

Name It To Tame It: Managing Leadership Overwhelm One Emotion at a Time



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Name It To Tame It: Managing Leadership Overwhelm One Emotion at a Time

Hello! I am here to tell you that you've got this! If we have learned nothing else during this pandemic, we have learned that emotions run high.

A lot of the time.

We have all travelled through the lows, the lower lows and even some highs on this wild ride. The pandemic has tested all of us. It has been especially difficult for those of us in the helping professions.

Now, as we are hopefully moving into recovery, we remain in completely unknown territory as we attempt to assess how the pandemic has changed us and perhaps what we would like to change.

But here is what we do know:

1. Throughout the pandemic we were forced to continually re-learn how to behave, how to cope, how to feel. Not to mention, we continually experienced a series of losses of many things that are important to us.
2. Now that we are moving forward, we are excited about setting and achieving new goals, but the recovery from all of these emotions are piled on top of what we already had going on before March 2020.

Enter the recipe for leadership overwhelm!

LIVING AND WORKING OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS
HAS BEEN A TRIP! SHOW YOURSELF SOME GRACE AS
YOU MOVE FORWARD.

The Pandemic has been different from any other crisis or disaster you have ever experienced, because the destruction has been invisible and ongoing.

We are recovering from the personal trauma, the ongoing stress from the interruptions to our businesses and the pressures of running a business and feeling responsible for our staff and patients.

All of this adds up to emotional overload. That will look different for all of us. Physical symptoms, yelling, crying, depression, anxiety, or just feeling like you are not yourself. Some are struggling with making changes to how we do business and re-establishing business goals, habits and connections.

Many of us have changed, and we are working on redefining our values, relationships and even ourselves.

So, to help you deal with the feels, I want to share the idea pioneered by psychiatrist and mindfulness expert Dan Siegel; the concept of "Name it to Tame it". This quick tool involves taking a quick "time out" to label feelings and decide what to do with them in a purposeful way rather than succumbing to the behaviours we want to change. This is especially important for us in the helping professionals. We put pressure on ourselves to "keep it together" for our patients and colleagues every day. But over time, something has got to give.

The Domino Effect

Here is how a domino effect of reactive thoughts might show up for you.

On the left, the negative event takes place and our natural responses kick in. On the right hand side, see how naming our feelings can create a different outcome.

EVENT TO ACTION

Your Body
clenches, stiffens

You Think...

"WTH?! How could he possibly think he's right?"

You Feel
pissed off

Your Body
ramps up the stiffness and clenching
fight response

You Decide
you're going to "let him have it"

NAME THE FEELING

Your Body
first stiffens, surges, or in some way
alerts you that upset is here

You Think...

"My body is telling me I'm pissed."
(deep, slow breath in)

You Recognize
"I'm having upsetting thoughts." (slow
exhale out)

You Feel
"Pissed . . . pissed . . . pissed . . ." (deep,
slow breath in)

Your body slows down (slow exhale
out)

You feel, "hurt, frustrated . . ." (deep,
slow breath in) and decide to wait
until you are ready to respond.

You are learning how to respond, instead of letting your triggers lead you. You are observing thoughts and feelings and then you are putting some space between them and your actions.

Ultimately, by labelling our feelings, we are aiming to create a distance between ourselves and our experience so that we that we give ourselves the opportunity to choose how to respond to the situations in front of us, rather than simply responding on auto-pilot, doing the same things (ex.) yelling, and experiencing the same results (ex.) remorse and shame.

We are trying to give ourselves space as our reactions are boiling up.

Think about a time you thought a problem was HUGE. If you had the opportunity to take it up with the person whom you perceived to be the root of your problem, you would have blasted them. But alas, that person isn't available, so you dive into paperwork instead. When you finally get a chance to talk to the person, you are still angry, but the visceral, hard-core angry reaction has dissipated. THIS is what I am talking about here...except you are CHOOSING to put some distance between yourself and the other person.

