



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Workplace Self-Care for Leaders

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As a supervisor, HR “go-to” person, or department manager, you are likely charged with managing organizational change, employee conflicts, and fluctuating work volumes.

Whether you do this work alone or as part of a team, these kinds of volatile and emotion-stirring responsibilities can at times be daunting and stressful. Managers who best handle these stormy situations are those who value and dedicatedly practice *self-care*.^{1,2,3}

This term has been overused and may seem like pop-psychology, but it is actually a powerful tool for re-energizing emotionally, mentally, and physically. Before daily stress hijacks your work day or follows you home, you can diminish its impact with a daily dose of self-care.

Consider this idea: *Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it.** Fortifying yourself with intentional care can help improve your ability to respond more positively to the challenges in your life. And leaders who practice self-care also create a valuable ripple effect—they model effective coping skills to their staff, who may then also cope more positively to issues. This dynamic has the potential for dramatically improving a whole team’s response to workplace stress.

What To Do

Begin by gathering information on where your pressure points are, and then create a care plan based on your specific situation.

Observe

Take a moment to observe your thoughts. Are your work expectations for yourself truly realistic? Are you trying to do too much alone? Is everything a priority? Do you really have to work through lunch? Challenge your thoughts with an honest assessment. Often, stress levels are determined by how we perceive a situation. By reframing a rigid perspective to one with more possibilities, we can lower the pressure we feel from it.

Look at your behavior. Are you eating lunch at your desk five days a week? Isolating yourself from others? Staying late each night? These actions reinforce the misguided thought that there isn’t time in the work day for yourself. And this then keeps you chained to your desk and feeling frazzled.

Notice how you feel at different points in the day. Do you start the day with a “fire in your belly” but end it with a “pain in your gut?” Do you experience mid-afternoon brain fog? Do you feel your blood pressure start to rise after two hours of morning email? These physical reactions can identify natural times in the day that you could feel better with some self-attention.

Now that you have an idea of how you are impacted by stress, make a plan to address your specific needs.

Strategize

Thought check-ins. Take your “mental temperature” first thing in the morning and several times in the day. Notice what’s on your mind, any worry that’s nagging at you, or anxious anticipation of something that may or may not happen. This practice can help you see if you are bringing troubling thoughts to work, and identify any negative thinking throughout the day that feeds stress. “The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.” – William James.

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Once you identify a burdensome thought, transform it into something more realistic and reasonable. Turn “I’ll never get everything done today!” into, “Not everything needs to be done today. I’ll do the best I can to accomplish the highest priority tasks, and handle the rest over time and with help.”

Get moving. Think about the times in the day when you are sluggish, distracted, or overwhelmed. Build in short movement breaks to re-energize and restore. Try: stretching, climbing stairs, lifting a hand-weight at your desk, walking with a co-worker, or check out the “deskercises” from your EAP website (<http://www.firstchoicееap.com> - Search “deskercise” in the search bar at the top of the screen).

Conscious distraction. Use one of your breaks or lunch hour for an enjoyable distraction. What restores you? Music? Exercise? Talking with a friend? Quiet time away? Fill a space each day with an activity that brings you calm. Better yet, find ways to laugh!

The Mayo Clinic asserts that laughter is a powerful stress-reliever that stimulates circulation, helps muscles relax, and increases endorphins in the brain, which lowers physical stress symptoms and gives one that “aaahh” feeling. Look for funny puppy videos, excerpts from comedies you like, joke websites, or hang out with someone you find amusing. If you can, try laughing at the absurd things that happen in your life rather than firing up your temper.

Start small. Ask yourself, “What’s one thing I can change or add into my day for self-care?” Just try one idea for a week and see how it goes. Then, do it for another week until it’s firmly a part of your day and you plan around it.

Remember that caring for yourself is not selfish! Enjoy it. Make it something you look forward to rather than another thing on your “to do” list. Need more ideas? Look to your EAP website for these on-demand webinars for inspiration: Making Self-Care a Priority; Ready, Set, Relax; or Realize Your Resilience. Go ahead. Put yourself first for a moment!

*Charles Swindoll

<https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/your-daily-reminder-30-quotes-that-promote-self-care/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>

