



## *Samples of Ritual Resources*

**Building strength by using intentional strategies to help understand, learn about, celebrate, and grieve the activities of individuals and the groups they belong to.**

*Thanks to five of the IMHT street outreach teams in Los Angeles County for providing many of the examples listed in this packet.*

**“The real enemy of high performance is not stress...rather, the problem is the absence of disciplined, intermittent recovery.”**

**Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz**



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# ABOUT RITUALS

## WHAT IS A RITUAL?

A process used by an individual or group which allows each participant to increase health through further understanding, celebrating, grieving, or taking action. Although the structure is planned, the outcome for each person can be different.

## Rituals build resiliency by:

- encouraging individual health to build group resiliency
- structure for working through difficult events
- bringing people “home” to their group
- planned time for gaining strength
- supporting various viewpoints on a topic or event
- release of emotion, tension, and reducing toxicity
- each person accurately seen by others

## Ritual Criteria

1. Designed by participants
2. Stated purpose is health of group
3. Frequency determined by group
4. Everyone is involved
5. Not focused on customers or product issues



# Our current methods to stay healthy as individuals and as a group.

Individual	Team
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humor</li> <li>• Walk</li> <li>• Saying “Thank You”</li> <li>• Confiding in co-workers</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Taking time off</li> <li>• Skip lunch so I can leave on time</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Get therapy</li> <li>• Baking</li> <li>• Breathing</li> <li>• Go to Happy Hour</li> <li>• Massage</li> <li>• Go home for lunch</li> <li>• Take sick time</li> <li>• Quiet time</li> <li>• Take work home to complete</li> </ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humor</li> <li>• Dancing</li> <li>• Non-work discussion</li> <li>• Overnights together at conferences</li> <li>• Overnights together camping</li> <li>• Potlucks</li> <li>• Team lunches/don’t talk about work</li> <li>• Gift Cards</li> <li>• Go to Happy Hour</li> <li>• Drink good coffee and gather in kitchen</li> <li>• Staff become friends</li> <li>• Group Me app for connecting</li> <li>• No phone during supervision</li> </ul>

# Rituals for Resiliency Action Model

## Focus Area One: Celebrating and Grieving

Activities which acknowledge both accomplishment and loss for individual members of the workgroup, entire workgroup, or individuals being served.

## Focus Area Two: Community Engagement

Activities which reinforce purpose of group and clarify specific group and individual responsibilities, roles, and working agreements.

## Focus Area Three: Personal Identity

Activities which result in individual employees becoming more well-known to their coworkers.

## Focus Area Four: Learning

Activities which increase knowledge and skill in carrying out the purpose of the group.

## Focus Area Five: Physical

Activities which increase physical health of individual members so they can further carry out the purpose of the group.

# Rituals for Organizational Resiliency

## Focus Area One: Celebrating and Grieving

Activities which acknowledge both accomplishment and loss for individual members of the workgroup, entire workgroup, individuals being served, or groups of individuals being served.

*“I am part of a group that believes in honoring and respecting each other by acknowledging significant passages in the lives of everyone involved.”*

## We want to affirm...

Examples:

- I DO have hope.
- We can have fun and find joy together.
- We will get through this, whatever the crisis.

## We want to have antidotes for...

Examples:

- No possible success in some cases
- Sad circumstances about clients
- Powerlessness to effect global change about racism and poverty
- Stress associated with serving clients including: physical issues with clients, client abuse, no services because of funding.

# Ritual Examples

## Focus Area One: Celebrating and Grieving

Activities that acknowledge both accomplishment and loss for individual Members of the workgroup, entire workgroup, or individuals being served.

### Individual Rituals

- Pick a beautiful spot nearby, and go there when someone dies. Do a personal ritual for yourself.
- Start your day with breathing and feeling gratitude for the opportunity to do your work.
- Write a short meditation to yourself to reflect on when someone dies.
- “Sumo-Suit” to work out aggression.
- Do yoga.
- Make a personal “Music for Hope” mix CD and play it once a week.
- Have a few minutes of silence alone to reflect on a person who is gone.
- Get a life: engage in enjoyable activities for yourself.
- Bring a photo that represents a time in your life when you got through something difficult, post that photo to remind yourself you will get through this.
- Find a fellow co-worker and dump.
- Rely on your faith tradition or spiritual practice when grieving or blessing.
- Move your body: walk, exercise, bike, boat, dance.
- Leave work acknowledging one thing to celebrate about the day.

