

Case Study: What Happens After Hearing Rashad Hayes Speak? Don't Burn Your Cake: High Performance Without Self-Destruction

Executive Summary

Across 14 different speaking events with social workers, educators, healthcare professionals, youth workers, and cancer survivors, audiences consistently walked away from Rashad Hayes' keynotes feeling:

- **Reignited in their purpose** ("This allowed me to remember my why.")
- **Convicted about self-care** ("I don't want to burn my cake.")
- **Seen and valued as humans, not just helpers** ("I walked in with my head down and walked away with my head up.")
- **Equipped with simple, memorable tools** they could share with their coworkers, clients, students, and families ("I'm going to show the x-y graph to foster parents and co-workers.")

This case study pulls together the impact from 14 speaking engagements to answer one question:

What actually changes after people hear Rashad Hayes speak?

About the Engagement Series

Over the course of 14 events, Rashad spoke to:

1. **County child welfare & DHR staff**
2. **State social work conferences**
3. **Supervisors and frontline social workers**
4. **AYA (Adolescent & Young Adult) cancer survivors and caregivers**

5. Family resource center and community-based organization staff
6. K-12 teachers and school district back-to-school convocations
7. High school assemblies and youth programs
8. Counselors and mental health professionals
9. Child support and human services agencies
10. Faith-adjacent and community nonprofit staff
11. Multi-disciplinary human service conferences
12. Frontline case managers and advocates
13. Supervisors and agency leaders focused on burnout and culture
14. Mixed audiences of helping professionals at statewide conferences

Across all 14, the through line was the same: “**Don’t Burn Your Cake®**” and the CAKE framework as a fresh, real, and relatable way to talk about burnout, resilience, and purpose.

Before Rashad Speaks: The Core Challenges

From the testimonials, a consistent picture emerges of what audiences were facing **before** the session:

- **High burnout and emotional fatigue**
 - “Very tough and emotionally draining jobs.”
 - “A helping profession that drains you.”
- **Feeling unseen, unappreciated, and taken for granted**
 - “I’ve been in and out with leaving due to lack of support from my supervisor.”
 - “A leader needs to show appreciation for their workers.”

- **Disconnected from their ‘why’**
 - “This session allowed me to remember my why... why I want to work with children and families.”
- **Avoidance of traditional ‘self-care’ sessions**
 - “I usually avoid sessions classified as self-care. However, I’m glad I came to this one.”
- **Survival mode over purpose mode**
 - People described themselves as stuck, bitter, tired, on the edge of leaving, or simply going through the motions.

The Rashad Hayes Experience

Participants repeatedly described the experience in the same ways:

- **Energetic, engaging, and interactive**
 - “Energetic and REAL talk!”
 - “Very engaging! Even when he puts you on the spot, it’s still enjoyable.”
 - “Lighthearted but serious in all the right ways.”
- **Relatable and honest**
 - “Real, inspiring, self-reflective.”
 - “Heat helps you rise! I love that so much.”
 - “He spoke from a genuine familiar space as a social worker.”
- **Accessible tools, not fluff**
 - “Easy steps to remember.”

- “Prepare–Pause–Proceed. Continue to learn, always love yourself, know your worth, and enjoy your life.”
- “You’re going to learn you can’t bake a cake in a cold oven.”
- **Practical metaphors that stick**
 - “I love analogies, and yours is one of the best!”
 - “Don’t burn your cake! Icing on a burnt cake doesn’t change the cake.”
 - “Our life is like baking a cake... how it tastes, texture, moisture, etc.”

What Happens After: Key Outcomes Across 14 Events

1. People Remember Their “Why.”

Across child welfare, schools, and nonprofits, people walked out with a **renewed sense of purpose**:

- “This session allowed me to remember my why.”
- “Much needed to help employees regain their purpose!”
- “Reignited our passion for teaching and reminded us why we show up for our students every day.”

Post-event behavior:

- Staff shared they wanted to **stay in the field**, not just quietly exit.
- Many said they planned to **share the message with their teams**, foster parents, students, and even family members.

2. Self-Care Moves From Buzzword to Daily Practice

Participants didn't just hear about self-care; they **reframed it as essential to their effectiveness**:

- “I can serve others better when I am better taken care of.”
- “Motivational... gave me the recharge that I needed and sought after.”
- “Great metaphor for self-care, especially for social workers.”

Post-event behavior:

- Intention to **prioritize rest, boundaries, and emotional check-ins**.
- Teams reported wanting to **build CAKE language into team culture** (“Pause and reset,” “Don’t burn your cake,” “I want my cake!”).
- Participants expressed a desire to **teach these concepts** to the families, youth, and clients they serve.

3. Confidence, Identity, and Self-Worth Get Restored

Rashad's approach consistently leads to **personal identity and self-worth breakthroughs**:

- “It reminded me I will be okay and to keep going.”
- “I walked in with my head down and walked away with my head up.”
- “Inspiring and rationally accepting of what life is and how to unconditionally accept yourself.”
- “I felt seen with him.”

