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Trauma-Informed Servant Leadership Training

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A final project presented to the faculty of the
Instructional Design Master's Degree Program
University of Massachusetts Boston

Trauma-Informed Servant Leadership Training

Submitted by
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Abstract

Due to the high rate of employee burnout and toxic workplace environments, organizations and managers are looking toward better leadership approaches to retain employees and promote engagement in the workplace. This training course was developed through surveys and scholarly research to train managers in a Trauma-Informed Servant Leadership approach to create psychologically safe work environments. Psychologically safe work environments have lower turnover rates, greater creativity and engagement, and higher employee satisfaction. The Trauma-Informed Servant Leadership approach reduces institutional betrayal and promotes psychological safety by adopting a transparent, results-driven framework. The training gives leaders a basic understanding of trauma, its impact on the brain, and employee well-being. The training instruction shows managers how to identify signs of trauma when they appear in the workplace and how to respond appropriately. The asynchronous self-driven eLearning course comprises six learning modules that can be completed at the learners' pace.

Keywords: Psychological safety, leadership, trauma, trauma-informed approach, servant leadership

Dedicated to Gene Duggan

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Part 1: Analysis

Organizational Need

Trauma-informed management practices focus on building psychological safety among employees. When employees feel safe in their work environment, they are more likely to share concerns and experiences without fear of retaliation (Manning, 2022). This, in turn, allows for more instances of reporting and addressing toxic behavior. Reducing the feeling of institutional betrayal and promoting psychological safety, trauma-informed managers will be more likely to have satisfied, productive employees who experience less burnout and turnover.

Performance Environment

Managers and supervisors who want to learn new management skills to improve psychological safety and enhance leadership skills will participate in Trauma-Informed Management learning modules.

Analysis Report

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed how people work and think about the role of work in their lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted institutional responses to collective trauma, though trauma in the workplace did not start with COVID-19 and will not end there (Miller et al., 2022). As Manning (2021) states, “If we work with people, we are working with people in trauma” (p. 9). This poses a unique dilemma for administrators and management: How do we work with employees dealing with trauma? Workplace impacts of this trauma range from “lost productivity, absenteeism, and turnover” and when not addressed, can lead to devastating effects on the company (Manning, 2021, p. 9).

To better understand management styles in employees, a brief, 6-question anonymous survey was posted in various groups on LinkedIn. The questions asked participants to reflect on their current or most recent manager and their feelings about psychological safety in that environment. Results revealed that thirty-five percent of survey respondents reported refraining from speaking up in meetings or discussions because [they] were afraid of negative consequences or judgment. Additionally, 45% of respondents noticed favoritism or discrimination in the workplace from their managers. Thirty-five percent of respondents rated their manager's empathy level toward their trauma as a three or below (on a scale of 1-5). Psychological safety research argues that one of the most important things we can do to support traumatized individuals is to show a willingness to listen and acknowledge the pain of those who share their stories (Manning, 2022). These survey results indicate that employees may not feel comfortable sharing their traumas or concerns for fear that their managers may not be empathetic or, in some cases, understanding in their responses, increasing instances of "institutional betrayal" (Manning, 2022). When institutions fail to protect us in times of crisis, we incur a second injury: institutional betrayal.

At the beginning of 2021, more than 40% of employees were considering leaving their workplaces, signaling what has been called The Great Resignation (Sull et al., 2022). MIT Sloan Management Review (Sull et al., 2022) published an analysis of 34 million employee profiles to identify workers who left their jobs for any reason and to understand the drivers of this mass exodus of employees. The findings revealed that at the top of the list was what employees identified as a toxic corporate culture. "A toxic corporate culture, for example, is 10.4 times more powerful than compensation in predicting a company's attrition rate compared with its industry" (Sull et al., 2022, para 2). Other factors such as compensation, response to COVID-19, and job security ranked high among the researchers. Still, the highest-ranking factor determined

that toxic work cultures motivated employees to leave. This research indicates that employees would benefit from feeling more supported in their workplaces. “As we have seen the lines between work and home blur and a fundamental shift in our expectations of the places in which we work, organizations have struggled to provide the support and leadership their employees and customers need” (Manning, 2022, para 3).

