseases

Cognitive Function

Depression and Anxiety

Suicidality and Self-Harm

Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation (hhs.gov)

WORK IMPACTS

Work Presenteeism

Work Absenteeism

Work Engagement

Workplace Distress

Work Satisfaction

Performance and Productivity

The Loneliness Epidemic Persists: A Post-Pandemic Look at the State of Loneliness among U.S. Adults | Cigna Newsroom (thecignagroup.com)

WOS_Annual_Report_2021_Full.pdf (lifeworks.com)

Personalizing It – DOH PH Connects

Public Health Connects | Washington State Department of Health

Mitigating Loneliness - Connection Types


Intimate Connections

Relational Connections

Collective Connections

What's Happening at DOH?

Center for Inclusion, Belonging and Well-being (CIBW)

- July 2023 – Established CIBW

- August 2023 – Darrow Brown, Chief began at DOH

- January 2024 – CIBW grew to a team of 4

- August 2023 to April 2024 – Human-centered design of CIBW (Empathy, Define, Ideate, Prototype, Test)

- April 2024 to June - Sharing/testing Prototype with DOH leaders and partners

- July 2024 – initiating priority projects, focused on equity and well-being in general and Connection and Community specifically

- July 2024 – Finalizing new position PDs and preparing for recruiting and hiring

Targeted Universalism

5 Essentials

Human-centered Design

Trauma-responsive approach
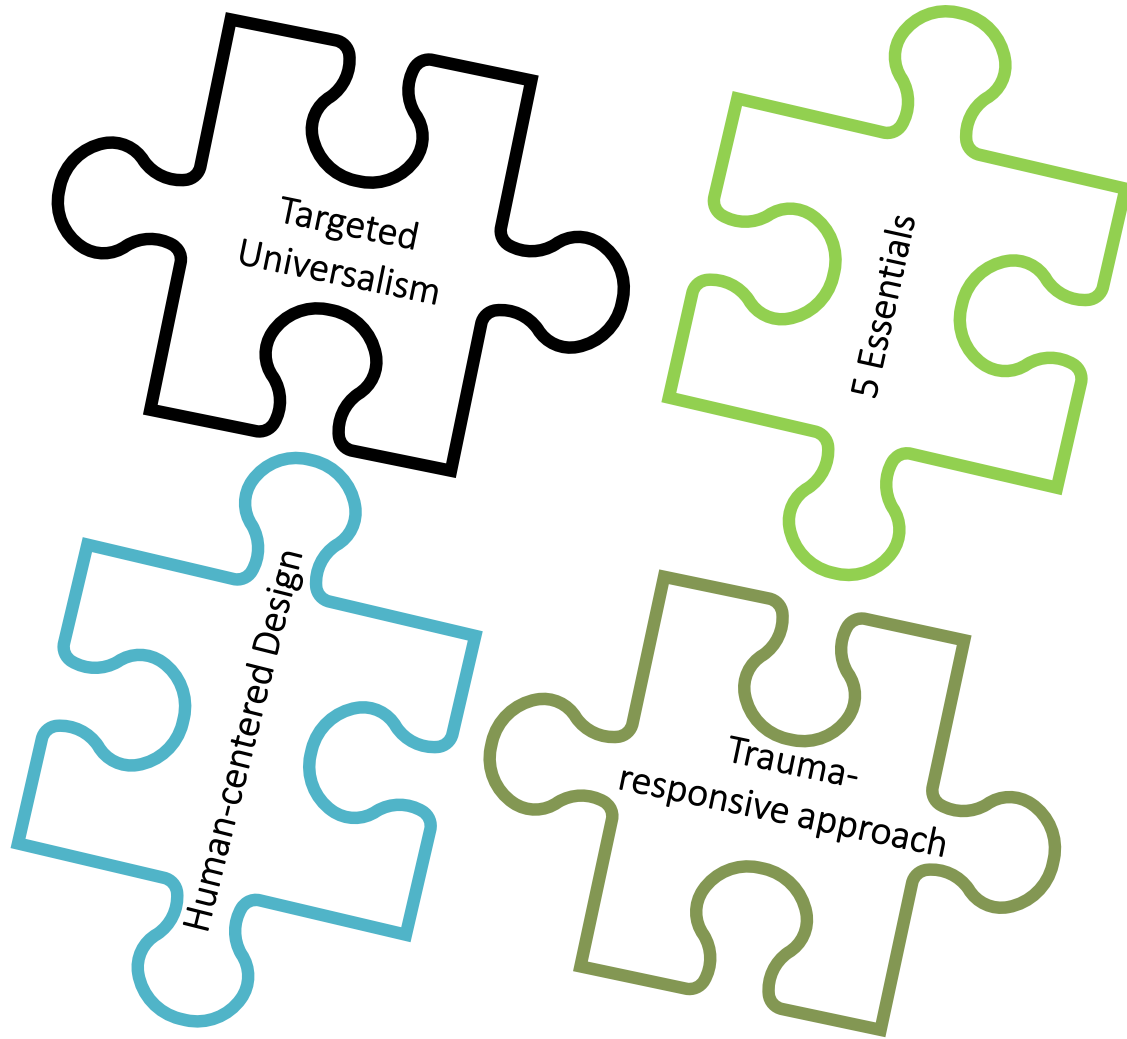
The Center for Inclusion, Belonging and Well-being

