

**VLA 2019**  
OCTOBER 24, 4PM

# HANDLING DIFFICULT PATRON BEHAVIORS

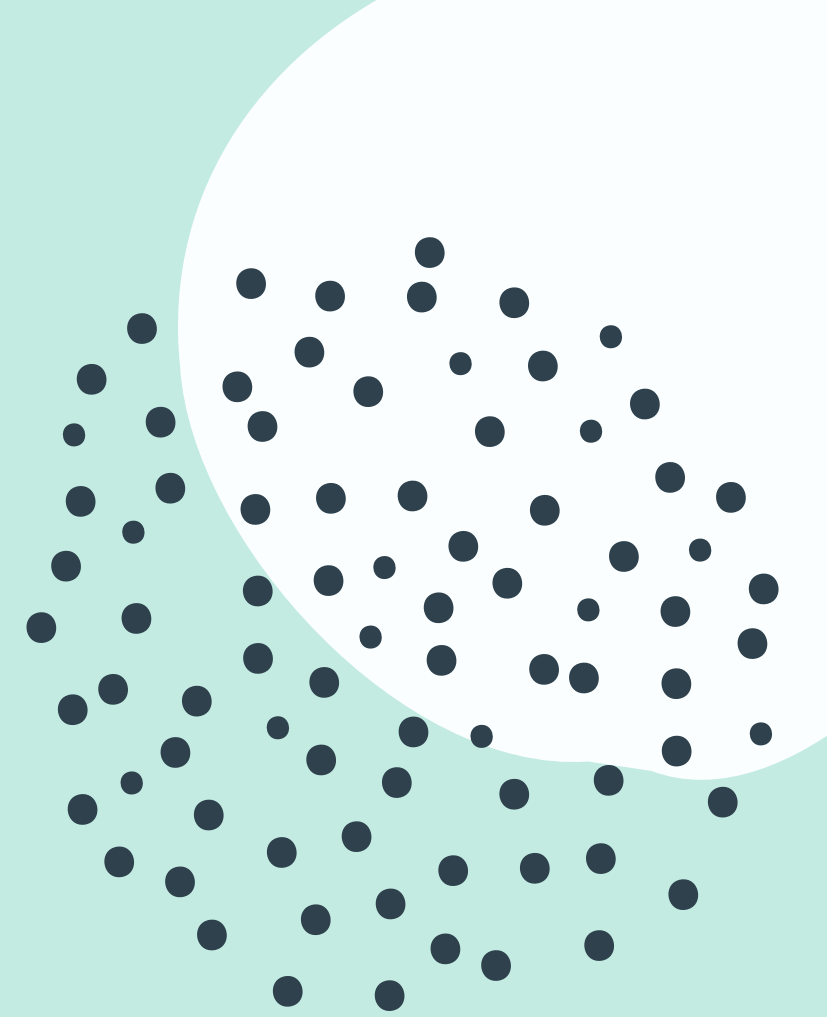
Presentation by Laurel Tacoma  
Branch Manager, Fairfax County Public Library



# Today's Presentation

## AGENDA

- Techniques to keep your cool
- Alternatives to saying "no"
- Ways to battle compassion fatigue
- Suggestions for responding to online criticism
- Approaches to growing your staff's customer service skills



Difficult Patron Behaviors  
| Laurel Tacoma

# DRAW THE LINE AT ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR



Difficult Patron Behaviors | Laurel Tacoma



## KNOW WHAT YOUR TRIGGERS ARE

Identify what repeatedly gets under your skin. It may be a person, it may be something they say or do, or it could be a circumstance that frustrates you.

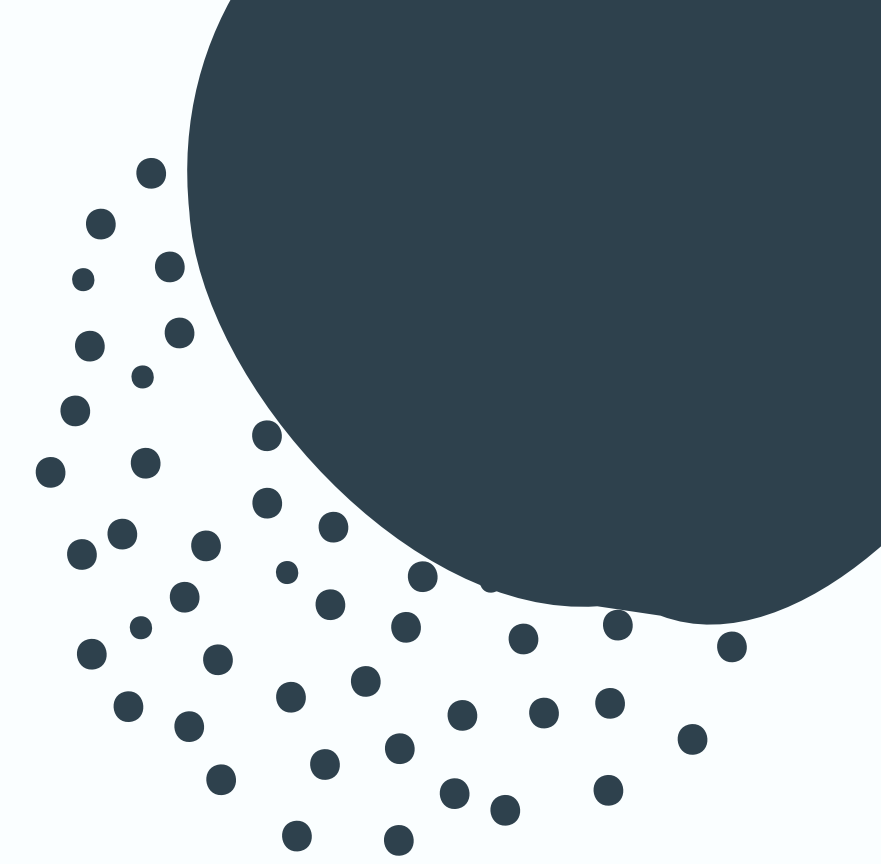
## RECOGNIZE THE AMYGDALA HIJACK

Be aware of how your body is responding to a stress response. When you perceive yourself under attack, complex decision-making disappears, as does access to multiple perspectives. Keep calm and breathe.

