

Betsy Kindall:

I'm Betsy Kindall.

Nicole Fairchild:

I'm Nicole Fairchild.

Stacy Moore:

And I'm Stacy Moore.

Betsy Kindall:

And this is Arkansas A.W.A.R.E., a project to advance wellness and resiliency in education.

Welcome back everybody to the most wonderful time of the year.

Nicole Fairchild:

The most wonderful time of the school year. Not. I have to say, Betsy. I was in a school district the other day doing some after school PD, and I said something about February is kind of the pits.

Betsy Kindall:

It's rough.

Nicole Fairchild:

The holidays are behind us. There's none for a long time. And then-

Betsy Kindall:

With the exception of weather, there's no break in sight until spring break.

Nicole Fairchild:

And testing's coming up. And it's a tough place to be. And I did have one of the teachers say, "You know what? I love my job. I love coming to work every day. I just get more tired this time of year." And I was like, "Oh, what a lovely reframe, because I'm ready to go into the pits and be like, this part of the year stinks." And they were so good. They were like, "No, I'm just a little more tired."

Betsy Kindall:

Yeah, I'm more than a little more tired. I think we also-

Nicole Fairchild:

A level of exhaustion-

Betsy Kindall:

Well, and we want to hibernate this time of year as humans, but what we're going to talk about today is morale. Because I think this time of year in school buildings, morale does sort of wane. It gets a little low.

And we want to just take a few minutes to talk about some things you could do out there to improve your school's morale.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, I know some things like and I-

Betsy Kindall:

Oh, do you now?

Nicole Fairchild:

Well, yeah, but to me, boosting morale is also a little bit of common sense. But I think the trouble is that a lot of times people feel like it has to be a top down procedure. It needs to come from the top down to really do something that boosts morale. And I understand that I... And I don't disagree that if it comes from the top down, then it makes a huge difference. But even if it doesn't-

Betsy Kindall:

Oh, yeah. Because I think that there's something to be said for empowering the students in your classroom in that way. You know what I mean? Things that... Well, we had talked about though in the last episode, but just making it feel different. And that can absolutely come from a student too.

Nicole Fairchild:

Oh, sure.

Betsy Kindall:

That can come from the student level.

Nicole Fairchild:

Absolutely. I mean, we all have a part to play in how the culture feels. So just real quickly, I don't want to spend a lot of air time on the things that are wrong, but if these things are wrong, you got to identify them so that you can move forward toward the right things. And if there's a lack of growth, like if you do not feel professionally developed or professionally supported, if there's a lack of communication or clarity in your mission, if there's a constant set of leadership changes or leadership problems, those things are definitely going to interfere with your ability to have a good morale.

Betsy Kindall:

And again, not to dive off into the deep end or become too political, we've obviously had changes in our state that I think our educators are feeling. We're all anticipating the release of a new initiative from our new governor and our new commissioner. And so as we're waiting, I think we cannot overlook the fact that it's weighing heavy on our educators across the state. A lot of them are stressed. And I think that it absolutely affects morale. And not that I'm honing in on those things, but change in general, change... Massive amounts of change at the system level it can really put a plug in any kind of positive morale.

Nicole Fairchild:

Well, what I'm thinking too is anticipation itself can be tiring. Whether you're anticipating because you're excited or you're anticipating because you're cautious or fearful. Either way, anticipation in and of itself can be emotionally exhausting. And we talk a lot on this podcast about whether or not you have the bandwidth, you know what I mean? Enough of a buffer or enough bandwidth to be able to deal with the day-to-day stresses. And so just anticipation, I think it draws down on the bandwidth.

It takes a lot of data away from your bandwidth. And so we just need to be aware of that. It's not going to stay this forever, and we're going to have some closure and some answers and all of those things. And testing's going to come, and testing's going to go, and all of those things are going to happen. But we do need to be aware of where we're at and how things are impacting us. I mean, that's in and of itself, emotional intelligence, our ability to do that. And actually, I've got a whole list of things here that do help to boost morale. But one of the things I would say I think makes a huge difference, and I'm wondering what you think is working with people who do have emotional intelligence.

Oh, yes. So do I think that makes a difference? Absolutely. And I think if you're out there thinking, oh, well, where do I sit on that likert scale? You know, can actually do a self-assessment for your emotional IQ if you wanted to. There's tons out there, to be honest. But I think that if you are... A huge part of emotional intelligence is understanding how you feel, why you feel that way, and the things that are impacting that. But in addition to that, it is honing in on how other people feel. Because when we have a high emotional IQ, it helps us identify or basically hone in on those folks that are number one, not doing well, but even hone in on those folks that may be doing really well.

I've noticed Johnny, for example, is he seems to be happier, and I feel like that it's the best word I can use is intuitive. To be intuitive and insightful to see as a result of how people are behaving, maybe how they are, how well are they? And I do think... I get this question a lot in just work and other areas of my life, but I think that some folks may be born with a really tuned in emotional IQ, but I think that's also a muscle that you can work.