### Group Rituals

- Any activity in the Individual Rituals list that you can do as a group.
- Post LARGE picture(s) of client(s) with house-keys at their door when they get housing.
- Alter regular meeting format to focus on recent death. Develop a ritual for this.
- Creation of memorial spot in office for people who have passed.
- Create group “*memorial quilt*” out of paper squares to remember the person.
- Get our outcome data on the wall so everyone can see it all the time.
- Ritual for “*best employee effort that really failed*” to honor risk-taking.
- “*Cracks of Light*” ritual: Go around the room having people tell small slivers of moments when they saw change in somebody they were helping.
- Acknowledge significant organizational goals accomplished.
- Honoring birthdays, graduations, etc.
- Share a song with group that represents hope to you.
- Place symbols of importance for our organization all over the office.
- Guided meditations at beginning and end of group meetings.
- Clear glass “*let go of*” vase: Staff write down things they want to let go of and put it in the clear vase. When it is full, they either burn the contents or bury it with a ritual.
- *Padlock Ritual*: a board on the wall that has a bunch of padlocks hanging on nails. Staff unlock their padlock when they get to work, and lock it when they go. A way to enter and exit work definitely. Could also use a small bell to ring when you come and go.
- “*Dissolving Paper*” ritual: Use magic dissolving paper. Write things you want to let go of and then put the paper in water and watch it dissolve/disappear. It’s magic! It’s fun!
- At end of workweek, in pairs, each tell one story they want to forget about over the weekend so they can let it go.
- Daily morning meetings: tell one story of a hope you have for that day with one person.
- Have a *Team Spirit* week: each day at a scheduled time a short activity that builds teamwork.
- Everyone wears blue one day and group photo taken. Repeat other weeks with red, green, etc. Post on wall.

### Working agreements or tasks to do:

- Leaving early under pre-planned conditions when stress is high.
- Compassionate Leave: Having staff go home when a high-stress event happens.
- Investigate cultural rituals from different traditions and adapt some for our use.



# Rituals for Organizational Resiliency

## Focus Area Two: Community Engagement

Activities which reinforce purpose of group  
and clarify specific group and individual  
responsibilities, roles and working agreements.

*“I am part of something much larger than  
myself, my role is clear, and we are  
making a difference in the world.”*

### We want to affirm...

Examples:

- I can get everything done that I need to, and it's OK if I don't.
- I'm heard.
- I can't do this by myself.
- Everyone has a valuable skill set.
- We have shared goals and principles.

### We want to have antidotes for...

Examples:

- Burned-out Managers effect our burnout.
- Toxic stew of anger/resentment between staff and Administration.
- Billing/paperwork pressure and requirements.
- Personalities of co-workers (just out of school or having worked a long time)
- Changes in directives and/or focus.
- Team managing multiple crisis/tasks in one day

# Ritual Examples

## Focus Area Two: Community Engagement

Activities that reinforce purpose of individual responsibilities,  
Roles, and working agreements.

### Individual Rituals:

- Each person creates a visual reminder of why they do this work. Could be a paragraph, a collage, a poem, a photo...something that touches the core of why they do this work.
- Create an “informal” job description outlining what you really want to be doing during the workday. Review it periodically to see if you are doing what you want to be doing.
- Volunteer one day with an organization that you collaborate with that does different work than you do. (food bank, shelter, community policing, street clinic).

### Group Rituals:

- Any activity in the Individual Rituals list that you can do as a group.
- Always start meeting with a symbol of the purpose of our work in the middle of the meeting table.
- Short list of powerful group operating values displayed in numerous places in the workplace.
- “*Take a Hike*”: Interrupt staff meeting to take a 10 minute walk around the block with one other person and share a story about your work from the day before.
- Force ourselves to make time for retreats twice per year, no matter what.
- Rituals to orient ourselves to other programs regularly.
- Regular discussions clarifying the tasks we do and the expected outcomes.
- Share our informal “*what we really do*” job descriptions with each other and discuss.
- Photograph of each staff person with a short statement underneath it about why this work is so important to him or her.
- Create a staff or staff/client gift wall with photo’s and gifts displayed.
- Create a Strategic Plan for where we want to be five years from now.
- Ritual to orient new staff to our mission.
- Ritual to acknowledge our organizations history.
- Adopt a conflict resolution process we all use when there is conflict in our group.
- Develop a wall pictorial showing the values changes in our work over the past twenty years.