## NEVER ARGUE

Don't give in to the temptation. They will be wrong many times. If someone is very upset, avoid using the word "you" at all.

# Techniques





## LET THEM VENT

Listen to the whole story without interrupting.  
Sometimes all they want is to be heard.

## ACKNOWLEDGE AND REFOCUS

Acknowledge the customer's feelings and refocus the issue on solving the problem. This can help them calm down by no longer focusing on the thing that made them angry.

## TRY TO COME UP WITH A QUICK, EASY SOLUTION

If you can't, ask if you can work on the problem and get back to them in 24 or 48 hours. This also buys time for them to calm down.



# Techniques

## CUSTOMERS HAVE EMOTIONAL NEEDS AND RATIONAL NEEDS

Address both if possible. If not, address the emotion behind the words.

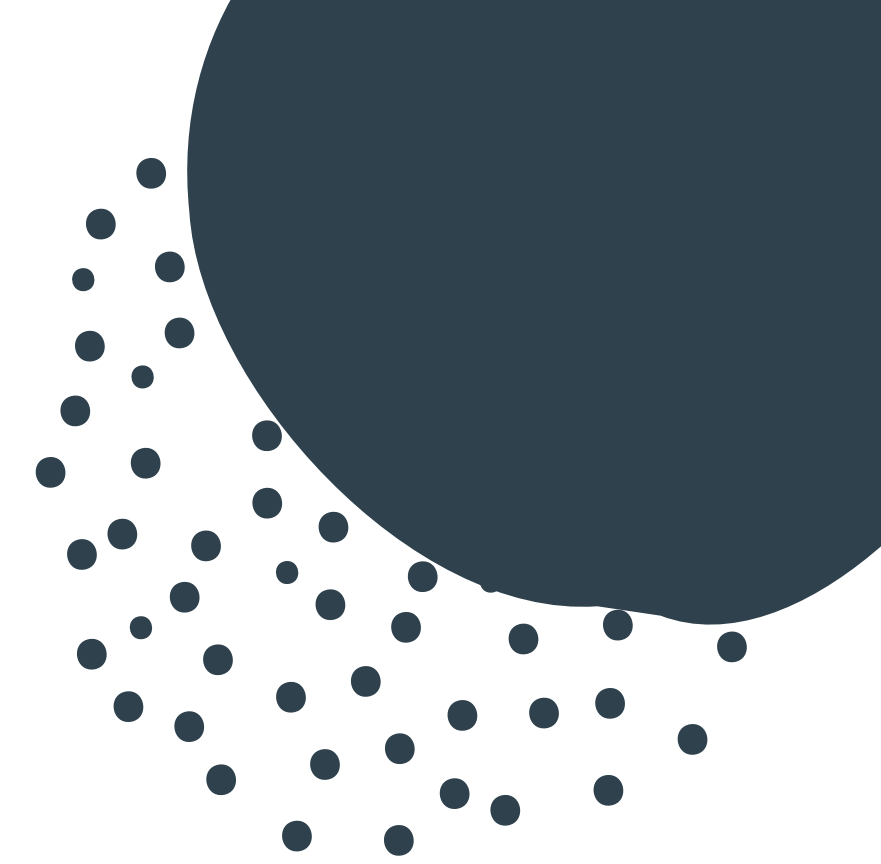
## FOCUS ON THE PATRON'S IMPACT ON THE LIBRARY

Keep the focus centered on what the patron does or doesn't do, should do differently, and how the issue at hand impacts the library's business in a negative way.

## OR MAKE IT MORE ABOUT THEM

"I see your things are very precious to you. Is there a way we can put them somewhere they'll be safe?"  
Make them seem valuable, seen.

# Techniques



# TECHNIQUES



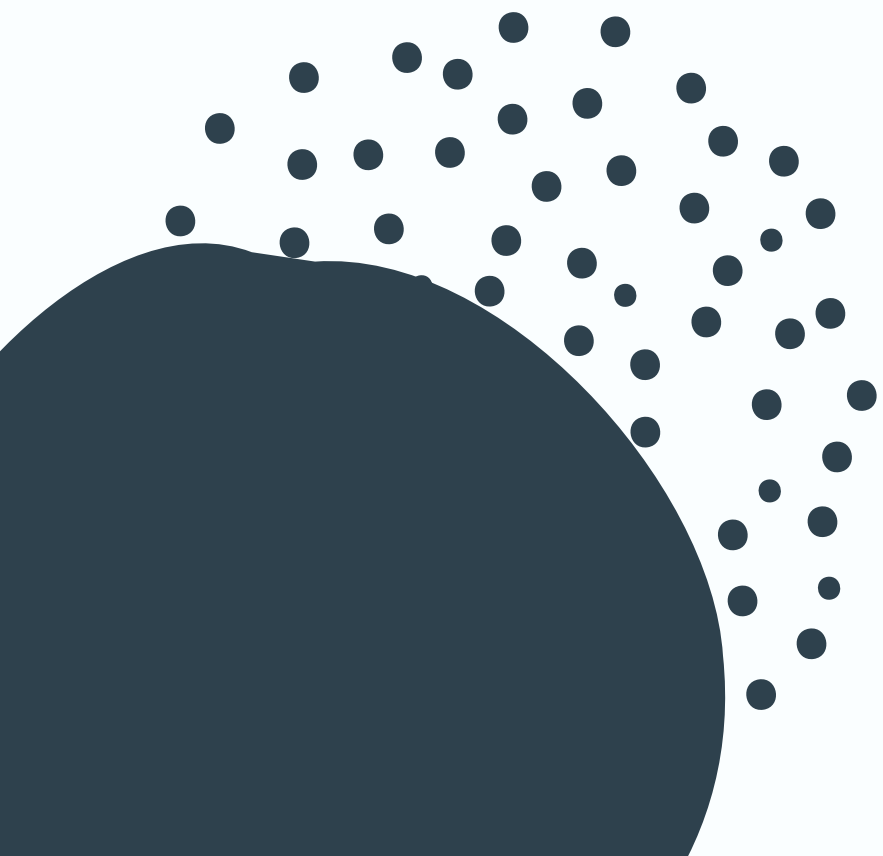
## KNOW YOUR LOCAL RESOURCES

Have entry referral cards handy to hand out to customers who are struggling. Know whose number to give out for shelters, the local Community Service Board location, nonprofits, drop-in centers, counseling services, health care, treatment, and so on.