The effects are beneficial on so many levels:

Your Body: avoids the acute stress response and physical toll it can take

Your Relationship: won't be damaged by saying hurtful things

Your Mental Health: won't suffer from guilt or regret

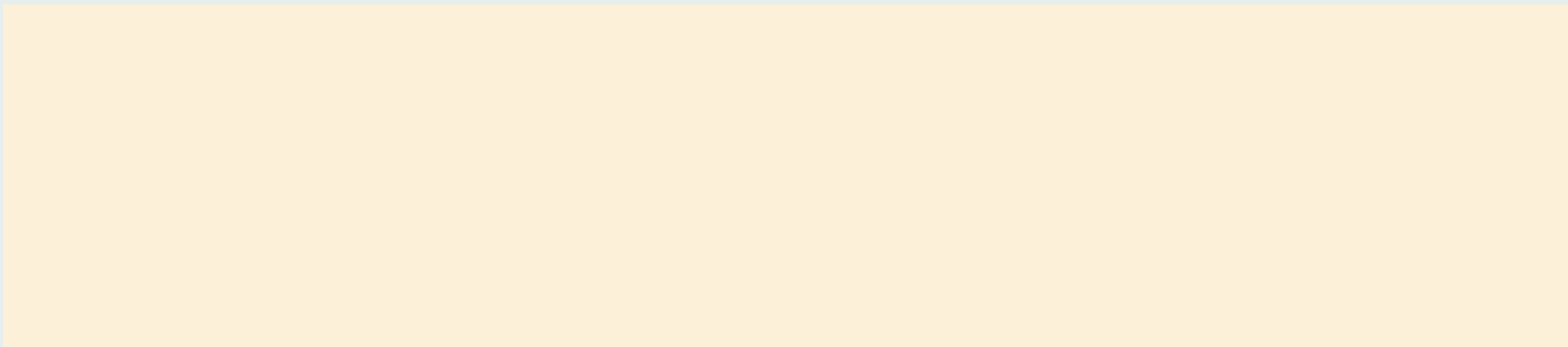
You may even walk away with a win-win and a peaceful resolution to the problem at hand.

The 3 Question Formula

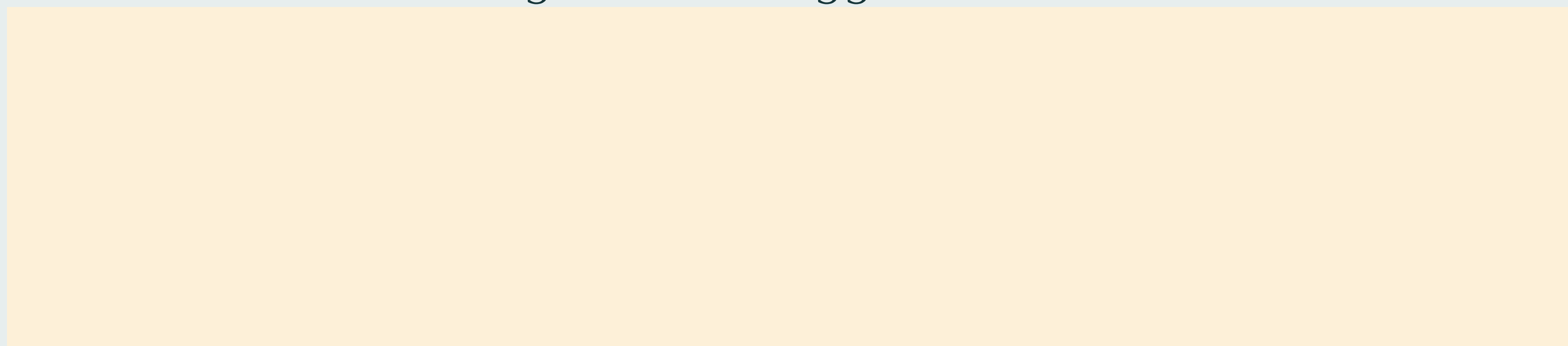
Name it to Tame it!!

Picture this: you learn a new associate is consistently late for sessions and their patient retention is low. Your support staff complains that they are not following intake procedures. You have provided training, coaching and support, but they still struggle and don't seem to care. The distress ripples through your body as you open an email from your landlord advising of a rent increase in the new year. This may not be your scenario...but everyday occurrences can become catastrophic when we are stressed!