Washington State Department of HEALTH

Target Universalism

"Targeted universalism means setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. Within a targeted universalism framework, universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal. Targeted universalism is goal oriented, and the processes are directed in service of the explicit, universal goal."
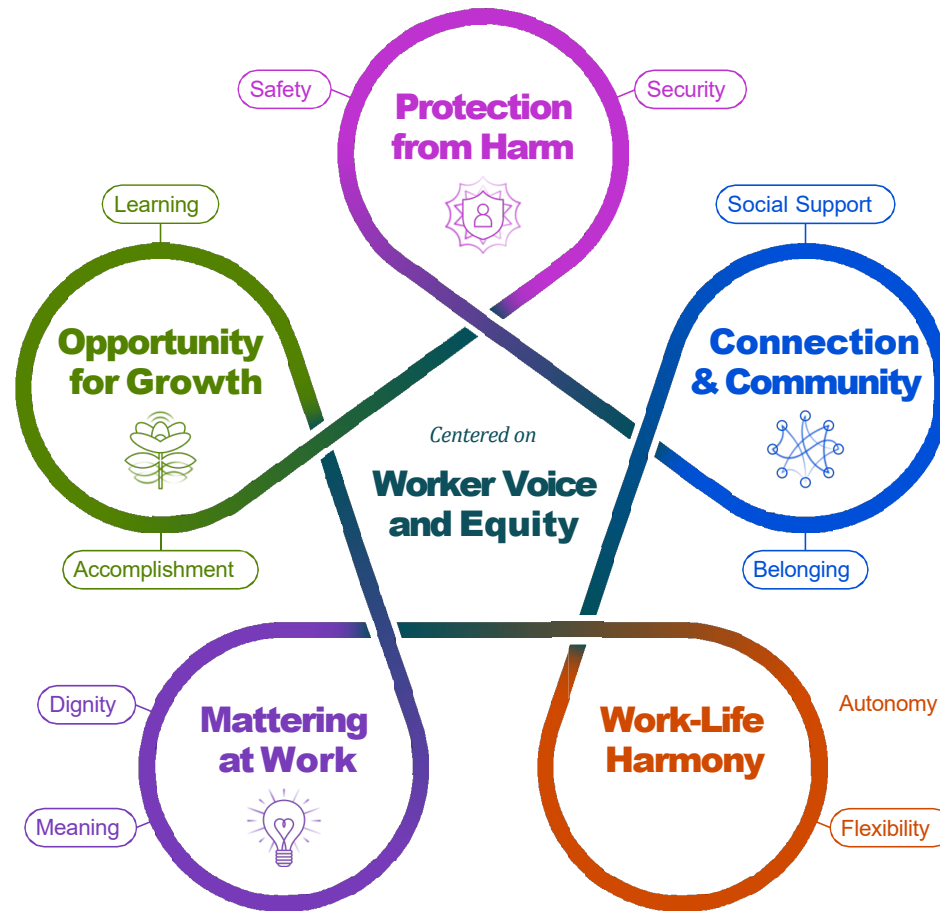
Universal Goal

Well-being for Every Employee

What Is Well-being?