## DELUSIONS SHOULDN'T BE DISPUTED OR REINFORCED

- Do not expect that rational thinking will have an effect on a person's delusions. If you debate the delusion, the person may expand the details to counter your argument or include you in the delusion.
- Do not smile or shake your head when the person speaks, as this may lead to misunderstanding. Do not touch the person without permission. Position yourself at the person's level if it is safe to do so. Do not whisper or laugh, as this may be misunderstood and may increase paranoia.
- Depending on how severe the psychotic symptoms are, one approach that may be effective is to validate the fear associated with the delusion while calmly explaining you see the situation differently.

Have an  
emotional/attitude  
anchor







# Alternatives to "No"

PRACTICE GIVING RESPONSES WITHOUT NO,  
CAN'T, DON'T, WON'T

Try to re-phrase things.

LEAD WITH WHAT YOU CAN DO

"We'll be happy to extend it a day, but I wasn't able to renew it again." "I'd be happy to look for tax assistance places, but we can't help with taxes ourselves."

MAKE THEM PART OF THE SOLUTION

Explore options with the customer. "Let me walk you through these steps to authorize the account."



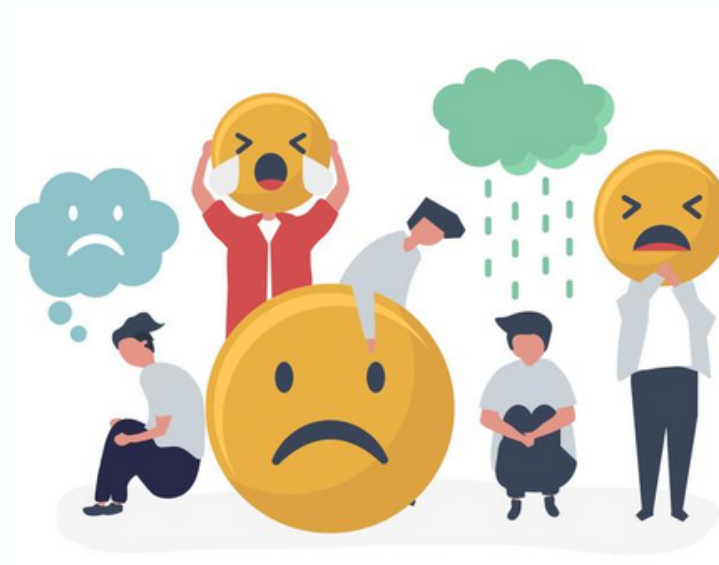
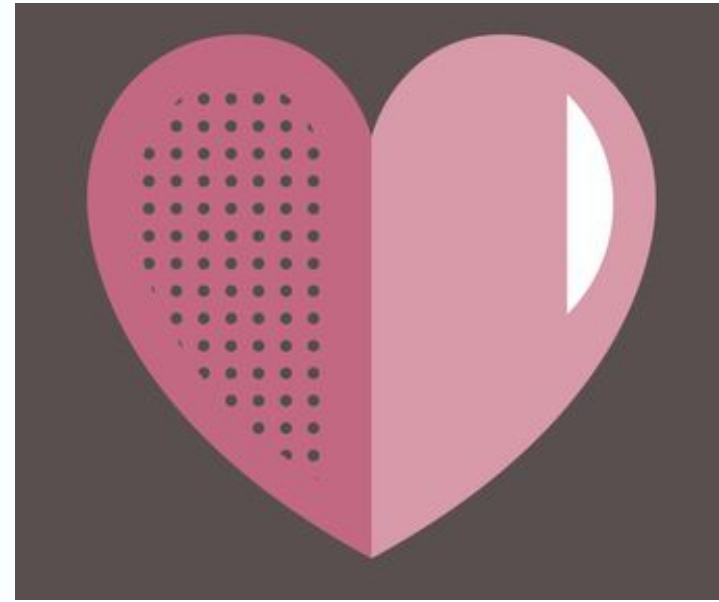
# Qualifier

SOMETIMES "NO" IS THE ONLY ANSWER

Patrons who need a black and white answer

Patrons who need clear boundaries drawn for them

# Compassion Fatigue



## WHAT IT IS

Jobs that require constant empathy can lead to “compassion fatigue,” an acute inability to empathize that’s driven by stress, and burnout, a more gradual and chronic version of this phenomenon.

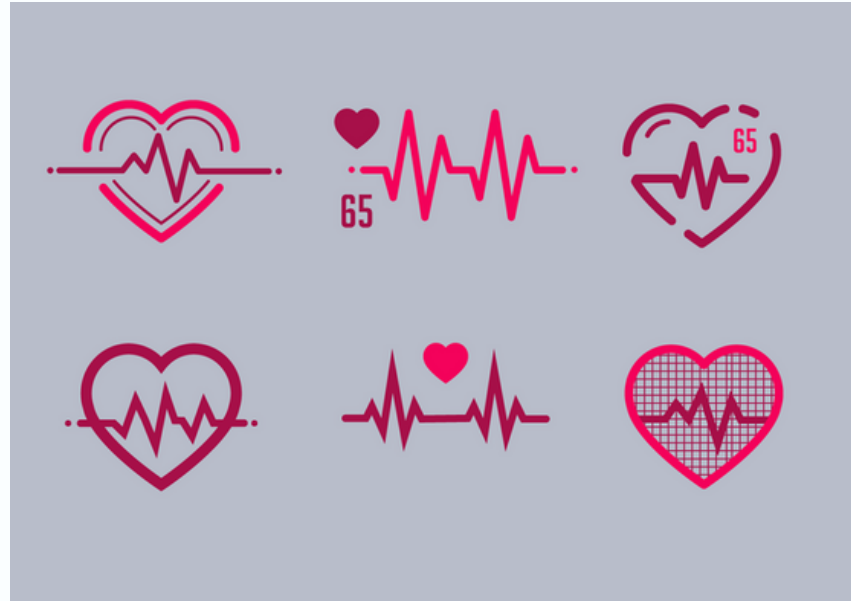
## KEY PREDICTORS

Anxiety, feelings of trauma, depression, preoccupation, attitude of hopelessness, anger toward perpetrators or causal events, lack of energy, weariness, sense of fatigue, exhaustion, and what researchers call excessive empathy, meaning the tendency to sacrifice one’s own needs for others’ (rather than simply “feeling” for people).

