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Northeast and Caribbean (HHS Region 2)

MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Moral Injury Through the Lens of Diversity and Equity

Rita Nakashima Brock, Ph.D.

About Us …

The Northeast and Caribbean MHTTC provides 5 years (2018 – 2023) of funding to:

- Enhance capacity of behavioral health workforce to deliver evidence-based and promising practices to individuals with mental illnesses.

- Address full continuum of services spanning mental illness prevention, treatment, and recovery supports.

- Train related workforces (police/first responders, primary care providers, vocational services, etc.) to provide effective services to people with mental illnesses.

Supplemental funding to work with school teachers and staff to address student mental health.

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Feedback about this training will assist us in developing trainings that are relevant to your current professional needs. Therefore, your feedback counts!

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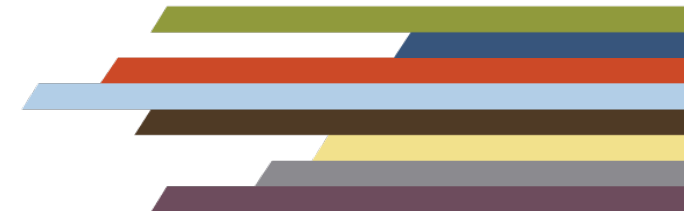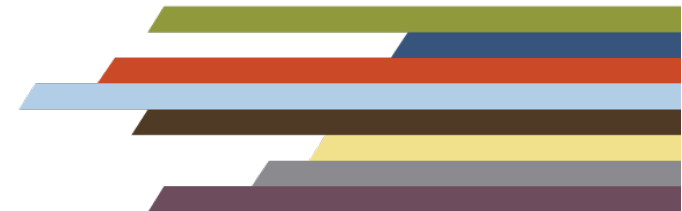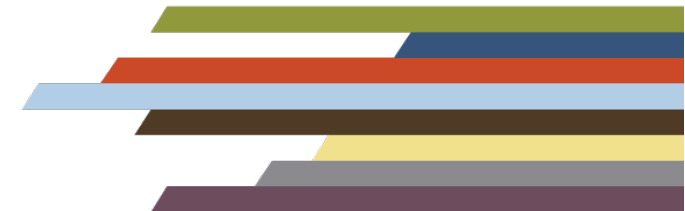- You can control who can see your chat comments.

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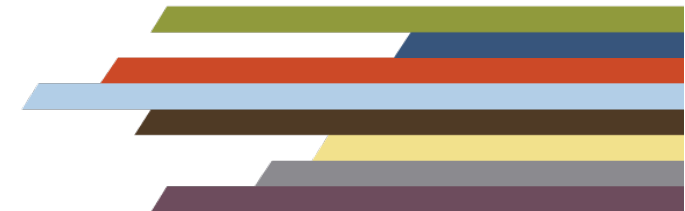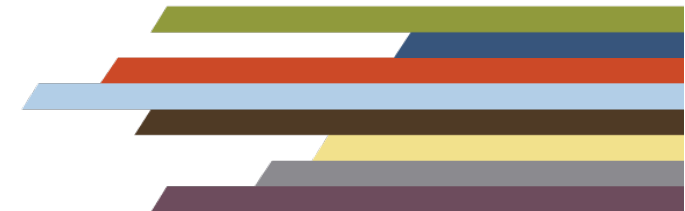
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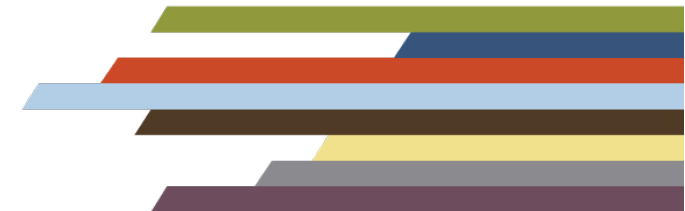
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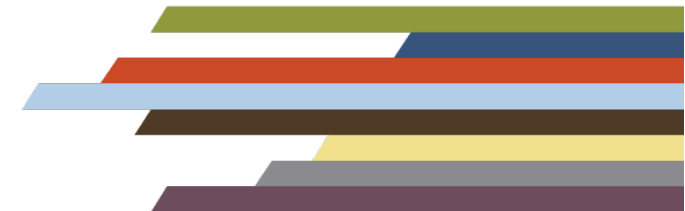
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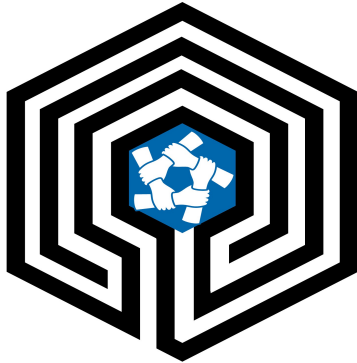
Moral Injury