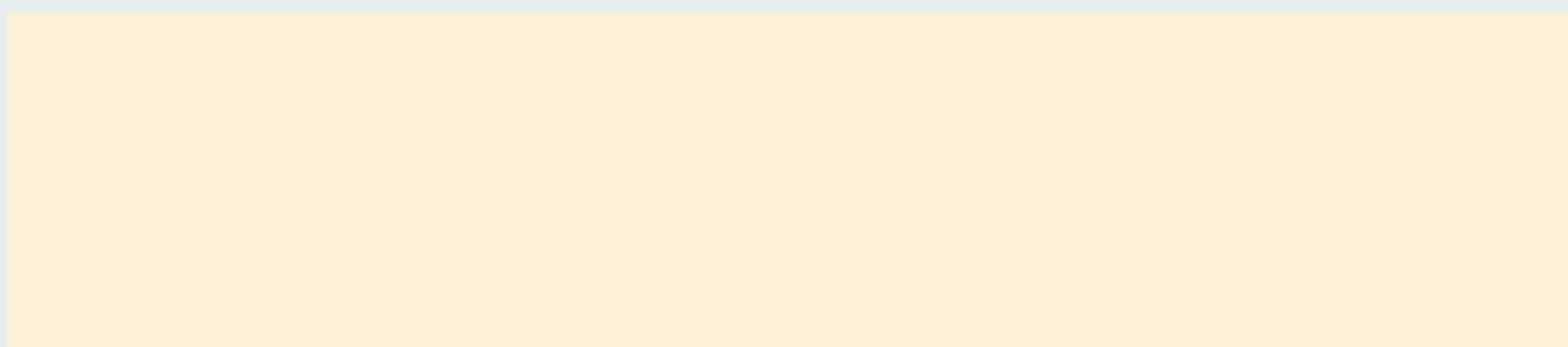
Q1 Name what you're feeling
(ie) sad, pissed, frustrated, overwhelmed, hopeless...



Q2 Think about what you need
(ie) a walk, a hug, a bath, doggo love, a snack...



Q3 List the actions you can take to feel better right now
(ie) call a friend, journal my feelings, eat, rest, cuddle...



The Domino Effect

Now use this blank page to think about an event that has happened to you (or is happening right now). Think about the way you would usually act and react. Then, look at alternatives, while keeping in mind that concept of putting space between the thought and feelings before you and make actual choices about behaviours rather than engaging in that immediate, reactive response.

EVENT TO ACTION

Your Body

You Think

You Feel

Your Body

You Decide

NAME THE FEELING

Your Body

You Think

You Recognize

You Feel

You are learning how to respond, instead of letting your triggers lead you.

You are observing thoughts and feelings and then you are putting some space between them and your actions.

Check In So You Don't Check Out!

Stress, struggles with self-care, and even compassion fatigue and burnout are occupational hazards for those in the helping professions.

If you are finding that your attempts to "Name it to Tame it" are becoming increasingly challenging, it may be time to check in on yourself to see if you are dipping your toe into the stress pool, or you are flailing your arms in the deep end. Here are some self-assessment tools that may provide some clarity.

<http://www.community-networks.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Self-Assessment-Tools-Compassion-Fatigue-Feb-22-2010.pdf>

<https://appliedpospsych.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Stress-and-Burnout-Questionnaire.pdf>

<https://self-compassion.org/self-compassion-test/>

This is not a substitute for professional diagnosis or advice. If your scores show that you're at risk and you are concerned about yourself, ask for help. Psychotherapists are positioned to show empathy, and help you care for yourself so that you can do the work you love, caring for others. Getting ahead of stress, burnout and compassion fatigue is key!

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You can get through this. You deserve support.
Head here for resources, tips, supports
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Hey! I'm Alison, the owner of Maratos Counselling & Consulting Services and The Practice Companion. I hope you found this helpful.

I specialize in helping my therapist colleagues and other helping professionals to avoid burnout and love their practices through ensuring that their mental health and business health is taken care of.