## IMPACT

Withdrawal from family or friends, absenteeism, sleep disturbance, impaired behavior and judgment, desire to quit, diminished performance ability.

# Compassion Fatigue



## PERSONAL HEALTH

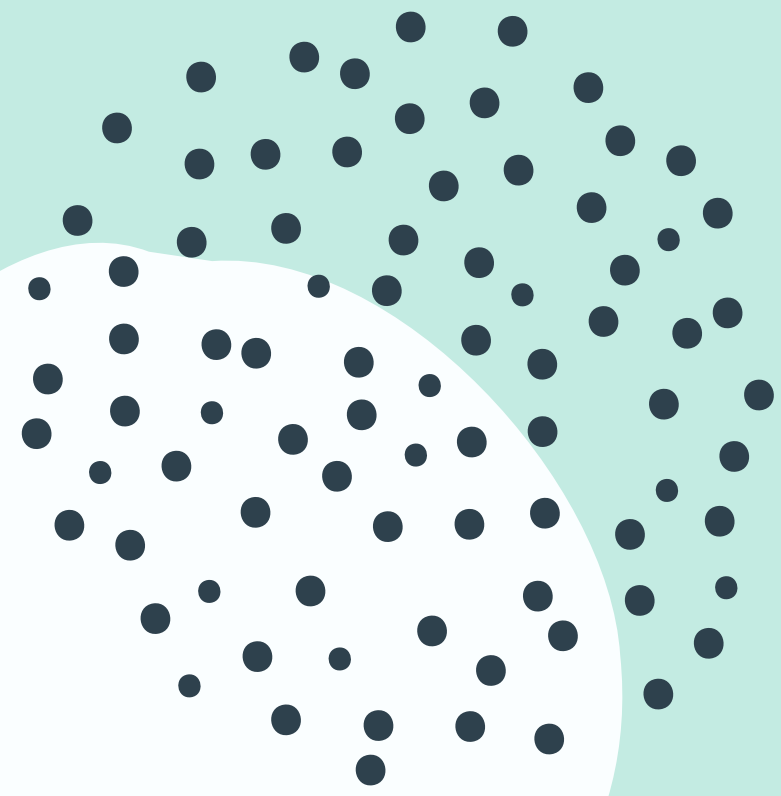
Elements of physical self-care include eating a well-balanced diet, getting adequate rest, exercising, movement throughout the day. Stress relief activities such as walking and yoga may also be helpful.

## SOCIAL HEALTH

Make time to connect with family, friends, pets, and people who share your non-work interests. Take time to attend artistic or cultural events that can be ways to restore perspective.

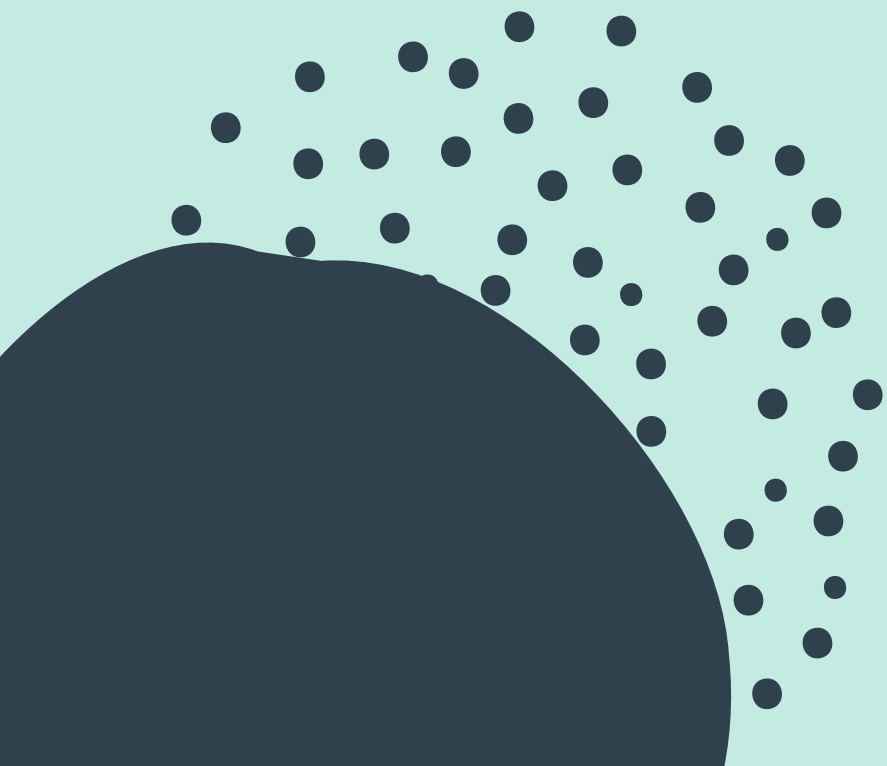
## MENTAL HEALTH

Elements of mental self-care include learning how to remain positive, journaling, meditation, building resiliency, mindfulness, taking time off work, deep breathing to relieve stress, progressive relaxation, and the use of guided imagery to enhance relaxation.