Five Essentials for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being

Centered on the worker voice and equity, these five Essentials support workplaces as engines of well-being. Each Essential is grounded in two human needs, shared across industries and roles.

Creating a plan with all workers to enact these components can help reimagine workplaces as engines of well-being.

Protection from Harm
- Prioritize workplace physical and psychological safety
- Enable adequate rest
- Normalize and support mental health
- Operationalize DEIA* norms, policies, and programs

Connection & Community
- Create cultures of inclusion and belonging
- Cultivate trusted relationships
- Foster collaboration and teamwork

Work-Life Harmony
- Provide more autonomy over how work is done
- Make schedules as flexible and predictable as possible
- Increase access to paid leave
- Respect boundaries between work and non-work time

Mattering at Work
- Provide a living wage
- Engage workers in workplace decisions
- Build a culture of gratitude and recognition
- Connect individual work with organizational mission

Opportunity for Growth
- Offer quality training, education, and mentoring
- Foster clear, equitable pathways for career advancement
- Ensure relevant, reciprocal feedback

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility

Diagram labels: Safety, Security, Protection from Harm; Learning, Opportunity for Growth, Accomplishment; Social Support, Connection & Community, Belonging; Centered on Worker Voice and Equity; Dignity, Mattering at Work, Meaning; Autonomy, Work-Life Harmony, Flexibility

US Surgeon General - Workplace Mental Health and Well-being

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"Organizations can also suffer from traumatic stress, frequently arising from the compounding effect of multiple events over time and the cumulative impact that comes from the nature of the work in which professionals engage. For those Organizations harboring the effects of unhealed toxic stress, the typical outcome is needless repetitions of the stress cycle – inflicting harm on those who work there, and in turn being harmed by even their most dedicated professionals."

Lodestar BRAVE Trauma-Responsive Leadership

"Trauma responsive cultures foster restorative, healing-centered engagement"
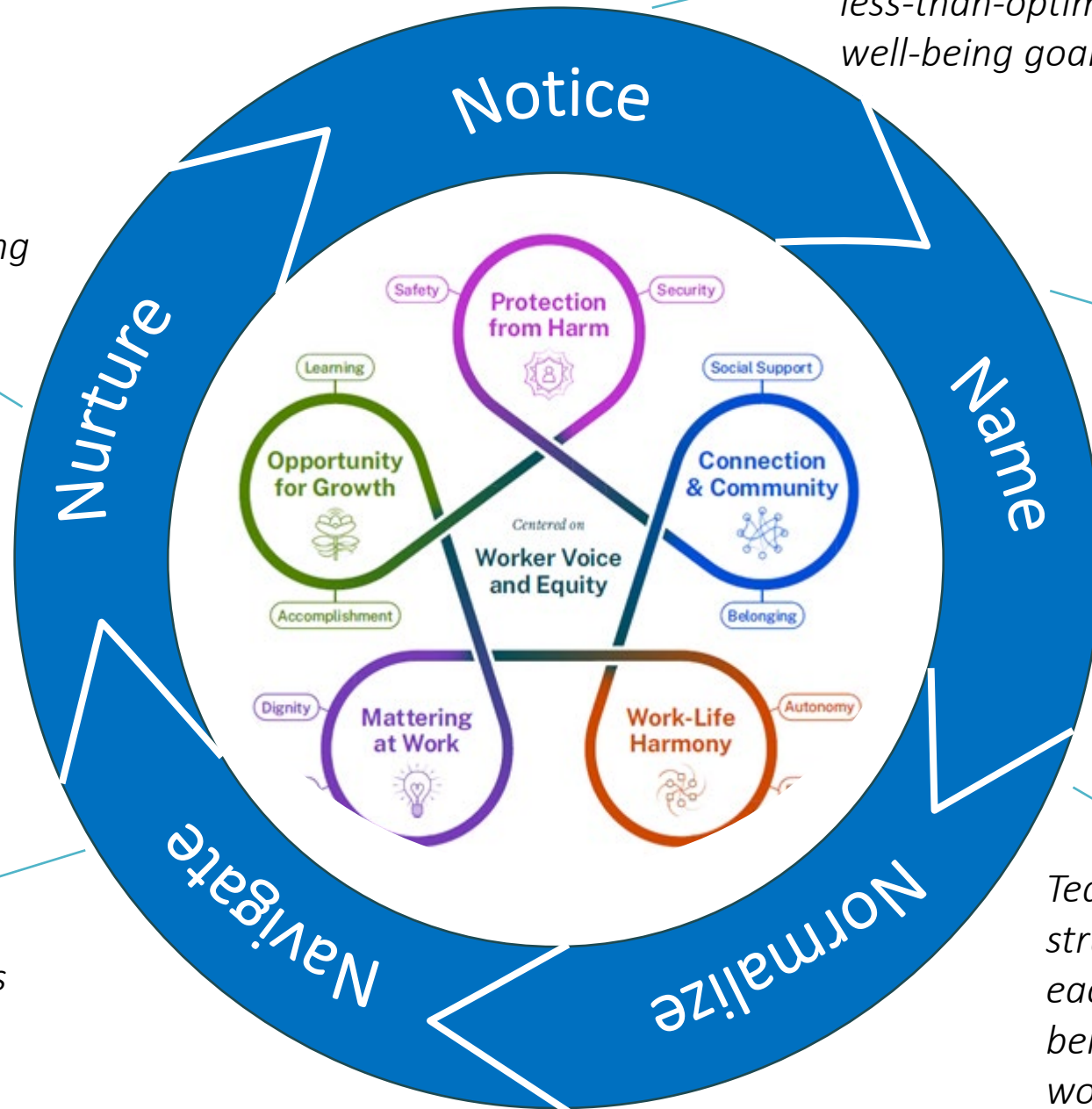
Lodestar BRAVE Leadership Participant Guide