### Working agreements or tasks to do:

- Flexibility in the rules in order to get the job done. Calculate that the cost of breaking certain rules is worth it in order to do quality work.
- Have a daily cut-off time for seeing clients so we can catch up and get our notes done daily.
- Administrators allocate one day every six months for a learning/re-grouping retreat.
- Divide clients up by meeting days so not everyone gets talked about everyday.
- Revise daily meeting agenda so it speaks to our real needs.
- Establish backup protocol when one of us is absent.
- Develop more ways for all employees to be involved in decision-making.



# Rituals for Organizational Resiliency

## Focus Area Three: Personal Identity

Activities which result in individual employees becoming more well-known to their coworkers.

*“I am part of a group that welcomes me for who I am, has an interest in my story, and believes I bring a significant contribution to the group’s purpose.”*

## We want to affirm...

Examples:

- I am called to be a part of this work.
- I’ve been through things that make me want to do this work.
- I find joy in this work.
- I am not powerless or helpless.

## We want to have antidotes for...

Examples:

- Not having enough time to spend together.
- Feeling isolated and alone.
- Forgetting I have a life outside work.
- Focusing on the work problems all the time.

# Ritual Examples

## Focus Area Three: Personal Identity

Activities that result in individual employees becoming  
More well-known to their coworkers.

### Individual Rituals:

- Display photos representing life outside work in your workspace.
- Create small placard with your gifts listed on it and display in your workspace.
- Ritual for approaching a person you are helping: release need to control, see the person as gifted, come from a place of not-knowing, see their presence as a gift in your life).
- Symbols on your desk that represent your beliefs about the work you do.

### Group Rituals:

- Any activity in the Individual Rituals list that you can do as a group.
- Share stories about why we got into this work.
- Share stories about outside interests.
- “*Spotlight on You*”: a different staff person each meeting shares a story about “something they love.”
- Do the “*3 truths and a lie*” game with each other to discover unique life experiences.
- Identify our *Core Gifts* and display in our work area.
- Rotate staff bringing a “*Get to know each other*” icebreaker to staff meetings.
- “*In Five Years*”: Staff discuss one thing that they would like different in their life in five years.
- “*Food Like Me*”: Staff brings food to share that they believe has attributes like them.
- Discuss at staff meeting how our unique gifts cause us difficulty at work.
- Discuss two ways that our unique gifts help us at work to get the job done.
- “*Canary in the Coal Mine*”: Staff share three personal behaviors they exhibit when they are getting burned out so other staff can be aware and compassionate.
- Complete the “*3 Gift Buckets*” with each staff member and share with each other.
- Staff share stories of not-belonging from their own life to build common ground with co-workers and the people they serve.
- Create a story-theme jar and choose a story to tell at regular staff meetings.
- Do “*Three things to know about me if you want to get along with me*” discussion.
- Have a celebration for new employees that honors the gifts they are bringing to us.
- “*Broken-Heart Wall*”: Staff put personal statement on wall around an image of a broken heart that says something about how this work that breaks their heart. Staff acknowledges this wall graphic regularly by standing silent around it or lighting a candle of hope near it.
- “*Gifts on our Backs*”: Staff tape a piece of paper on each persons back and all wander around in a room writing qualities they bring to the work on each persons back. Take off, place on wall, and honor in some way.
- Each staff member comes to regular meeting prepared to share something cool they saw a co-worker do during the previous week.

### Working agreements or tasks to do:

- Update each persons Core Gift statement at the annual performance evaluation date each year.
- Revise regular meeting agenda to include some of above at each meeting.

# Rituals for Organizational Resiliency

## Focus Area Four: Learning

Activities which increase knowledge and skill in carrying out the purpose of the group.