Although trauma-informed practices have been commonplace in specific fields and industries, the focus has mainly been on the customer or client, not the employees (Miller et al., 2022). These practices, integral in fields such as education, psychology, and public health, will also promote intense team experiences in the private sector. Trauma-informed management practices promote psychological safety in the workplace, creating a safe environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their concerns and issues and are encouraged to share their ideas and collaborate. Google recently found that psychological safety, more than anything else, was critical in making a team work (Manning, 2022). When management and organizations show that they care for their employees, they will earn loyalty and engagement from those employees.

The research shows multiple approaches to integrating trauma-informed practices into the workplace and promoting psychological safety. For example, The National Center for Trauma-Informed Care has outlined six principles of a Trauma-informed approach (Miller et al., 2022). The Center for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP) has published a toolkit among other free resources for creating trauma-informed workplaces (Toolkit, 2023); and Katherine Manning’s book *The Empathetic Workplace* outlines her approach, the LASER method (Manning, 2021). A positive team climate, where team members value one another's well-being

and have input into how the team carries out its work, is paramount to the team's psychological safety (Psychological et al. | McKinsey, 2021).

To encourage psychological safety and trauma-informed management practices, straightforward training through eLearning that can be completed asynchronously is necessary. This allows managers to complete the modules at their convenience. The training modules will be developed based on research on trauma-informed practices, empowering managers to acknowledge their employees' experiences and identities and motivate them toward greater workplace autonomy.

Instructional Goal

When presented with scenarios, managers and supervisors will be able to determine appropriate trauma-informed management techniques and skills with 90% accuracy.

Learner Analysis

Managers and supervisors will learn these training modules looking for solutions to rapid turnover, employee burnout, lack of trust, low motivation, and low psychological safety among their employees. They are open to new ways of approaching management techniques to improve their current situations.

The following scenarios were derived from my own experiences and those of the people I have interviewed. They represent multiple sectors, genders, ages, and experience levels.



New Hire Naomi

Age: Late 30s

Management experience: 2 years' experience

Environment: Higher-ed administration

Team Makeup: Five employees of various ages and skill sets who have been with the organization for 2-10 years.

Learner Goal: Increase team morale after toxic management left, improve retention, and encourage more collaboration among team members.

Motivations: She wants her employees to feel happy coming to work again.

Frustrations:

“I feel like I am paying for the mistakes of my predecessor.”

“Everyone is so emotionally burnt out I do not know how to help them heal and motivate themselves.”

“If my team would give me a chance, I think I could help them by coming to work again.”

Bio: I have been interested in managing this department for years and waited for the opportunity to arise. My experience managing a small team of advisors helped me gain confidence in my leadership skills. Unfortunately, when I got to this department, it was clear the team had low morale and was burnt out from the previous management's toxic behavior. I do not know how to get them to trust me and value the work they do again.



Grindstone Gary

Age: Late 50s

Management experience: 15 years' experience

Environment: Hospital administration

Team Makeup: 20 employees, nurses, case managers, and administrative personnel.

Learner Goal: Increase work effort and work ethic of employees, improve chronic absenteeism, and improve retention.

Motivations: Wants to feel like employees are giving their best effort to the job and stop slacking off.

Frustrations:

“People just don’t want to work anymore, and I can’t help that.”

“If everyone would stop being lazy, the work would be more evenly distributed, and we’d lose less employees.”

“I want people to work like they did before the pandemic and to stop calling out and asking for remote days.”

Bio: I’ve worked in the hospital system for over 30 years. I love being an administrator and working for an excellent organization that helps people and saves lives. The work we do at this hospital is so important but the staff I have now don’t seem to see the importance in what they do. I wish they’d either quit or wake up, but the current state of things is impossible.



Easy-Going Eli

Age: Mid 40s

Management experience: 4 years’ experience

Environment: Banking call center customer service manager

Team Makeup: 30 employees of various tenures and ages.

Learner Goal: Upper management wants my employees to meet more sales goals.

Motivations: I want my employees to continue to like me and not feel the pressure of meeting goals, but I need upper management to be satisfied with my team.

Frustrations:

“I like that my employees like me and treat me like a friend.”

“When the employees feel the pressure of selling in addition to handling the customers' emotions, they start to hate their job.”

“I care more that my employees like coming to work than I do that the sales goals are met but I don't want to lose my job, so I need to push the sales numbers.”