Post-event behavior:

- Participants talked about **no longer needing to prove themselves**: “I don’t need to prove myself to anyone.”
- Others described being ready to **move up, lead, and change things**: “I am more than ever ready to move up and make a difference.”

4. Teams Connect Around a Shared Language & Culture

The cake analogy and CAKE method become a **shared reference point** for teams:

- “Will provide perspective and encourage you to evaluate your purpose and motivation for your profession.”
- “This session encourages listeners to celebrate resiliency.”
- “Offered a new perspective on how to handle difficult situations. Encouraged self-care and unity.”

Post-event behavior:

- Leaders planned to **present CAKE to coworkers** and teams.
- Staff committed to **supporting one another**, not just “pushing through.”
- Teams gained a **shared language** to talk about burnout and culture without shame.

5. Concrete Tools Travel Beyond the Room

People did not leave the message in the ballroom. They took it with them:

- “I’m going to show the x-y graph to foster parents and co-workers.”
- “I shared your cake analogy with friends!”
- “This session really hit home and made me want to share what I learned with my team.”

Post-event behavior:

- Concepts like *heat helps you rise, don’t burn your cake, prepare–pause–proceed*, and CAKE became **portable tools** in staff meetings, supervisions, and classrooms.
- Participants expressed interest in **having Rashad back**, using him as a **mentor**, or bringing him in as a **graduation or keynote speaker**.

Event Spotlights (Examples Out of the 14)

Event 1: County DHR / Child Welfare Staff Reset

Challenge: High turnover risk, low supervisor support, and emotional exhaustion.

After Rashad's keynote:

- Staff reported: "This changed my view because I am the ingredient for my county... It's time I move on it and make a difference."
- Workers felt **seen and validated**, with one noting: "He hit the nail on the head of the current climate at DHR."
- Participants left committed to **supporting coworkers, uplifting each other, and staying in the fight**.

Event 2: State Social Work Conference (Self-Care Track)

Challenge: Attendees are skeptical of self-care sessions, used to surface-level content.

After Rashad's keynote:

- "The most useful one I've participated in."
- "One of the best presenters I've ever heard!"
- "Inspirational & relevant content for anyone!"

Participants left with **practical strategies**, a **new metaphor for burnout**, and a **fresh commitment** to their own well-being.

Event 3: K-12 Back-to-School Convocation

Audience: Teachers, administrators, and district staff.

Challenge: Teacher burnout, low morale, repetitive back-to-school messaging.

After Rashad's keynote:

- “Not your typical back-to-school speech. No fluff, but still interesting and empowering.”
- “Help teachers not have burnout. Remind us to take time for self.”
- “It was motivating for seasoned and brand new teachers.”

Teachers left with a **shared language** (“**Don’t burn your cake**”) and a reminder that **their presence matters more than perfection**.

Event 4: AYA Cancer Community & Advocates

Audience: Young adults with cancer and those who serve them.

Challenge: Grief, trauma, identity loss, and fatigue.

After Rashad’s session:

- “A session that carried elements of hope and reality. Emotional but purposeful.”
- “He’s great for the AYA community. I felt seen with him.”
- “Rashad gave such a unique way of making a really terrible experience into something good.”

Participants left with **renewed hope**, a **reframed story of their pain**, and a **language of cake and heat** to describe resilience.

Event 5: Statewide Family & Youth Services Conference

Audience: Family resource centers, youth services, advocacy centers, and prevention agencies.

Challenge: Chronic burnout, secondary trauma, and compassion fatigue.

After Rashad’s session:

- “Inspirational, educational, thought-provoking, lit a fire for me to fight burnout and continue motivating my team.”
- “Very innovative and engaging! Allowed me to observe myself and reflect that I needed to take care of myself.”

- “Powerful and reflective content that’s much needed in today’s world.”

Agencies walked away with **renewed motivation, language for self-reflection, and tools to support staff longevity.**

Why Organizations Bring Rashad In (And Bring Him Back)

Across all 14 events, planners and participants said things like:

- “Hire Rashad Hayes!”
- “One of the best live speaker events I’ve been to in a very long time!”
- “A speaker who can truly reach ANYONE!!”
- “He is truly a phenomenal speaker... from our same hometown.”
- “Rashad was dynamic and powerful... I don’t want to burn my cake.”
- “Our back-to-school speaker delivered a phenomenal message that reignited our passion for teaching.”

They’re not just reacting to good energy. They’re responding to **lasting impact**:

- Staff who were considering leaving... **recommit to their roles.**
- Professionals who preach self-care... finally **apply it to themselves.**
- Teams that felt disconnected... leave with **shared language and hope.**
- Individuals who felt invisible... walk out **seen, valued, and standing taller.**

The Bottom Line: After Rashad Speaks

People don’t just feel better. They act differently.

They:

- Re-engage with their purpose
- Name and challenge burnout
- Normalize self-care as a professional responsibility
- Use the cake language to support each other and their clients
- Carry the message out of the room and into classrooms, courtrooms, clinics, and homes