Oh, it absolutely is.

Betsy Kindall:

So no matter where you are on the emotional IQ scale, I think there's always areas for improvement, and I think it's something that you can work at to be in a better place. How does that affect morale in every single way?

Nicole Fairchild:

Absolutely. Because the things that, I just did a couple quick Google searches, what are the ways to boost morale? And they all pretty much say the same thing, but basically what they say is work with people who have a high EQ, emotional quotient. Work with... Because what they're saying is communicate clearly and often. Well, for me to be able to communicate clearly, I need to know what you need to know, and I need to be able to express it in a way where I make sure that you've got it. And communicating often is also, even if you're not entirely sure how to do that, communicating often is an easy first step. Because when people send an email and their supervisor takes three days, a week, maybe never to reply, they feel devalued. When they send an email and they get a reply within three hours, they feel valued. And that's just the simple truth. So when we reply quickly, when we answer promptly that's a simple thing to boost morale. Not a big deal, but really an important thing.

One of the other things that a lot of these references talk about is just recognizing employees in some way. And I've seen... We follow several different school districts just for our work, and I've seen several of

them doing Facebook posts and showcasing different people. And of course then the community comments and they're like, we love our sro or whatever. And those things are great. They don't take a lot of effort. They don't take a lot of energy, and they take zero dollars and they're making an impact on morale.

Betsy Kindall:

Exactly.

And so yeah, it'd be great if that came from the top down, but what can you do in your own hallway to recognize the people that you're working with day to day, side by side? And just to maybe be able to look them in the eye and say, "You know what, Betsy, it's been crazy town around here, but I am so thankful I work with you because you bring this and this to the-"

Nicole Fairchild:

And as an educator, I think it's fascinating because when you ask that question, what can you do in your hallway? You can do in your hallway with the adults? The same thing you need to be doing with your kids too. Making eye contact, recognizing them, giving them the recognition or validation that they matter. Listening, active listening.

Betsy Kindall:

Absolutely.

All those things that, again, go back to EQ or emotional IQ. In order to do all of those things well, you obviously have to be in tune with yourself and others.

Nicole Fairchild:

How much do you think it is setting your radar different? We talk about this quite a bit in trainings. I used to talk about this a lot in therapy, but when we're talking with how to make behavior change in kids, one of the things we often talk about is set your radar to what they're doing, right. We have a natural inclination to notice what people are doing wrong.

Betsy Kindall:

Yes. And I think that some people have not only a natural inclination, but their personality or habitual way that they work is to hone in on correction instead of empowerment.

Nicole Fairchild:

Right. But even with my colleagues and my peers, if I don't ever notice you unless you get on my nerves, that's not good. That's not good for morale. But then if I'm able to notice and appreciate what you're bringing to our team, what you're bringing to the table, I mean, that's actually kind of the fun that we have when we do the Enneagram training. It's the reason we do the Enneagram training. That right there is because I do believe it improves morale. Because the whole point of it is to increase everybody's emotional intelligence just a little bit. Can you notice even if other people aren't like you, and they come at the world from an entirely different way, and they see the world through an entirely different mindset, can you still appreciate what they bring to the table? Can you notice it? Can you be thankful for the good parts of it and give them grace for the bad parts because you got bad parts too.

Betsy Kindall:

Yeah, that's right.

Nicole Fairchild:

Can we do this? So that's always a fun one. I think one of the other things that is interesting in some of this research about what boost morale is give employees feedback, which is a little tricky because in education, the feedback is often test scores. But I would say in education, the feedback needs to be different than those outcomes. Those are, that's going to happen anyway. So can we give other feedback? You make it easy to work here.

Betsy Kindall:

Oh, yeah. And I say this, I've said this to people, and they're like, right. But I think ideally, if you have the right culture and the right environment, and I'm thinking about our team, like our AWARE team, I think we could do this. I would totally embrace 365 feedback. How are you feeling or giving you your critique like the goods, the bads, here's some strengths, here's some weaknesses now in return, how are you feeling about what you need from me?

Nicole Fairchild:

What do you need from me to help you do that? Or do you have feedback from me to help me do my job better? And being open and receptive to that information. And I think in doing that, it sets a tone of collaboration, community, networking, and respect.

Betsy Kindall:

And I think a lot of people are like, oh, man, I'd love to do that for my supervisor. But the deal is, y'all got to go first. You have to be willing to say, "I'll go first. I am willing to take and receive that kind of feedback." This right here says that studies have found that 87% of employees report that they want job development, but only a third receive the feedback that they need. Only a third receive the feedback that they need, which I think is pretty interesting. And 78 of employees say receiving recognition motivated them to do their jobs. Just a little bit of recognition. Just "Hey, thanks for doing this. Or I noticed you're on a lot of committees and I know that's taking your time, but your voice is valuable and we're so thankful you invest in this." Just simple, easy, I just noticed. And that can help boost morale, especially this time of year. This time of year is really critical.