Bio: I work with a great group of employees who work hard and achieve customer satisfaction 80% of the time. Unfortunately, the sales numbers are low and higher management is on my back to get the employees to sell more during their calls. I don't want to pressure my employees and create a tense environment at work so I avoid pushing them to meet the goals but now I'm in danger of losing my job.

Part 2: Design**Performance Objectives**

Employee satisfaction rates will increase via pre- and post-training surveys.

Learning Objectives

- Managers will be able to identify the signs of trauma and explain the impact of trauma on the workplace.
- Managers will be able to describe the key concepts of trauma-informed management with 90% accuracy in knowledge check.
- Managers will be able to employ empathetic communication styles and demonstrate active listening skills in three case study scenarios.

- Managers will be able to determine appropriate accommodations and management practices based on trauma-informed principles in three case study scenarios.
- Managers will be able to create a mission statement identifying the trauma-informed principles they commit to employ to promote psychological safety in their team.

Learner Assessment

Objective	Assessment Strategy
Managers will be able to identify the signs of trauma and explain the impact of trauma on the workplace.	Managers will answer 3 multiple choice questions about signs and symptoms of trauma in individuals in the workplace.
Managers will be able to describe the key concepts of trauma-informed management with 90% accuracy in knowledge check.	Managers will answer three multiple choice questions in a knowledge check with questions about trauma-informed practices.
Managers will be able to employ empathetic communication styles and demonstrate active listening skills in three case study scenarios.	Managers will answer three scenario-based case-study questions identifying how they would respond to scenarios with empathetic communication and active listening strategies.
Managers will be able to determine appropriate accommodations and management practices based on trauma-informed principles in three case study scenarios.	Managers will answer three scenario-based case study questions identifying accommodations and management practices.

Objective	Assessment Strategy
<p>Managers will be able to craft a mission statement identifying the trauma-informed principles they commit to employ to promote psychological safety in their team.</p>	<p>Using the trauma-informed principles learned in the training, managers will craft a mission statement and contribute them to a commitment wall where past classmates have posted their mission statements.</p>

Delivery Strategy

Managers will complete the training modules on their computers asynchronously and earn a certification badge upon course completion. To increase commitment to learning, the course concludes with an invitation to an exclusive community of managers who have completed the course on LinkedIn. The community allows learners to share their mission statements and commitment to trauma-informed practices. The community of managers is also a safe space where learners can ask questions and pose scenarios for advice on integrating trauma-informed techniques in the workplace. The community of managers will include past participants and moderators familiar with the concepts of trauma-informed practices.

Course Outline

The course will be delivered in three modules.

1. Module 1: Identify Trauma Responses
 - a. Objective
 - i. Managers will be able to identify the signs of trauma and explain the impact of trauma on the workplace.
 - b. Modules
 - i. Slides and interactive modules will explore:
 - ii. Understanding the concept of trauma
 - iii. Signs of trauma-related stress and how they appear in the workplace.
 - iv. Identifying workplace events that may be triggering.
 - c. Assessment
 - i. Formative – 3 Multiple Choice Questions

2. Module 2: Key Concepts of Trauma-Informed Management

a. Objective

- i. In knowledge checks, managers can describe the fundamental concepts of Trauma-Informed Management (TIM) with 90% accuracy.

b. Modules

- i. Slides and interactive modules will explore:
- ii. Critical concepts of TIM framework
- iii. How TIM could be applied in different scenarios

c. Assessment

- i. Formative – 3 Multiple Choice Questions
- ii. View three short case studies in which employees exemplify trauma-related behaviors and identify multiple-choice questions that illustrate appropriate behaviors to implement in scenarios.
- iii. Identify key concepts of the TIM framework.