Rita Nakashima Brock, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President and
Director of the Shay Moral Injury Center
Volunteers of America
rbrock@voa.org

What Is Moral Identity?*

1. Habits.
2. Meaning constructs.
3. Rules.
4. Rituals.
5. Experience.

*(Graybiel, 2008; Seligman, 2012)

1. Habits
Pre-conscious and earliest behaviors constantly shaped and reshaped by:
    Mimicry,
    Empathy,
    Body-memory,
    Repetition training, and
    Emotional reinforcement.

We are largely moral by habit.

2. Meaning Constructs: definitions of reality that structure perception, belonging, language, culture, faith

- Cosmology (what is reality and where do humans fit in it?)
- Rituals (training in habits of meaning and processing of feelings)
- Relationships (self, body, others, nature, cosmos)
- Behavior (when what to do is in question)
- Ideas (faith, belief, philosophy, ethics)

3. Rules: impermeable boundaries, law, ideals, imposed order, *claim to universals* based on what is customary, legal, and moral for a culture and society

1. Right View
2. Right Intention
3. Right Speech
4. Right Action
5. Right Livelihood
6. Right Effort
7. Right Mindfulness
8. Right Concentration

The Ten Commandments

I. I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.

II. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

III. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S Day

IV. Honor your father and your mother.

V. You shall not kill.

VI. You shall not commit adultery.

VII. You shall not steal.

VIII. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

IX. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

X. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

4. Rituals: liminal space within a flow of time; not *mundane* time; overrides personal sincerity via habit,
Enable imagined reality—subjunctive mood—"as if"—and
Permeable to ambiguity, change, differences = integrate chaotic forces into confined emotional process (death-loss, strangers, sickness, sex, gender, birth, moral failure, violence)
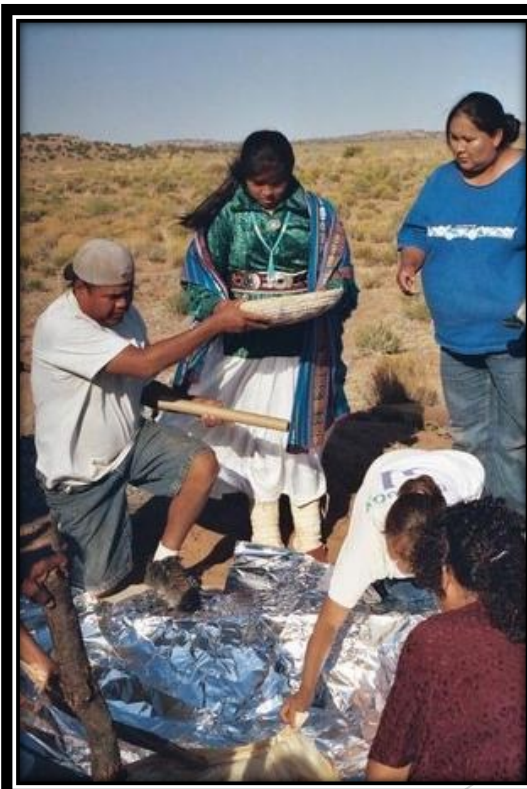
5. Experiences ="reality+ meaning" and can be:

reassuring,
creative,
wondrous,
curiosity-inducing,
suspenseful,
transformative,
chaotic,
resilience-testing,
morally injurious
traumatic

