

How to Navigate the Shame "Shadows" at Work and at Home



In her 2022 Harvard Business Review article entitled "**Free Yourself from Shame at Work**", clinical psychologist Jenny Taitz cites shame as "the bully of emotions". I do not disagree. When I have felt shame in my life – and we all do by the way – it is like being beaten down by the biggest, baddest bully in front of all my schoolmates in the schoolyard.

It's embarrassing and has made me feel helpless. And it has taken me to the pits of despair with an overwhelming sense of not being worthy. Unlike guilt which occurs when we experience regret about one of our actions, shame is our emotional bully of feeling towards oneself.

Shame actually does have its place in our human experience. It can spur us onto towards change and drive us to be more in community – if we choose to react to it this way.

Even the professional the workplace is not immune to its insidious effects. And when it exists, it halts creativity and innovation. It removes a sense of belonging and safety. It erodes team dynamics and organizational culture.

It doesn't discriminate among roles. CEOs, front line leaders along with employees across the entire organization all experience it.

So recognizing the signs and addressing shame head-on is essential for creating a workplace that encourages growth and collaboration that results in business results.

Here's what I do when I experience those feelings of shame:

1. **Give Myself a Break:** I am so hard on myself which most likely comes from the messages I received as a child. Seemed like I could never satisfy my mother and so to earn her approval, I kept trying harder and harder. And when I didn't measure up, I felt shameful. Now this has transferred to my professional life. Friends and colleagues of mine tell me all the time to "give myself some grace." I must be very intentional about it because it's not my natural thinking style. Instead of harsh self-criticism, I must acknowledge that I am human – I

will make mistakes and face setbacks. I have post notes all over my office walls to remind myself of how my wonderful attributes, skills, values, and beliefs have supported me in my accomplishments. Besides, who wants to live a life feeling negative about oneself all the time. I don't!

2. **I Reach Out:** Making connections outside myself is the last thing shame wants me to do because it thrives in isolation. Neurologically, shame is a reaction to feeling threat and as you know, its either flight or fight. Since shame is an individual, inward experience, I can't fight with myself, so then I tend to "flee" or withdraw from others. But the wonderful gift of life is that by opening to trusted friends, family members, or a mental health professional, you can receive support and be "alive" in non-judgmental space. Talking about my feelings of shame diminishes its power over me and allows others to connect and grow as they have faced similar challenges and can offer a sense of camaraderie.

3. **I Start Keeping Track:** Curt Thompson, author of "[The Soul of Shame](#)" encourages making a note of anytime we feel shame which allows us to stop in the moment and reset the mind towards self-love. As he says, "Think of what your best friend would tell you." We do not need to figure out where the shame is coming from. What we need to do is be able to deal with it in the moment and change our thinking about it. In conclusion, acknowledging and addressing shame in the workplace is essential for creating a positive and nurturing professional environment. By fostering a culture of empathy, providing constructive feedback, and promoting a growth mindset, organizations can mitigate the impact of shame and pave the way for individual and collective success.

These techniques carry over into the coaching work I do with clients. By encouraging these practices to others, they are becoming change agents in their workplaces to help reduce the impacts of shame.

Wanting only the best for you,
Tricia

Click [here to watch our YouTube video](#): "Cultivating the Emotionally Intelligent Workplace: On Shame"

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Carolyn Swora
Workplace Culture Consultant
Author; "Evolve: The Path to Trauma
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Expected Takeaways

- Understand the costs of driving high performance on business vitality and company cultures
- The future of leadership styles required to drive top performance
- Explore ways that leaders can discover new levels of joy in their professional and personal lives



Moderated by Tricia Steege
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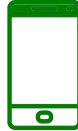
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Tricia Steege, CEO and Founder



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