3. Module 3: Communication and Listening

a. Objective

- i. Managers can employ empathetic communication styles and demonstrate active listening skills in three case study scenarios.

b. Modules

- i. Slides and interactive modules will explore:
- ii. Understanding empathetic communication
- iii. Understanding active listening

c. Assessment

- i. Formative – 3 Multiple Choice Questions
 1. View three short case studies in which employees exemplify trauma-related behaviors. Identify multiple-choice questions that illustrate appropriate empathetic communication techniques and active listening.
4. Module 4: Customizing for your employees.
 - a. Objective
 - i. In three case study scenarios, managers can determine appropriate accommodations and management practices based on trauma-informed principles.
 - b. Modules
 - i. Slides and interactive modules will explore:
 - ii. Common management issues that can be handled by TIM frameworks.
 - iii. Identifying the appropriate practices and accommodations for individual situations
 - c. Assessment
 - i. Formative – 3 Multiple Choice Questions
 - ii. Managers will answer three scenario-based case study questions identifying accommodations and management practices.
5. Module 5: Creating your Trauma-Informed Manager Mission Statement
 - a. Objective

- i. Managers will be able to craft a mission statement identifying the trauma-informed principles they commit to employ to promote psychological safety in their team.
- b. Modules
- c. Slides and interactive modules will explore:
 - i. Customizing TIM framework for your own workplace and management style.

Assessment

Using the trauma-informed principles learned in the training, managers will craft a mission statement and contribute it to a commitment wall where past classmates have posted their mission statements.

Part 3: Develop

Course Materials

The course includes the following materials:

- Self-paced asynchronous e-learning module program
- Four scenario-based modules with corresponding quiz questions
- One opportunity for mission statement creation
- Invitation to LinkedIn TISL community

Part 4: Implement

Implementation Plan

This course will be piloted before it is officially rolled out. In the pilot, it will be offered to 3 interested managers free of charge in exchange for their open feedback throughout the practice.

Managers will be asked to follow up in 3 months with employee satisfaction surveys and complete them.

Part 5: Evaluate

Evaluation Plan – Kirkpatrick Model

Pre- and post-surveys will be dispersed to all pilot members to distribute to their employees. The survey will include qualitative and quantitative questions regarding how they feel their managers listen to them and the overall sense of psychological safety they experience at work.

When the course launches, learners will be sent brief evaluation surveys for themselves and their employees to complete to gauge psychological safety and empathy in the workplace before training. Three months after completion of the pilot course, the learners will be sent another survey to distribute to their employees to gauge employees' sense of psychological safety and how they perceive their manager's leadership style.

In addition, the learners will be asked to complete their evaluation surveys about their experience, thoughts, and reactions to the training following the Kirkpatrick models of evaluation: reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

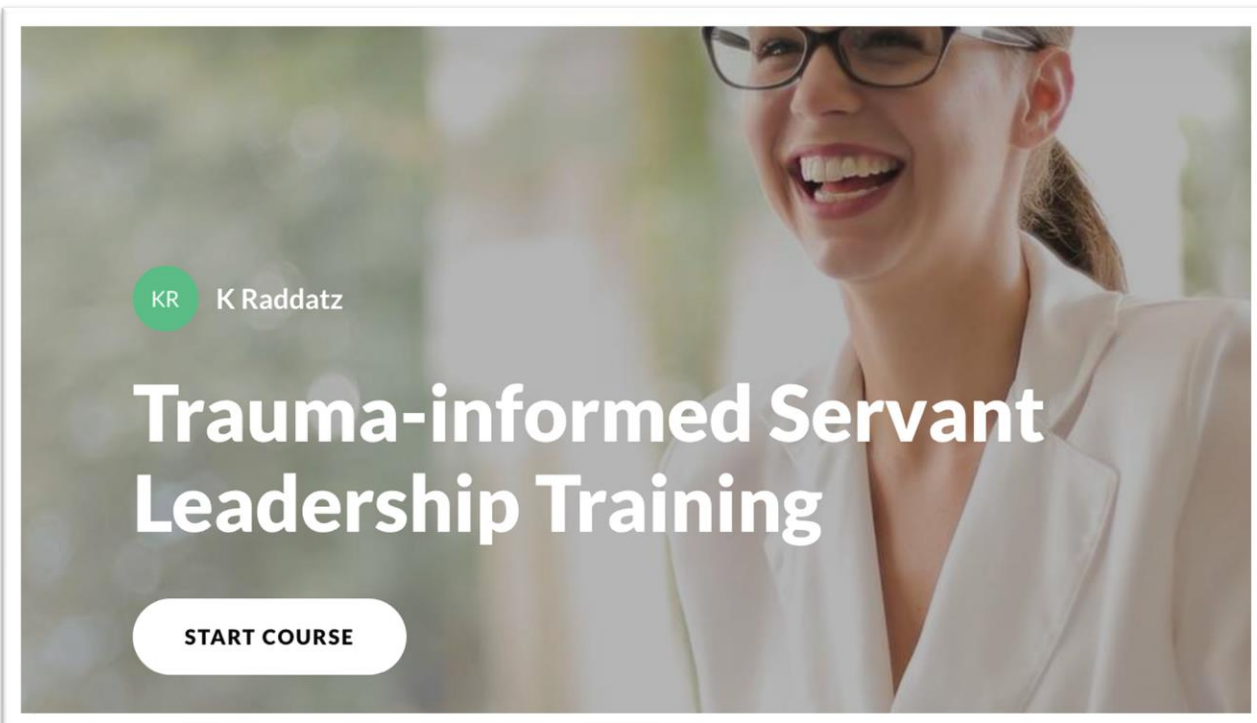
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Appendix