—must be integrated for stable, resilient identity.
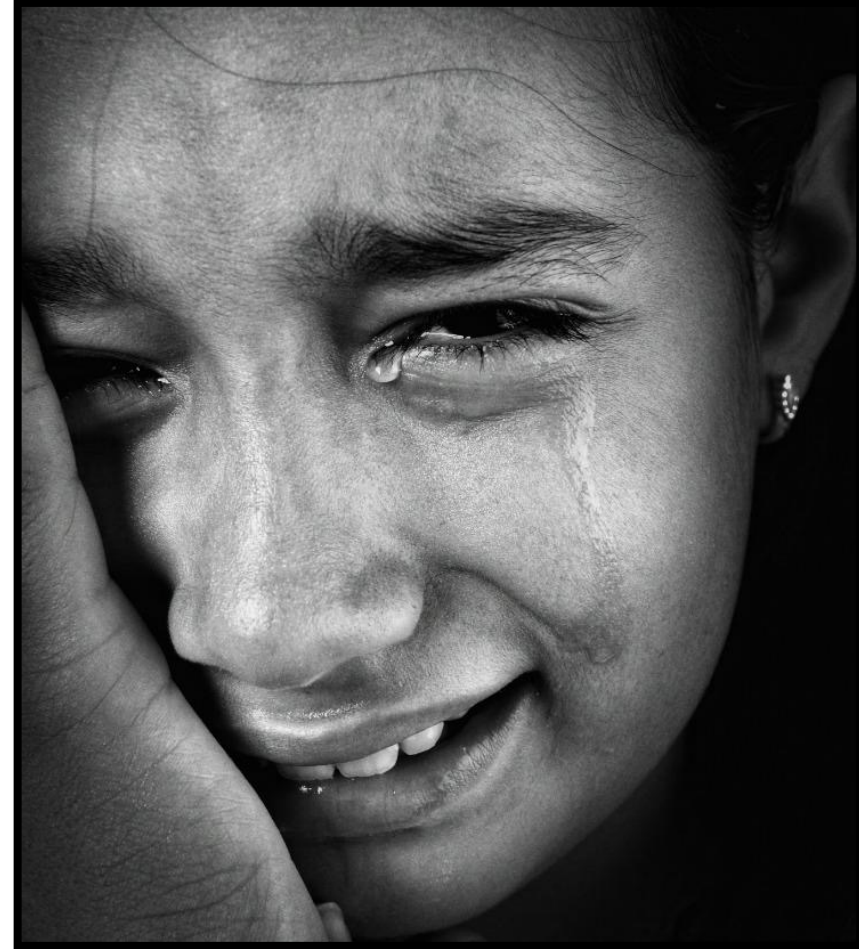
Prevailing Definitions of Moral Injury

<u>Jonathan Shay (2014):</u>

A betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority (e.g., in the military, a leader), in a high stakes situation. All three.

<u>Litz, B. T., et al. (2016) paraphrased:</u>

Moral Injury' is a syndrome of shame, self-handicapping, anger, and demoralization that occurs when deeply held beliefs and expectations about moral and ethical conduct are transgressed. It is distinct from a life threat as it is also not inherently fear-based; it can arise from killing, perpetration of violence, betrayals of trust in leaders, witnessing depraved behavior, or failing to prevent serious unethical acts.

MORAL INJURY AS SUFFERING

Moral injury is a change in character resulting from

1) harmful experiences or life conditions that

2) persons or groups are unable to justify, process, and integrate

3) into a reliable identity and meaning system that

4) sustains relationships and supports human flourishing.

