Service with a Mask: Managing Emotions and Stress during COVID-19

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Targeted Research Training (TRT) Program

Housed in Department of Psychology at UCF

Cutting-edge research and interventions to improve workplace well-being and organizational effectiveness in hospitality

Interdisciplinary training for graduate students

Outreach and dissemination of research findings
Sunshine Education & Research Center

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Mission

The Sunshine Education and Research Center transforms workplace quality of life through transdisciplinary education, research and practice, and industry partnerships.

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Targeted Research Training

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- Dr. Kristin Horan, I/O Psychology
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- Dr. Deborah Breiter Terry, Rosen College

Academic Partners
- Multiple Universities
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- Faculty, Graduate and Undergraduate Students

Advisory Partners
- Central Florida Hotels
- Union
- Research & Public Policy
Service with a Mask: Managing Emotions and Stress during COVID-19

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Three main goals

- Make sense of the pandemic as an emotional event
- Explain the unique challenge for hospitality: Emotional labor
- Identify ways to manage emotions as hospitality workers
Poll: Tell me about your current work status

• (a) Working at work (mostly in person)
• (b) Working at home (mostly remote)
• (c) Not working: furloughed or on leave
• (d) Not working: laid off/between jobs
Poll: This past week, how often did you feel any of the following:

- Nervous
- Anxious
- Dread
- Worried
- Exhausted
- Fatigued
- Ineffective
- Overwhelmed

(a) Almost every day  
(b) Several days  
(c) A few days  
(d) Almost never
Why do we feel anxious?

GLOBAL CHANGE
Pandemic

NATION/STATE CHANGE
Lockdown & Masks
Politics & Protests

LOCAL CHANGE
Remote/layoffs
Work and School

Change → adaptation
Frontline Staff in April 2020

“four walls are closing in on me”,
Why do we feel anxious?

Something we value is threatened.

Threats → arousal state to adapt/cope.
What is Threatened for Hospitality Workers?

- Employees Working @Work
  - Health Threat
- Furloughed workers
  - Job security threat
- Employees Working @Home
  - Work-family threat
- Laid off workers
  - Financial Threat
Evidence: Is Anxiety Higher for Those *Still* Working or *NOT* Working in Hospitality?

Survey of 141 Hospitality Workers (US and UK) – Grandey et al, 2020
Why are we so tired?

General Adaptation Syndrome (Selye)
Stress Cycle at Work

Daily Threatening Events

- Bodily arousal ("fight or flight")
- Ineffective at work & home

Insomnia

Exhaustion

Job Burnout

Maladaptive coping
Evidence: Common Maladaptive Coping is Emotion Suppression (avoid, numb, ignore feelings)

Employees who feel more anxiety, suppress more

Suppressing denies our needs for Choice Competence Connection

With costs to...

Four-week study of 503 Canadian employees in March-April (Trougakos et al., 2020, JAP)
Anxiety is a rational and adaptive response to threatening and uncertain events.

When anxiety continues and is suppressed over time:

Exhaustion – and costs to health, family and work – occurs.
Three main goals

Making sense of the pandemic as an emotional event

Explaining the unique challenge for hospitality: Emotional labor

Identifying ways to manage emotions as hospitality workers
Emotional Labor: Managing own emotions

Service *with a Smile* Expectations

Feeling anxious about health and job

"We are often on the frontlines of communicable disease. We're often the first ones to encounter it," (ABC News)
Emotional Labor: Managing own emotions

Expectations haven’t changed – so how meet them with a mask?

Grandey et al., 2020, in progress
Poll: Which service provider is smiling?

SURFACE ACTING (pretend and suppress) 
Used when feeling negative or mistreatment

DEEP ACTING (“smize”, modify feelings) 
Used when feel positive or prosocial

(a)  (b)  (c) Neither  (d) Both
Emotional Labor: Managing customer emotions

This one lady got really mad, “it’s not your job to tell me how to wear a mask”, started filming me on her phone saying she was going to post on youtube.

(Restaurant manager in PA)

Threatens customers’ need for control; power shift from “customers’ always right”
Emotional Labor: Managing customer emotions

...we’re expected to have a positive attitude but also be stern to make sure people are following the rules. It’s a fine line to walk. (Librarian in MO)

we’re at the front lines of a war and I am kind of like a general in battle. I do get “mean” to some people now, which I’ve never done. (Bartender in GA)

(Grandey et al., in progress)
Customer Mistreatment ➔ More Surface Acting (suppression and faking) which is linked to more...

- Burnout
- Insomnia
- Somatic symptoms
- Marital conflict
- After work Drinking

e.g., Grandey, Krannitz, et al., 2016; Grandey et al., 2019; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000; Wagner, et al., 2013
In summary

Hospitality workers still expected to perform “service with a smile”

Must effortfully suppress and fake expressions to manage own and customers emotions

Exhausting effort with costs to health, family and work
Three Main Goals

- Make sense of the pandemic as an emotional event
- Explain the unique challenge for hospitality: Emotional labor
- Identify effective ways to manage emotions as hospitality workers
Managing Emotions Effectively for Health and Work

(1) Regulate

- **ACCEPT THE FEELINGS**
  - Track emotions: Mood apps
  - Information: not good or bad
  - Take time to listen to the message

- **AVOID FUELING THEM**
  - Limit negative news/media/people
  - Stop negative thought spirals
    - Catastrophizing
    - Guilt tripping (feel bad for your condition or how you feel)
Managing Emotions Effectively for Health and Work