# Set Your Boundaries

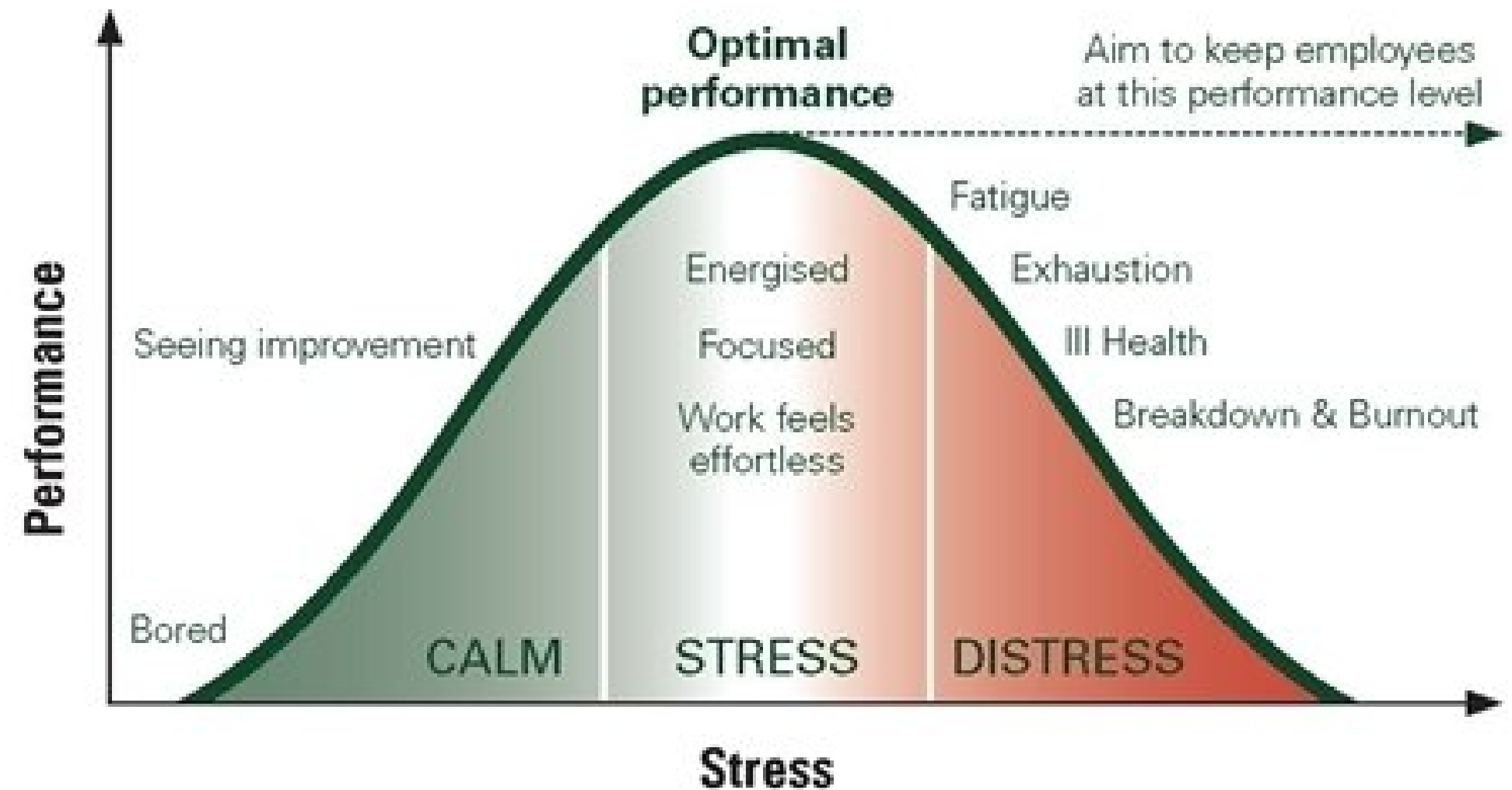
It is important to engage in both physical and psychological compartmentalization. Boundaries need to be drawn physically between work and home, and boundaries need to be established mentally and emotionally as well.

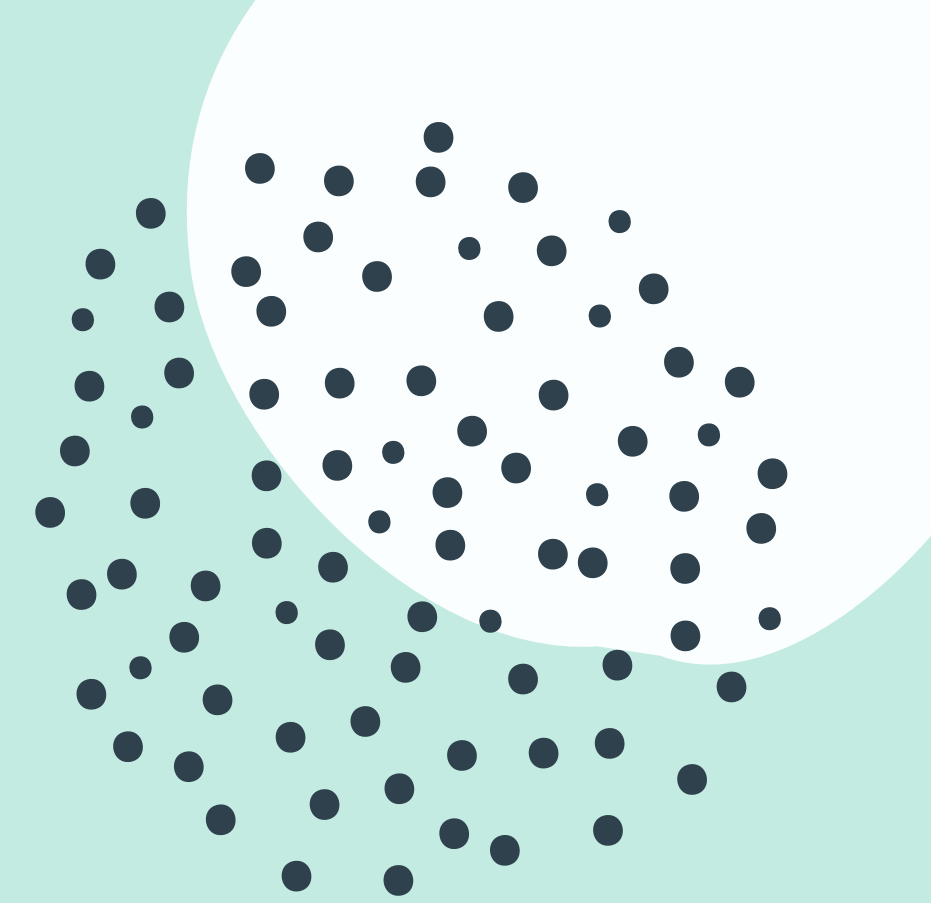


# Eustress vs Distress

The Yerkes-Dodson Human Performance and Stress Curve

## Human Performance Curve





# Responding to Online Criticism

When to address and when to leave alone

# Responding to Online Criticism

Usually better to address. Not responding is a response: It says “I don’t care about you.”

You need to interact with your customers in the channels *they* prefer, not just those *you* prefer.