*“I am part of a group which is committed to learning new things from each other and eagerly searching outside of ourselves for good ideas and solutions.”*

## We want to affirm...

Examples:

- I DO have the skills to do this job.
- Everyone is trying to get better at what they do.
- We have to keep learning or we will get stale.
- Creativity will keep us from getting burned out.

## We want to have antidotes for...

Examples:

- Managing theory into practice with highly challenging clients.
- Staff working harder than client.
- Taking personal responsibility for another.
- No time to learn, we're always “doing.”

# Ritual Examples

## Focus Area Four: Learning

Activities that increase knowledge and skill in carrying out the purpose of the group.

### Individual Rituals:

- Identify individual learning goals every six months.
- Individual staff write mantra to read when they are working harder than the client or taking responsibility for the client.

### Group Rituals:

- Any activity in the Individual Rituals list that you can do as a group.
- “*Walk in My Shoes Wednesdays*”: staff all put their shoes in a bag. You reach in the bag and whoever’s shoes you pull out you shadow them working for ½ a day.
- Create “*Learning Challenges*” wall chart showing what each staff person is trying to learn more about. Highlight progress/learning at each staff meeting for several staff.
- *Learning Journey* rituals: visit other programs to see what innovations they have created.
- One staff brings article with some new learning for them and presents at staff meeting.
- “*ALottaLike*” ritual: Pick a totally different occupation and list four ways it’s similar and what we could learn from them. Example: “How are car salespersons’ like us, and what could we learn from them?”
- Create dialogue highlighting what different skill sets within our workplace could learn from each other.
- Sign on the exit door: “*What did I learn today?*”
- Roundtable brainstorming and learning discussions of group-identified issues.
- Have an official “*Open Space*” learning event every six months.
- Use “*Four-Directions*” problem-solving methods (or other indigenous techniques).
- Use our *Basic Five* operating principles as the foundation for solving client issues.
- Administrators shadowing staff on a regular basis and reporting at meetings what they observed, learned, and appreciated.
- Display graphic of tree limb showing issues on the branches and how, if staff take too much responsibility the limbs, they can break off and fall to the ground. (Use tree limb story).

### Working agreements or tasks to do:

- Create structured mentoring activities for new employees.
- Opportunity for billing credit for training/learning activity.
- One personal-choice training for every three that are mandated.
- Re-format regular meetings with more time for learning.

# Rituals for Organizational Resiliency

## Focus Area Five: Physical

Activities which increase physical health of individual members so they can further carry out the purpose of the group.

*“I am part of a group which is committed to individual health, knowing that bringin our whole self is necessary for us to be able to offer sustained help.”*

## We want to affirm...

Examples:

- Our own health is as important to us as we believe it is for the people we serve.
- There is time for our health.
- Our personal health effects the quality of our service.

## We want to have antidotes for...

- Examples:
- Not taking lunch so I can get work done.
- Not doing self-care.
- Working outside of work hours to get done.

# Ritual Examples

## Focus Area Five: Physical

Activities that increase physical health of individual members so they can further carry out the purpose of the group.

### Individual Rituals:

- Start each morning with stretching, yoga, or other activity.
- Create a “personal wellness” goals chart for your workspace.
- Tape a personal health mantra on your laptop or desk.
- “*No Elevators*” workday: agree to walk stairs if three floors or less.
- Personal agreement not to work during lunch.
- Personal agreement not to talk about work during lunch.
- Personal agreement to eat lunch away from your desk.
- Wear pedometer: “*10,000 Steps Per Day*” club.

### Group Rituals:

- Any activity in the Individual Rituals list that you can do as a group.
- Do group stretching, yoga, or other low-impact exercise.
- Take a neighborhood hike during lunch with co-workers.
- “*Crab-Walk Tuesday*”: Walk sideways the first hour of work in the office.
- Use stand-up meetings instead of sit-down meetings sometimes.
- Cooks demonstrate healthy cooking techniques during lunch.
- Staff bring healthy snacks from other cultures once a month to staff meeting.
- Weekend hikes or camping as a group.
- Staff participate in sport that one staff person really likes.