eLearning Modules

- The was created in Rise360 and begins with an introduction to the topic and learning objectives, followed by a course outline.



Trauma-informed leadership practices focus on building psychological safety among employees. When employees feel safe in their work environment, they are more likely to share concerns and experiences without fear of retaliation. By promoting psychological safety for your team, you will have satisfied, productive employees who experience less burnout and turnover.

In this course, you'll understand how the principles of trauma-informed servant leadership can create psychological safety among your employees. This course will familiarize you with how to:

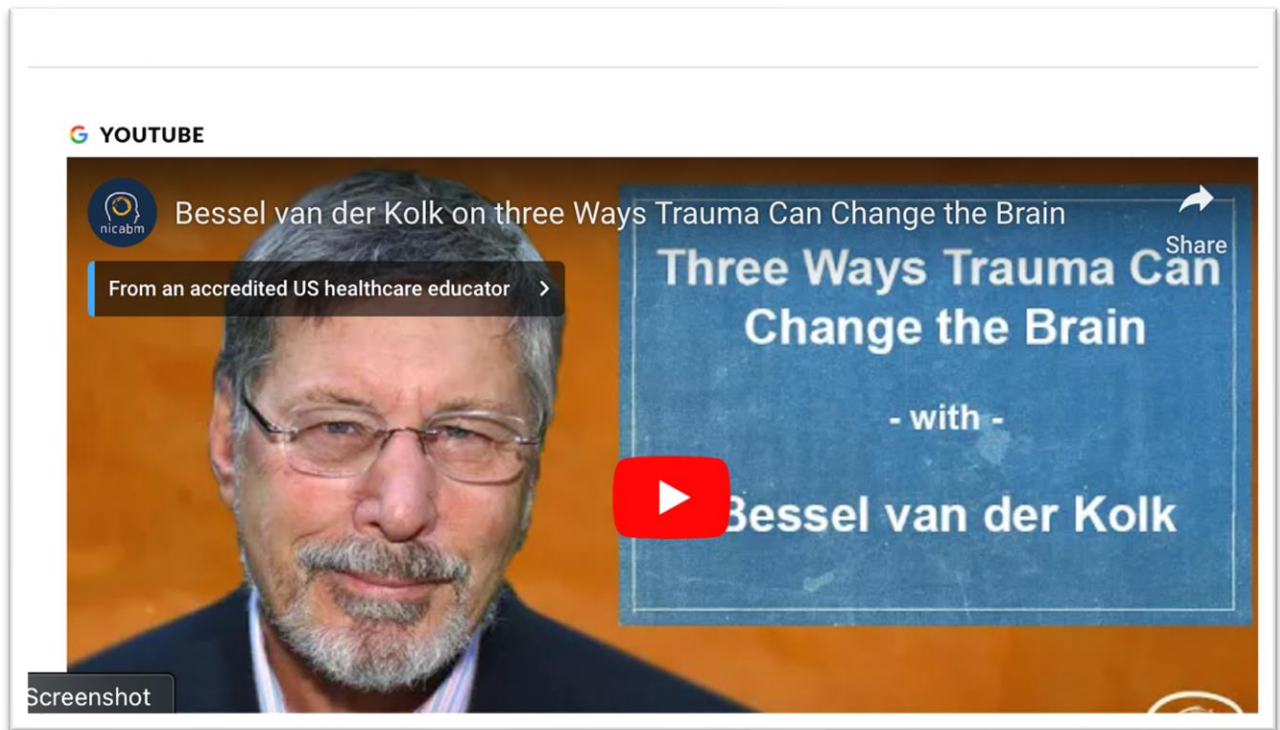
- identify the signs of trauma and explain the impact of trauma on the workplace

- compose an empathetic leader mission statement identifying the trauma-informed principles you hope to employ as a servant leader.