Work/Life Risk Factors for Moral Injury (Synergistic Effects of Multiple Factors)

- ❑ Context with Life and Death Consequences
- ❑ Expected Perfection
- ❑ Physically Dependent People
- ❑ Emotionally Charged People
- ❑ Ethical Dilemmas
- ❑ Limited Choices
- ❑ High Risk for Liability
- ❑ Responsibility with Little Control
- ❑ Betrayal of Trust by Persons in Power (ex. Parents, Supervisors, Policy Makers, Authorities of the State)
- ❑ Isolated Working/Living Conditions
- ❑ Unresolved Previous Traumas
- ❑ Punitive Religious/Spiritual Meaning System

Moral Injury Symptoms Scale – Healthcare Professionals Version (MISS-HP)

1. Betrayal.
2. Guilt.
3. Ashamed.
4. Troubled by having acted violating morals or values.
5. I feel a failure in my work.
6. I sometimes feel God is punishing me.

7. Most people are trustworthy.
8. I have a good sense of meaning as a health professional.
9. I have forgiven myself.

10. Compared to before you went through these experiences, has your religious/spiritual faith strengthened?
11. Do the feelings you indicated above cause you significant distress or impair your ability to function in relationships, at work, or other areas of life important to you? (Manri, et. al., 2020)

Relation of PTSD to Moral Injury

PTSD | BOTH | MORAL INJURY

PTSD
"Startle" reflex
Memory loss
Fear
Flashbacks

BOTH
Anger
Depression
Anxiety
Insomnia
Nightmares
Self-medication with alcohol or drugs