One of the other interesting things that I found here is it talks about putting plants in windows. This little article, this came from Connectteam.com, but it's talking about... It says, buy some green office plants. It says... Sounds silly. Right? Wrong. "Research from live science has shown that people who toiled in offices with plants and window views reported they feel better about their job and their work performance compared to those in windowless offices was much better." So just having some plants and some windows.

Nicole Fairchild:

Wow. I know. I mean, that's kind of interesting.

Betsy Kindall:

It is kind of interesting, but sometimes it doesn't take much.

Nicole Fairchild:

You've got to have a window. You don't have a window.

Betsy Kindall:

I have no windows.

Nicole Fairchild:

You know what?

Betsy Kindall:

And I take vitamin D on purpose because of that.

Nicole Fairchild:

And you're sitting in there with your-

Betsy Kindall:

Yes, I do have my vitamin D light. Y'all get you one. Betsy wants to make fun of me for my vitamin D light. But listen, I need some vitamin D. I'm trying to help myself over here.

Nicole Fairchild:

I love it. I know one of the other things they say is encourage genuine breaks. So a lot of people don't even bother to take a lunch break. And I know a lot of educators are that way too. But even if you can create a culture where in your hallway or with your teaching partner or whatever, you at least take lunch together on Fridays or whatever. But encouraging and planning on making habits of genuine breaks is going to help morale. It makes us feel better if we know we've got something like that that we can look forward to. I know for you and I, because we're the two from the AWARE Grant that work right here in the building, and now we have Jamie, our service coordinator, who's with us. We will sometimes sit in the open cafeteria area here at the co-op in the morning and have a morning meeting right next to that coffee pot. And there are big windows in there. We've got natural light in there, and we call it our little coffee time. But really, it's a work shop-

Betsy Kindall:

Coffee shop.

Nicole Fairchild:

But it's a work meeting. But it feels different.

Betsy Kindall:

It does feel different.

Nicole Fairchild:

It feels different than being somewhere else. And so those things matter. I just want to say this out there. I mean, we realize it's February, we know it's tough, and we know some of you are tired, but if you do

have just to drop just enough emotional energy to consider this, I'd love for you to do a social experiment. Try one of these things out and see if it works.

Betsy Kindall:

And we want to hear about it. If it works for you, if it works for your coworkers, if there's something about that that's stuck and you're like, yeah, yeah, we're doing that. I'm buying every, I'm buying everybody a little tiny succulent. I love it. That's fabulous. Oh, okay. That's fabulous.

Nicole Fairchild:

One more thing before we wrap up, Betsy. I think one of the other things that you do not appreciate as much as you should is that Dad jokes can really boost morale.

Betsy Kindall:

No. Oh gosh, no.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yes, they can. Donnie, yes, they can. No, look at you nodding over there.

Betsy Kindall:

No.

Nicole Fairchild:

Yeah, I got to do,

Betsy Kindall:

I'm dying. This is me dying.

Nicole Fairchild:

I got at least two. The educators out there will appreciate them.

Betsy Kindall:

Okay, give it to me.

Nicole Fairchild:

All right. How do you find Will Smith in the snow?

Betsy Kindall:

You follow the fresh prints?

Nicole Fairchild:

I know I've told you that one like seven times.

Betsy Kindall:

Oh my Lord. Folks, be prepared for people to look at you when you ask them that question.

Nicole Fairchild:

It's a good joke.

Betsy Kindall:

No, no, no.

What's the next one?

Nicole Fairchild:

What was the other one? Why doesn't math grow up and solve its own problems?

Betsy Kindall:

I forget. You didn't like that one. I forget. What's the answer?

Nicole Fairchild:

That was it.

Betsy Kindall:

Oh, maybe I did remember it. That's horrible. I'm worried about the calendar. It's days are numbered.

Oh, here we go again. We're going to have to cut you off. Stop, stop, stop. Yes, I'm guessing that your last point is humor can boost morale, but not with dad jokes, people. Not with dad jokes.

Nicole Fairchild:

Listen even if you guys could have a dad jokes stare down with just a couple during a... The beginning, the icebreaker to your next afterschool pd, you know that's going to help.

Betsy Kindall:

That's funny. No.

Nicole Fairchild:

Oh, that was cute though.

Betsy Kindall:

All right. Well, educators out there, we love you. Listen, if you haven't heard it from somebody else, hear it from us and we mean it. We're thankful for the work you do.

We are so thankful for the work you do, and we are so happy that you tuned in with us. Hopefully you've gotten a few things that you can walk away with to help boost morale wherever you may be in your building.

Nicole Fairchild:



This transcript was exported on Feb 22, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

That's right. Have a great day guys.