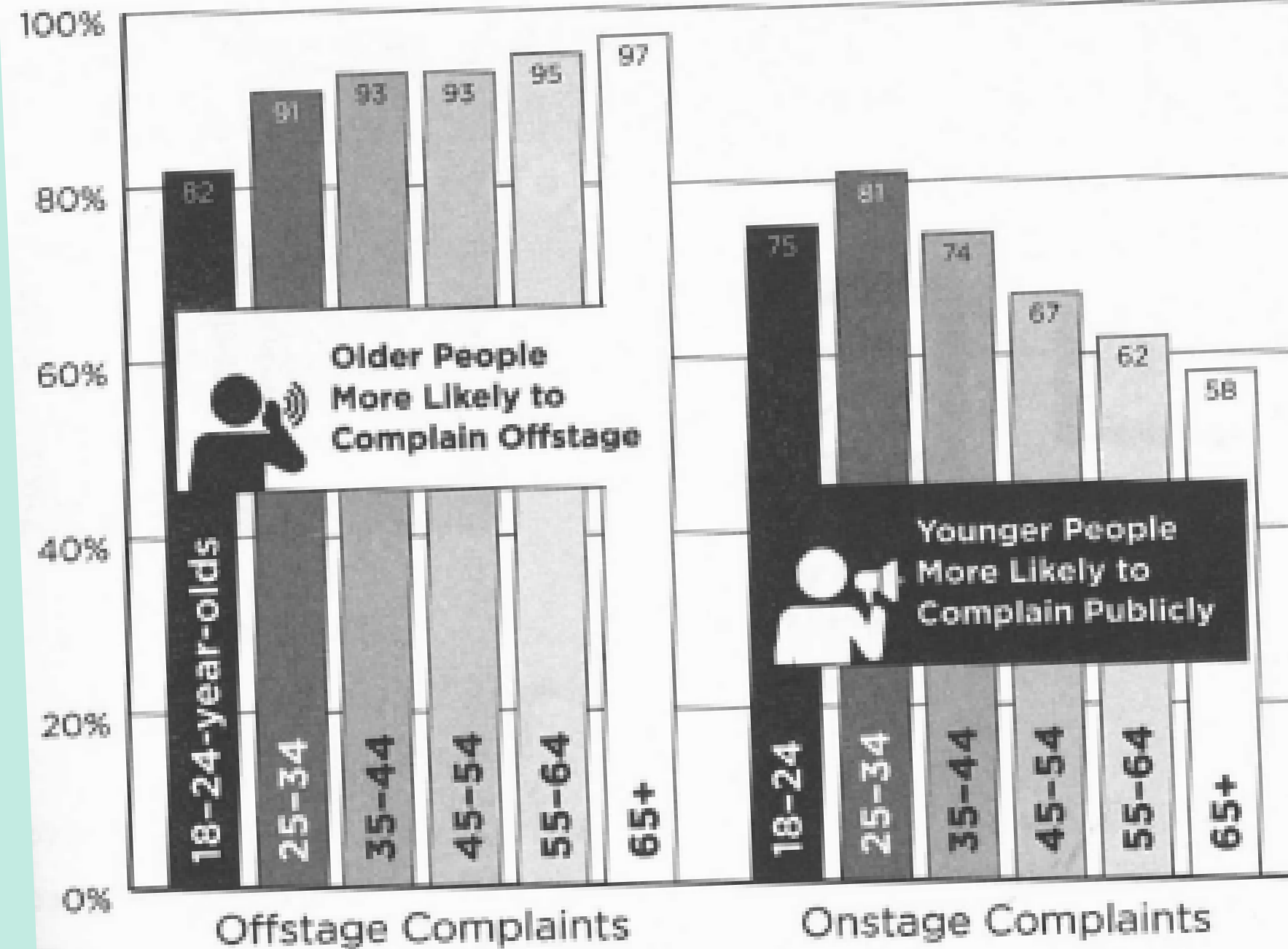
**THE SIMPLE ACT OF  
REPLYING TO A  
CUSTOMER ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA  
CAN INCREASE  
CUSTOMER  
ADVOCACY BY 20%**



# Get used to responding in an online forum

Customer service is a spectator sport: every onlooker is a potential customer.