Begin with the first lesson below, or click “*Start Course*” above to get started.

- ☰ Identify Trauma Responses in the Workplace
- ☰ Key Concepts of Trauma-informed Servant Leadership
- ☰ Effective Communication and Listening

- The eLearning modules use videos to provide multi-modal learning opportunities and encourage engagement.



- Information is made interactive through Rise360 features such as accordion boxes which allow the learner to expand on a concept to read more details as shown in the following screenshots:

Three ways the brain is changed by trauma:

Enhanced Threat Perception

Filtering System

Self-Sensing

Enhanced Threat Perception —

Individuals who have experienced trauma develop a heightened sensitivity to potential threats in their environment. This heightened perception can manifest as increased vigilance, hypervigilance, or a tendency to interpret neutral stimuli as threatening. It is believed to be a result of the brain's adaptive response to danger, but it can also contribute to symptoms of anxiety, stress, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Filtering System +

- Interactivity is also encouraged through “flashcards,” where learners can click on words presented in a lesson to see an animated card flip over to reveal a definition.

Active Listening

Active listening in the workplace is a communication technique where the listener fully engages in understanding and responding to what the speaker is saying. It involves more than just hearing the words; it requires concentration, empathy, and a genuine desire to comprehend the speaker's message. Here's how active listening might look in the workplace:

Giving full
attention



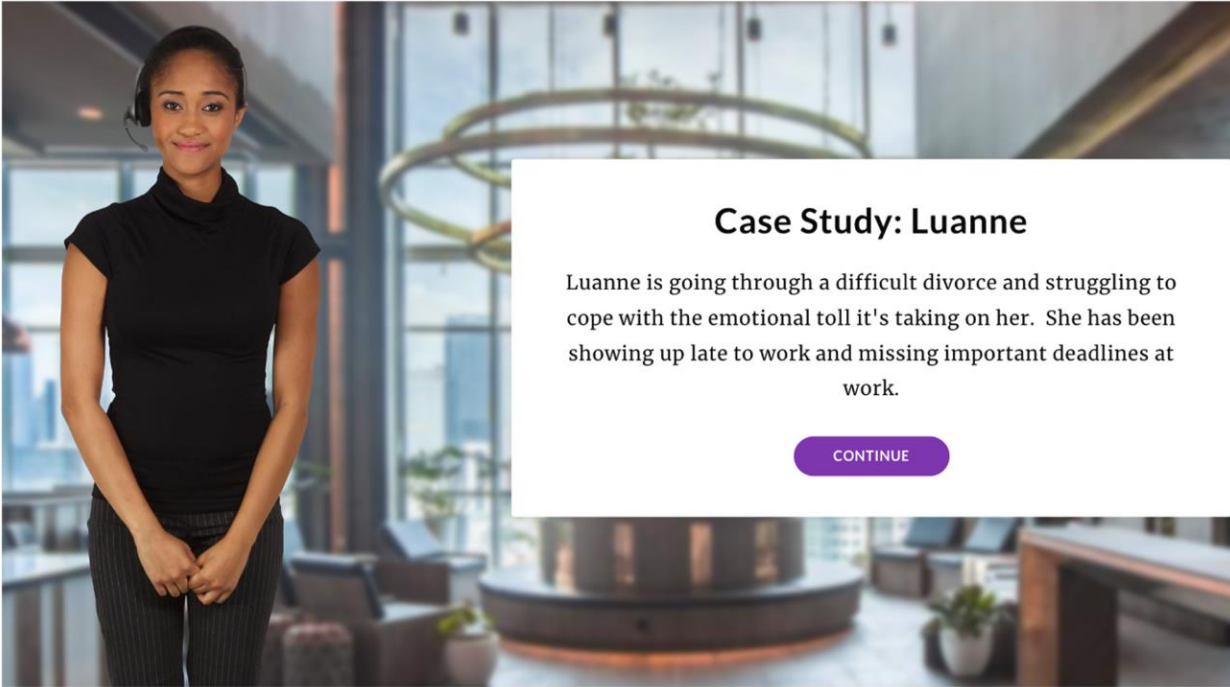
Asking clarifying
questions



Avoiding
interruptions



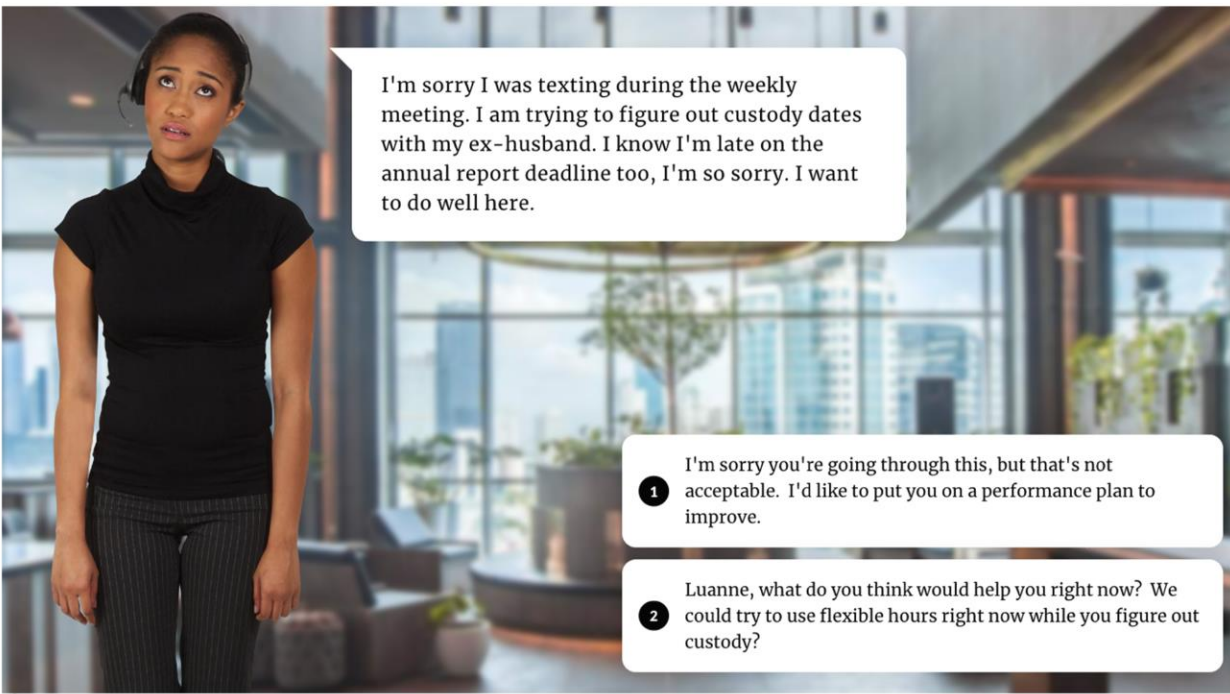
- Scenarios are interspersed throughout the learning to help learners respond to real-life situations using the knowledge gained in the modules.



Case Study: Luanne

Luanne is going through a difficult divorce and struggling to cope with the emotional toll it's taking on her. She has been showing up late to work and missing important deadlines at work.

[CONTINUE](#)



I'm sorry I was texting during the weekly meeting. I am trying to figure out custody dates with my ex-husband. I know I'm late on the annual report deadline too, I'm so sorry. I want to do well here.

- 1 I'm sorry you're going through this, but that's not acceptable. I'd like to put you on a performance plan to improve.
- 2 Luanne, what do you think would help you right now? We could try to use flexible hours right now while you figure out custody?

- Knowledge checks appear at the end of each module, prompting users to test their knowledge through a few multiple-choice questions.

What does the "S" in LASER method stand for?

Share

Silent

Shake head

Stop assumptions

SUBMIT

Questions to ask yourself:

How do I usually listen?	+
Why do I need to listen right now?	+
Who is the focus of attention?	+
What am I missing?	+
Am I getting in my own way?	+
Am I in an information bubble?	+