Trauma-Responsive Approach

Trauma-responsive engagement

Step	Interpersonal	Organizational
Notice	Self-awareness of activation, awareness of activation in others	Team and/or partners perceive/are aware of less-than-optimal performance relative to well-being goals
Name	Identify emotions, specific the experience	Team and/or partners identify gaps, challenges, opportunities, the impacted groups and impacts with respect to the goals.
Normalize	Universality of experiences, others may feel similarly	Team and partners assess the structures supporting or impeding each group from experiencing well-being at work, identify root causes, work toward understanding why
Navigate	Self-regulation, co-regulation, explore choices	Design and activate targeted strategies for identified groups to achieve well-being at work
Nurture	Compassion for self and others, restoration	Understand the impact of our work, measure, support and sustain the strategies that bring us closer to the universal goal.

Lodestar BRAVE Trauma-Responsive Leadership – *(Step and Interpersonal columns)*

Notice

Team and/or partners perceive/are aware of less-than-optimal performance relative to well-being goals

Name

Team and/or partners identify gaps, challenges, opportunities, the impacted groups and impacts with respect to the goals.

Normalize

Team and partners assess the structures supporting or impeding each group from experiencing well-being at work, identify root causes, work toward understanding why

Navigate

Design and activate targeted strategies for identified groups to achieve well-being at work

Nurture

Understand the impact of our work, measure, support and sustain the strategies that bring us closer to the universal goal.

Centered on **Worker Voice and Equity**

Protection from Harm — Safety, Security

Connection & Community — Social Support, Belonging

Work-Life Harmony — Autonomy

Mattering at Work — Dignity

Opportunity for Growth — Learning, Accomplishment

Navigate by Human-Centered Design

"Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer's toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success." – Tim Brown, Executive Chair, IDEO