MORAL INJURY
Sorrow
Grief
Regret
Shame
Alienation

Source: The Huffington Post
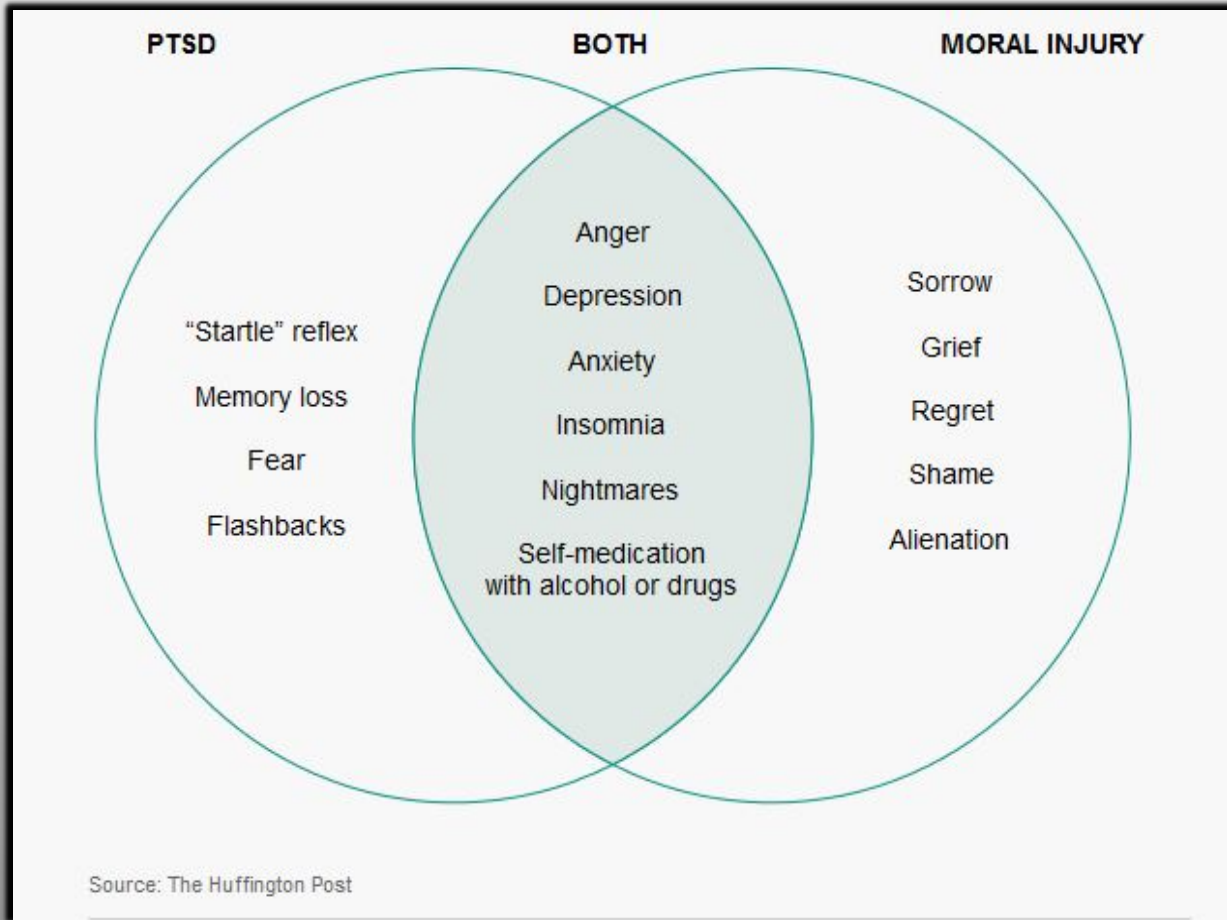
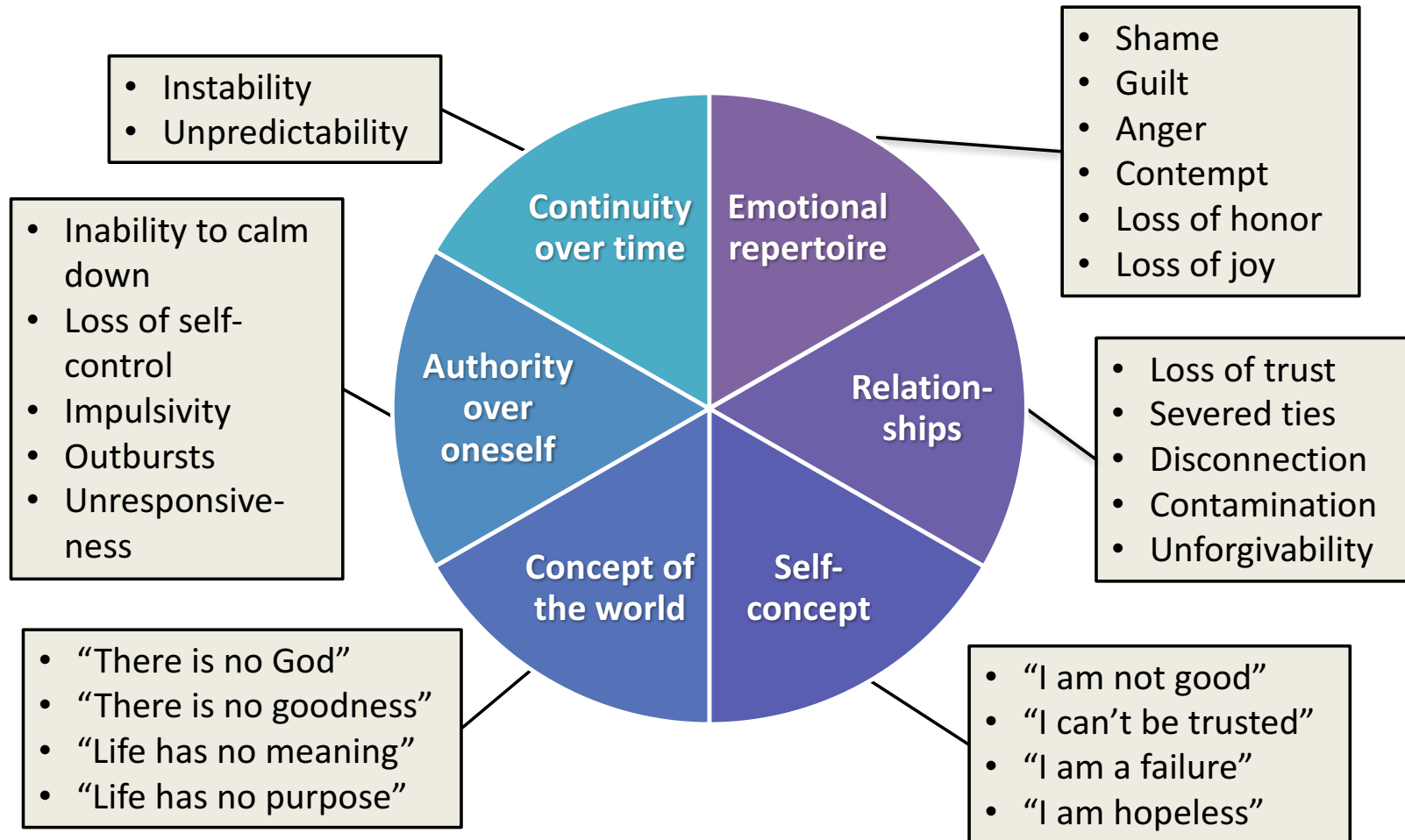## Moral Emotions:

Sorrow
Remorse/Regret
Guilt/Shame
Embarrassment
Alienation/Isolation
Humiliation
Anxiety/Dread
Despair

Outrage/Fury
Disgust
Mistrust
Contempt
Bitterness
Frustration
Cynicism

Facets of Moral Injury

- Instability
- Unpredictability

- Inability to calm down
- Loss of self-control
- Impulsivity
- Outbursts
- Unresponsive-ness

Continuity over time

Emotional repertoire

Authority over oneself

Relation-ships

Concept of the world

Self-concept

- Shame
- Guilt
- Anger
- Contempt
- Loss of honor
- Loss of joy

- Loss of trust
- Severed ties
- Disconnection
- Contamination
- Unforgivability

- "There is no God"
- "There is no goodness"
- "Life has no meaning"
- "Life has no purpose"

- "I am not good"
- "I can't be trusted"
- "I am a failure"
- "I am hopeless"

4

Diagram by Dr. William Nash, Greater Los Angeles VA

Assumptions:

▶ The human condition is to be born moral.

▶ Reality is chaotic and unsafe. We manage it collectively with multiple meaning systems.

▶ Moral injury is a devastating and ordinary human experience of moral failure, not a disorder.

▶ Moral injury is related to trauma and can be experienced alongside it and PTSD, but is not the same as either.