(2) **Recover** – you choose how

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**REDUCE STRESS AROUSAL**

- **Detach:**
  - Micro-breaks (BREATHE)
  - set work-family boundaries (time or space)
- **Relax:**
  - Video games/Movies/Netflix
  - Nature, walking, [Meditation](#)

**REFOCUS POSITIVE AROUSAL**

- **Exercise...**
- **Mastery:** learning or growth, focus on hobby or new skill (exert control!)
The Recovery Paradox:
Those who need recovery the most...
often feel they don’t have time for recovery

Evidence Based Conclusion:
Time spent on recovery
is a good investment
Evidence: What short-term recovery activities were effective for hospitality workers?
Grandey et al, under review

Those who stopped working had more financial threat
But also more time

Time spent on RELAXATION counteracted job insecurity--reduced stress & symptoms

Time spent on MASTERY improved sleep for all
Managing Emotions Effectively for Health and Work

(3) Relate

- SHARE EMOTIONS WITH COWORKERS
  - Break out of isolation
  - Give *gratitude* and compassion
  - Foster a *climate of authenticity* (Evidence)
Evidence:
*Climate of authenticity breaks the emotional labor stress cycle*

Grandey, et al., 2012, JOHP

“Staff made a Google doc for everyone to say their feelings and how to make restaurant safer. That was sent to the owners and the owners responded to how we feel, it made me feel like we are on the same page and makes everyone feel safe and more comfortable coming to work.” (Restaurant server in GA)
Managing Emotions Effectively for Health and Work

(3) Relate

- **SHARE EMOTIONS WITH COWORKERS**
  - Break out of isolation
  - Give *gratitude* and compassion
  - Foster a **climate of authenticity** (Evidence)

- **UNDERSTAND CUSTOMERS’ EMOTIONS**
  - Build rapport with mask
  - De-escalate conflict
Build rapport with mask (link)

- **Prosocial focus (deep acting):** recall positive interactions, practice perspective-taking
- **Eyes:** Direct contact & “smize”
- **Vocal tone:** ‘smile in your voice’
- **Body language:** open posture
- **Synchronicity:** mirror others’ body
De-escalate conflict (link)

1) Show empathy for ‘unfair’ situation
   • Acknowledge discomfort
   • Threat to autonomy

2) Clarify policy fairness
   • Clear, applies to all, all the time
   • Offer choices (increase autonomy)

3) Offer interpersonal fairness
   • Explain the reason for the policy
   • Courtesy: “Kill them with kindness” (emotional labor!)

• Exhausting: Take a micro-break to recover!
CDC guide: Useful for Management & Owners

Employers can take action to prevent workplace violence:

1. Communicate a clear message to employees about the policy and procedures for preventing workplace violence.
2. Provide training on recognizing and responding to signs of violence.
3. Implement a system for employees to report incidents of workplace violence.
4. Establish a crisis response plan that includes both physical and emotional support for victims.
5. Ensure all employees are trained in CPR and first aid to provide immediate assistance in case of a physical altercation.
6. Encourage employees to take breaks and refocus if they feel overwhelmed.
7. Foster a culture of respect and inclusion to reduce the risk of workplace violence.

Don’t:

1. Ignore warning signs or concerns from employees.
2. Punish employees for reporting incidents of workplace violence.
3. Fail to provide a safe and secure environment.
4. Allow for retaliation against victims.
5. Ignore the need for regular reviews and updates of the workplace violence policy.
6. Ignore the emotional well-being of victims.
7. Neglect to follow up with employees who have been affected by workplace violence.

UCF
In summary

Regulate emotions by accepting (not suppress or judge)

Recover from stress off-work by investing in detachment, relaxation, and mastery activities

Relate at-work by emotion expression (with coworkers) and understanding (with customers)
Conclusion

Have different emotional reactions?

Have your own stories about working with customers?

Have great ideas about how to cope?

We want to hear them!

Make sense of the pandemic as an emotional event: **Rational to feel anxious**

Explain the unique challenge for hospitality: **Emotional labor of people pleasing and mask enforcing**

Identify ways to manage emotions as hospitality workers: **Regulating and recovering while relating**

We want to hear your stories, experiences, and ideas about coping with the emotional challenges of the pandemic.
We need participants to improve work conditions for hospitality!

Click link or QR code for eligibility survey for Service with a Mask study
For More Information

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Upcoming Webinars

Lessons from Astronauts on Dealing with Isolation
Dr. Lauren Landon, NASA
Thursday, October 15, 2020
11 AM – 12 PM EST
Zoom Registration Required
Thank You!

Recommended Citation for this Session:

**Additional Reskill resources:**

**Degree programs**

[https://hospitality.ucf.edu/degree-programs/](https://hospitality.ucf.edu/degree-programs/)

**Graduate certificates:**

- Hospitality and Tourism Technologies Graduate Certificate
- Destination Marketing & Management Graduate Certificate
- Event Management Graduate Certificate

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**Upcoming Webinars:**

"People" People Working or Not Working in Isolation: Coping Tools for the Hospitality Industry
(balance of 4-part series)

Part 3: Lessons from Astronauts on Dealing with Isolation
Thursday, Oct. 15 @11:00 a.m. ET

Part 4: Who am I? Finding Your Purpose in a Period of Unemployment
Thursday, Oct. 22 @12:00 p.m. ET