

Overview

Self-Care and the Prevention of Compassion Fatigue

New leaders often find themselves in more senior roles because of their competence and abilities however this sense of competence can be challenged when stepping up into roles that are unfamiliar. Self-care strategies may need to be employed with added gusto in order to balance the new demands and expectations with perspective and the necessary supports. It can be a particularly stressful time with internal and external pressures around succeeding and demonstrating competence. It can take time to understand the expectations of a new role and at what level you and others may perceive as acceptable. Identity shifts and relationships can change. Peers may now report to you and relationships with new colleagues need time to develop.

Though there is a lot that individuals can do to around taking responsibility for their self-care it is understood that that prevention of organisational stress is best tackled at three levels: Organisational, Professional, and Personal. Things like adequate supervision, good processes and role definition are important as well as an organisational culture that views support seeking and limit setting as signs of strength rather than weakness – these are all factors that support leaders' own self-care. Below, however, the focus will be on what we as leaders can do for ourselves both personally and professionally so that you can optimise the significant (but not unlimited) resource that is you.

This resource, however focuses upon what strategies new leaders and those leaders moving into new roles can implement on the personal and professional level. These strategies can sustain us through what can be stressful, isolating and exciting times offering many opportunities for growth!

Tom's Tips

- Find a peer on equal level for peer supervision (e.g. Team Leader to Team Leader)
- External supervision
- Practice saying No
- Practicing slowing down responses to queries – take time to reflect and see if it is relevant and beneficial to your current role, even though might be interesting
- Try not to get seduced by language 'We really want you'... 'We are head-hunting you'
- Ask yourself – would I expect this of someone else?
- Take time out
- Walk away from the desk
- Remind yourself that you are not your job – even if you are passionate about the work, you are still not your job
- Remind yourself that on your death bed, DTAUs will not even enter your brain
- Do something nice for yourself at least daily
- Spend some quiet time each day
- Play with the dog
- Try some mindless TV watching – where you don't have to think or worry about being judged
- Try to – eat well, incorporate some level of exercise in to your routine, socialise with people outside of the field, sleep
- Check-in with yourself – if your line manager and peers are going home on time, why are you working back late?
- Try not worrying over things you can't control or influence and focus on what you can

Shannon's Suggestions

- Find the roots of stability, what keeps you grounded? What are the activities that you enjoy such as art, sports, time with friends?
- Utilise lunch breaks for activity, e.g. walks, jogs, yoga
- Find a mentor: which can be an organic relationship that forms with someone with more experience.
- Utilise supervision
- Implement my own understanding of self-management and regulation
- Be kind towards yourself and recognise strengths as well as areas for development
- Learn to let go
- Utilise CBT interventions or other approaches that resonate with you
- Self-awareness: being aware of how you present, body language, your reactions
- Self-reflection: find a space for reflection
- Be organised: utilise time management and organisational strategies e.g. diary, lists
- Self-regulation: developing strategies of how to manage mood e.g. disputation strategies, scaling how important is this to me
- Attempt to achieve life balance: Develop a pie graph of the activities that are taking up your time to illustrate a balanced or an unbalanced lifestyle.
- Spend more time listening than talking.
- If you are in a position that may recruit to a role, don't rush and make sure it is a right fit.

Cath's Clues/Contemplations

Self-care is ultimately a personal responsibility. The following represent important components of effective self-care:

1. Know yourself – what your vulnerabilities and personality traits are, your early warning signs of stress and match self-care strategies in response to these
2. Practice what you preach – what would you discuss with your clients in the same situations (i.e., managing stress?) CBT skills etc
3. Keep perspective – we have important jobs, but they are only part of our whole
4. Acceptance – that change is constant, you can't control everything, not everyone will like you, you will make mistakes

Helpful links

Schwartz, T. & McCarthy, C. (2007) Managing Yourself: Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time. Harvard Business Review, October 2007, pp 1-10

Diane L. Coutu (2002) How Resilience Works, Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation, May 2002

(These articles are contained in the PDF)