▶ Every society, religion, and culture has to address moral injury, but not all approaches alleviate it. Some can make it worse.
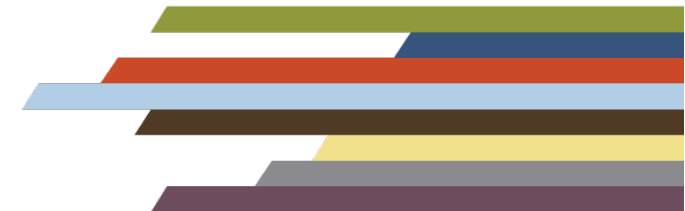
Recovery as Integration and Resilience
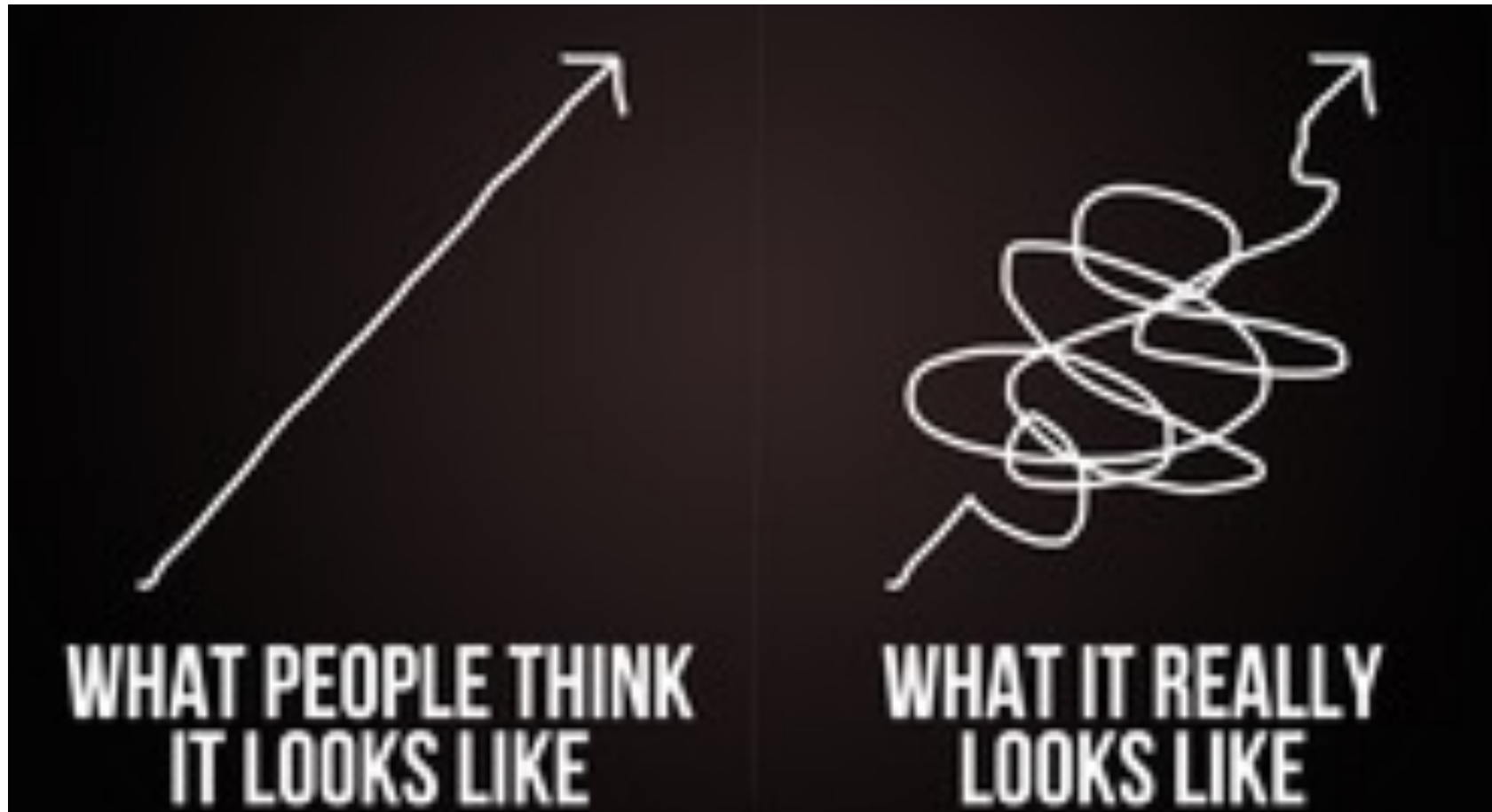
Q and A

Evaluation Information

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At the end of today's training please take a moment to complete a **brief** survey about today's training.
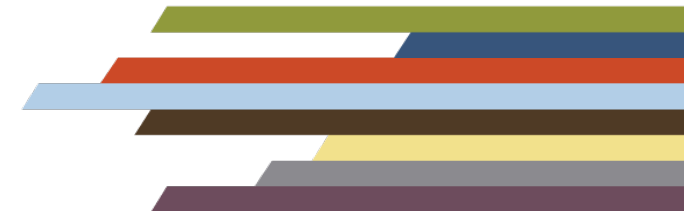

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