Offstage and Onstage Complaints by Age



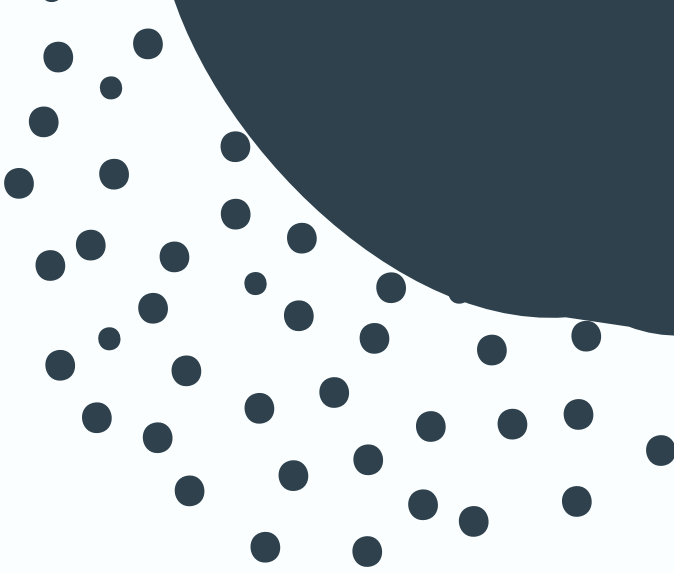
Edison Research and Jay Baer, 2015



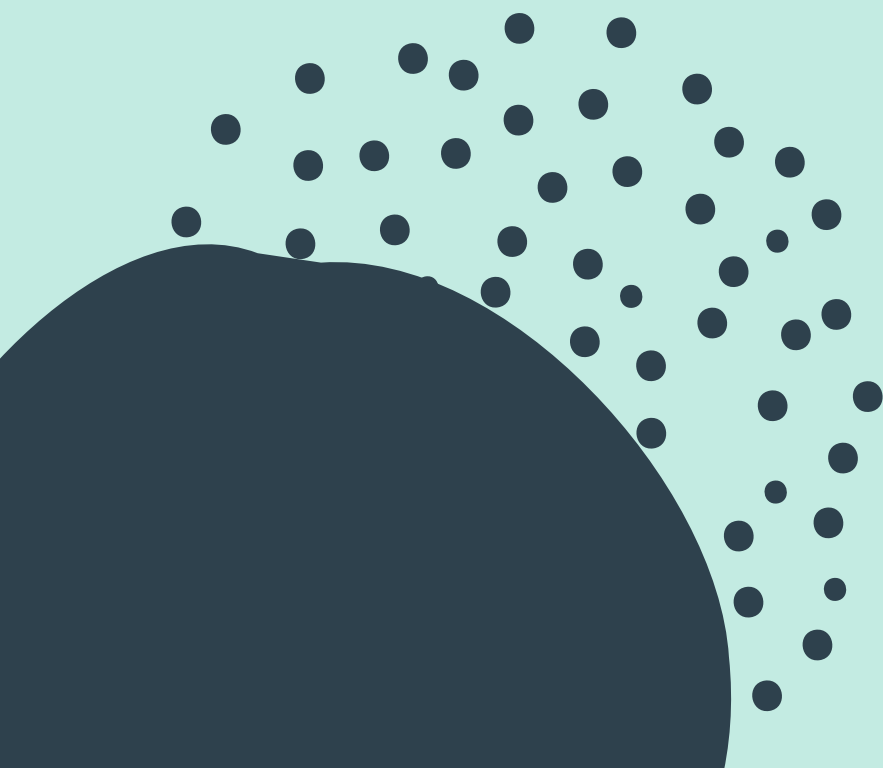
# Be careful of:

Political statements, endorsements (of candidates, vendors, products, etc), trolls, hate speech, conspiracy theories, falling into the Outrage Machine.

Unreasonable comments: If answering, try to answer them in private if possible. Offer to call or email.



Onstage  
complainers  
usually want an  
audience; offstage  
complainers want  
an answer.



# Approaches to growing your staff's customer service skills





## REPETITION OF VALUES

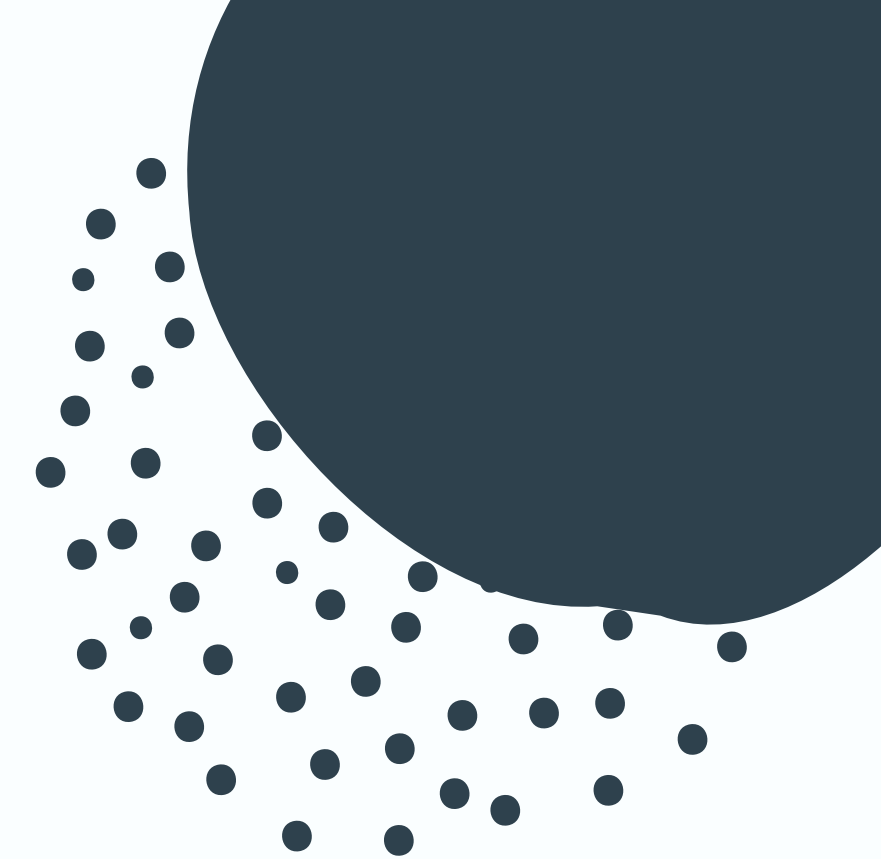
The core belief that values need to be discussed on a daily basis and that values can't be discussed enough.

## COMMON LANGUAGE

The inculcation of a common language among staff.

## POSITIVE STORYTELLING

The ability to capture, share, and inspire through tangible examples of what it means to live the values.



**Set the  
Foundation.**



## VISUAL SYMBOLS

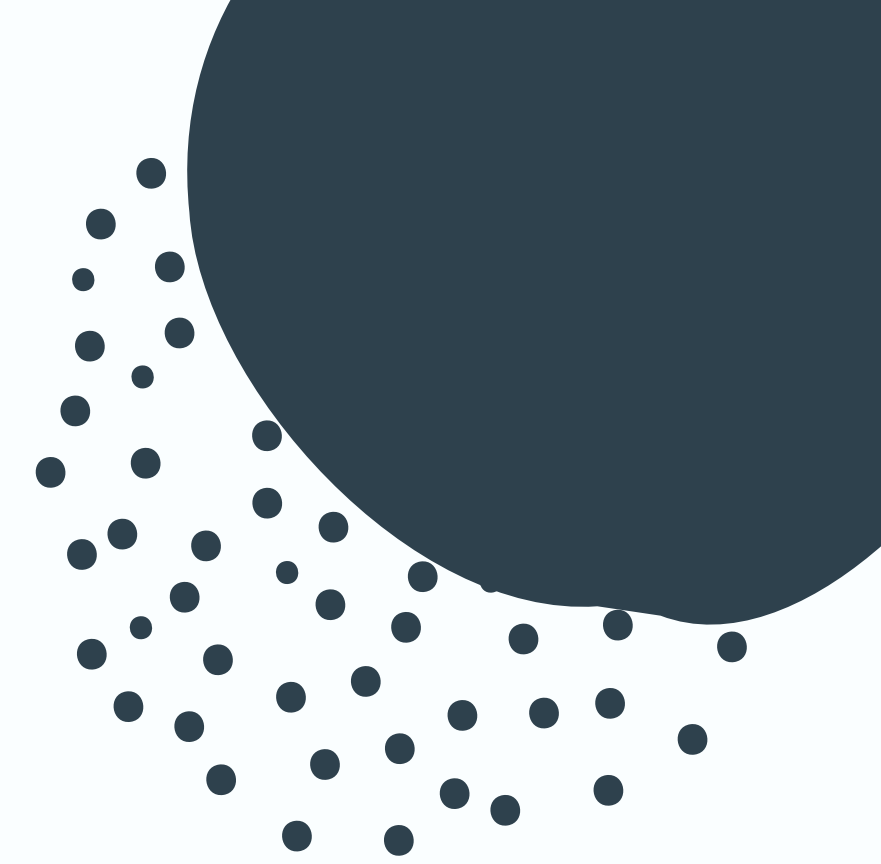
Back up your values visually in your work environment.