### Working agreements or tasks to do:

- Invite a personal trainer to give a talk at our workplace.
- Join a group exercise/weight-loss competition in our town.



## Keeping Track of Rituals...

Focus Area (1-5)	Name and Brief Description	Who Participates	Who Leads	How Often

## **Keeping It Going**

### **Key things that will increase ritual success in your organization:**

- **A ritual has started at the moment you begin to design it.** Immerse yourself in the pleasure and meaning of the entire ritual experience, including the design.
- **Don't create a lot more meeting time for rituals!** Most rituals can be done before or after already scheduled meetings and don't require a lot of extra time.
- **The first couple times you do a new ritual,** be sure to allow time at the end for a short feedback discussion. Remember, rituals will sometimes seem silly, sometimes not work, and sometimes produce unexpected results. Keep at it until you find what works. Was it meaningful? Was it interesting? How could you change it to make it more meaningful or interesting? Rituals often need to be altered slightly, or sometimes abandoned in favor of new ideas. Be open to change
- **Don't postpone a ritual.** We're all busy, and the tendency is to say, "We'll do this next week when we're not so busy." The pattern of postponing rituals leads to the end of rituals in an organization.
- **Have a designated leader for each ritual.** Rituals won't sustain themselves without somebody being in charge and making sure it happens.
- **Everyone participates.** Everybody who can be there should be there. Be sure to have group agreements that outline the conditions under which a person may be absent. If you don't, eventually everybody will just be too busy and no-one will show up to participate. Remember, rituals are the glue that holds your group together, so the whole group needs to participate.
- **Don't continue rituals that have lost their meaningfulness.** There is nothing worse than a boring ritual. Redesign it, abandon it for something else, but don't keep doing it. Rituals can lose their effectiveness over time. *NOTE: Many groups get to a "hump" phase a few months after their initial kick-off of rituals, and have to recommit to the idea of rituals and their usefulness in the group.*
- **Periodically, review your rituals.** Groups often review their rituals each year, offering the opportunity for old rituals to be altered or abandoned, and new rituals to be added.
- **How many rituals is enough?** It's helpful to have a ritual or two in each of the five areas, but you don't have to start them all at one time. Each group will come up with the "right" amount depending on their unique culture.

# Responses to Resistance

Some participants are likely to respond with these typical types of resistance when you begin establishment of rituals in your group. The “resistors” are not “wrong”, and often have very important contributions to make. They are important to listen to, keep including, and also to put in charge of designing and leading rituals. Most resistors will become advocates for ritualized activity if they have the opportunity to repeatedly witness the positive effects of rituals on other members of their group.

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## No Time

Everyone is busy, and almost everyone wonders where they will get the time to participate in what may be seen as a non-essential activity. The leader(s) must designate the time, sponsor it, mandate attendance, and talk directly about why it is an essential activity. If necessary, the leader must figure out other activities taking place during staff meetings which can be efficiently reduced in order to allow time for these activities. Workgroup health must be valued as importantly as delivery of quality services.

## Don't believe it will help

Just as with people receiving services, staff members may have to temporarily carry the hope for other staff that have none. These members must be required to attend, but should not be mandated to participate if they choose not to. Over time, they may become involved if they are not shut out from witnessing the experience happening to others. In addition, the specific purpose of each ritual must be clearly known by all participants.

## Associating rituals with spiritual/religious activity

The leaders need to make a distinction between the common practice of spiritual rituals and the equally common practice of community rituals. Team rituals are not spiritual activities designed to deepen faith, they are community-building rituals designed to promote group cohesion, identify, and strength.

## Fear of overexposing facts or feelings

Participants need to be clearly told that their participation can be at whatever level they are comfortable with. By their design, ritual activities should not promote excessive personal story-telling or sharing of deep emotions at unsafe levels.

## Not businesslike or professional enough

Since it is the mission of all helping organizations to support people they serve to be more integrated in their community, it is in the business interests of social service organizations to be familiar with how to design community events which sponsor the inclusion of all citizens and promote health and healing. Also, increased trust is built between co-workers when they get to know each other in more ways than solely by the tasks each completes during their workday. Rituals deepen each employee's commitment to both their co-workers and also to the mission of the organization.