Human-centered Design Mindset
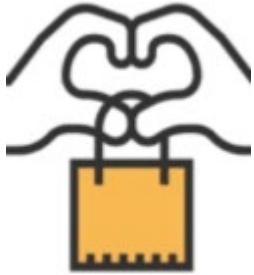
Empathy

Optimism

Embrace Ambiguity

Make It

Learn From Failure
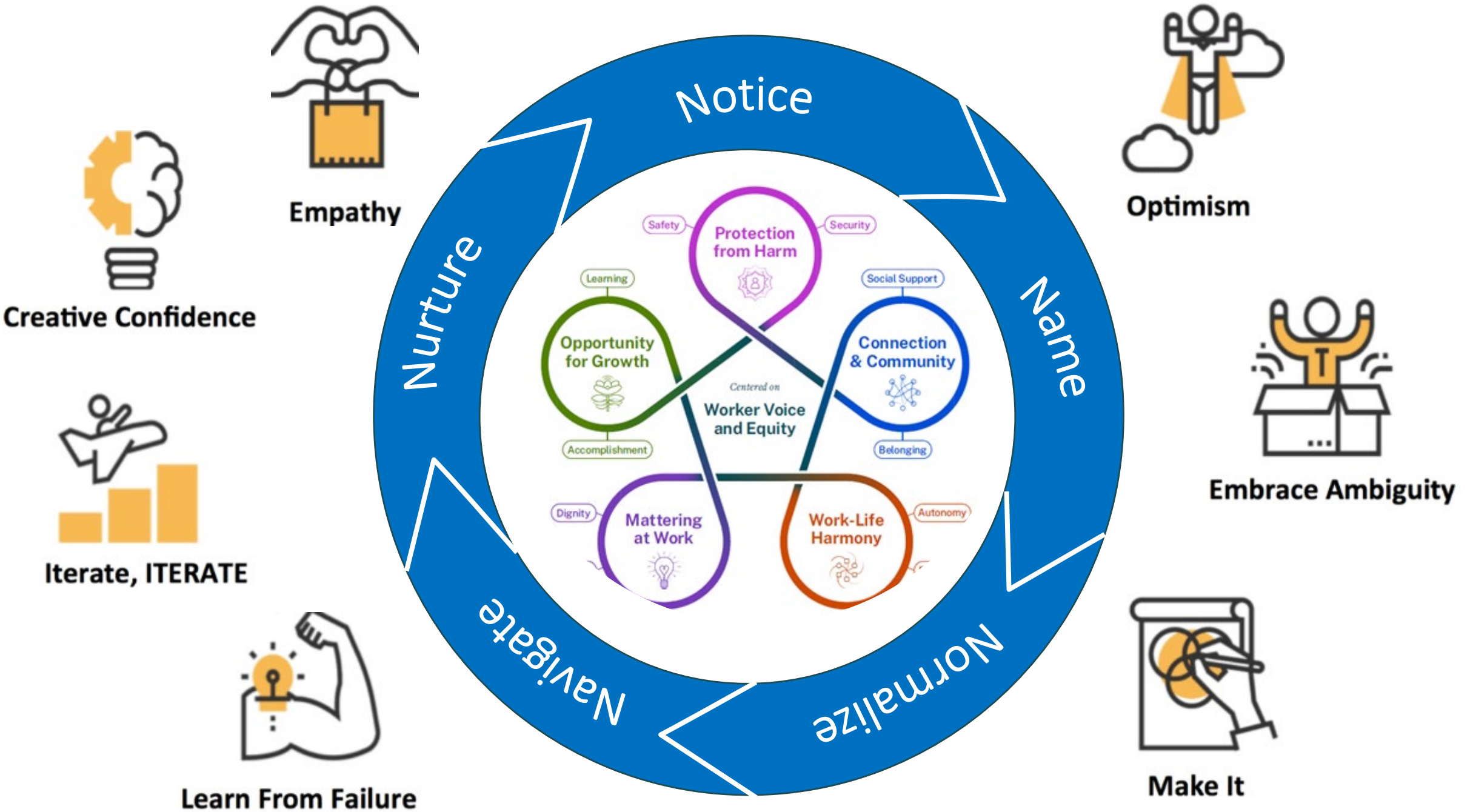
Iterate, ITERATE

Creative Confidence

Design Thinking Mindsets for Human-Centered Design (innovationtraining.org)

What is the Center?

Systems and structures focused

Change agent

Strategic partner

What's next for the Center?

- ❑ Recruiting and hiring
- ❑ Building internal operations
- ❑ Developing and strengthening partnerships
- ❑ Identifying priorities
- ❑ Addressing immediate needs
- ❑ Testing the prototype

Thank you!

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