## EMPOWER THROUGH TRUST AND RECOGNITION

Hold leadership responsible for catching their staff doing things well.

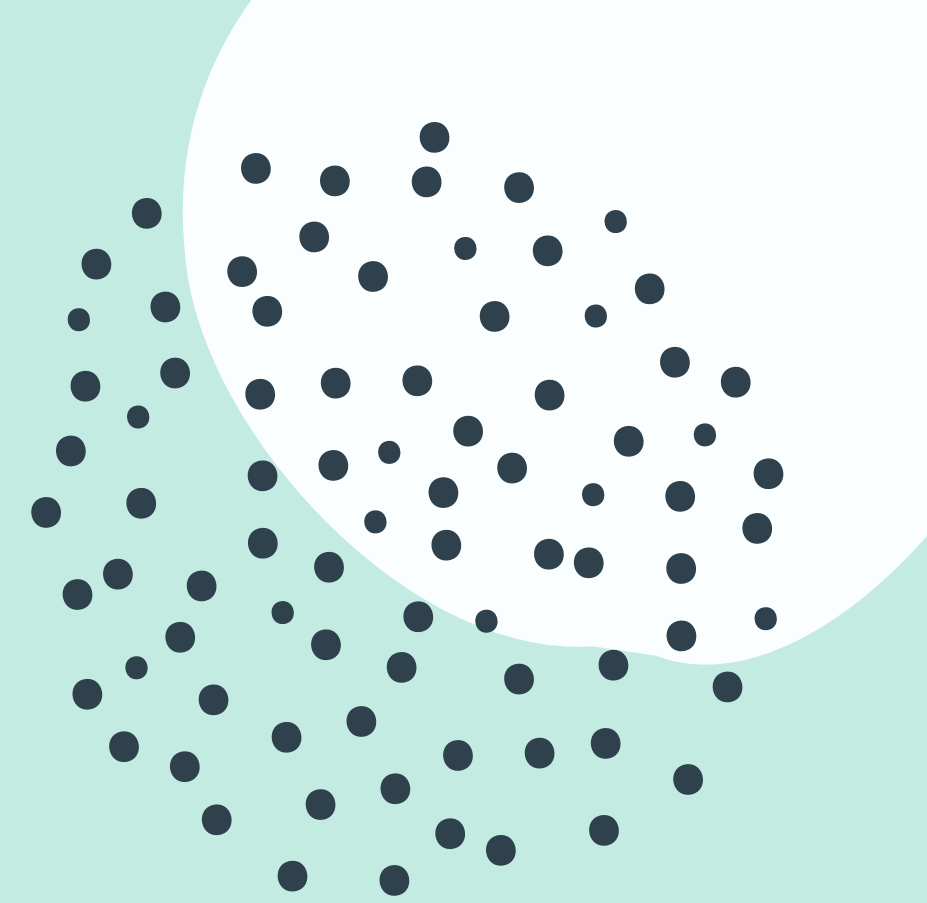
## MODEL THE BEHAVIOR

The active, daily presence of all leaders in the process and their commitment.



**Set the  
Foundation.**

# Striking Gold



- Ø Have you distilled your mission statement into a short, memorable, and operational set of phrases?
- Ø How regularly do you discuss the mission with your staff? How do you incorporate their feedback to ensure the mission is realized?
- Ø If asked, could everyone in your business provide a clear and accurate understanding of your company's mission and purpose?

## Resources

Difficult Patron Behaviors | Laurel Tacoma  
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- Albrecht, Steve. Preparing For the “Hygiene Talk.”
- Baer, Jay. Hug Your Haters: How to Embrace Complaints and Keep Your Customers.
- Bowers, Len, Geoff Brennan, Gary Winship and Christina Theodoridou. Talking With Acutely Psychotic People.
- California Library Services. Mental Health Initiative video series. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnHH\\_EDRIZg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnHH_EDRIZg).
- Chism, Marlene. Anger Management Lynda.com video.
- Cockerell, Lee. The Customer Rules: The 39 Essential Rules for Delivering Sensational Service.
- Cockerell, Lee. Creating Magic podcast.
- Dixon, Matthew. Effortless Experience: Conquering the New Battleground for Customer Loyalty.
- Goleman, Daniel. Emotional Intelligence.
- Hibbert, Christina. 8 Keys to Mental Health Through Exercise.
- Lipsky, Laura van Dernoot. Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others and The Age of Overwhelm.
- Mathieu, Françoise. The Compassion Fatigue Workbook: Creative Tools for Transforming Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Traumatization.
- Mental Health First Aid. [mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://mentalhealthfirstaid.org)
- Michelli, Joseph A. The New Gold Standard: 5 Leadership Principles for Creating a Legendary Customer Experience Courtesy of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness. [NAMI.org](http://NAMI.org).
- Quinn, Brian A. How Psychotherapists Handle Difficult Clients: Lessons for Librarians.
- Runkle, Kim. Psychosis: Responding To A Loved One In The Face Of Uncertainty. <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/June-2019/Psychosis-Responding-to-a-Loved-One-in-the-Face-of-Uncertainty>
- Toister, Jeff. [toistersolutions.com](http://toistersolutions.com).
- University of Buffalo. Self-Care Starter Kit. <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html>
- Wang K.L., Groth M. Buffering the negative effects of employee surface acting: the moderating role of employee-customer relationship strength and personalized services. American Psychological Association, 99(2), 341-350.
- Winch, Guy. The Squeaky Wheel: Complaining: The Right Way to Get Results, Improve Your Relationships and Enhance Self-Esteem.