



The Seasons of Self-Care

A project of the Class of 2010
Leading 4 Life Leadership Fellowship Program

*Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have,
the gift I was put on earth to offer to others.*

Parker Palmer

Welcome

It is our pleasure to share our work with you. We are all professionals in eldercare, who have spent a year working together as the 2010 Class of Leading 4 Life, a leadership academy sponsored by the Care Providers of Minnesota Foundation. We created *The Seasons of Self-Care* as a resource for our professional community, and we hope that you find it valuable.

We chose this resource to address a vital community need. As leaders in organizations that serve older adults, we know the challenges associated with all aspects of our profession. We also understand first-hand how difficult it can be, in the face of work, family, and personal life demands, to take adequate care of ourselves. Indeed, many of us are much more adept at caring for others than we are at meeting our own needs.

The Seasons of Self Care is a collection of ideas, advice, reflections, and resources designed to help you provide for your own self-care, so that you can be an effective, ethical leader in your community. Browse it, try things out, and bookmark this site or keep a hard copy at hand to remind you of your commitment to yourself. As they say in the airline industry, “Secure your own oxygen mask before assisting others.” We’ve found the suggestions in this book to be sustaining, in both crisis and in calm.

Thank you for being here!

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Introduction:

The Seasons of Self-Care

Even great leaders neglect to care for themselves. This is, in part, what Steven Covey refers to as “Sharpening the Saw.” (This is one of the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People described in his justly famous book by the same title.) It can be more fundamental than that: many of us do not attend to our basic needs, which ultimately impairs our ability

to perform and achieve our objectives as leaders. We use the metaphor of the seasons as a framework for capturing our needs as people, and as leaders. Other creatures – plants and animals – respond to the seasons quite dramatically. We can learn a lot from their examples, by assuring that every season is represented in our lives:

Season	Characteristic Pursuits	How do we integrate these seasons into our days and weeks?	How can we do a better job?
Winter	Resting and rejuvenation. Re-charging, reflecting, and being still.		
Spring	Preparing to produce, accelerating, engaging, developing new capabilities		
Summer	Production and growth. Making the most of our capabilities. Learning by doing.		
Autumn	Preparing to rest and rejuvenate. Decelerating. Celebrating and enjoying the fruits of our achievements		

Integrating Self-Care into Our Organizations

It is fair to say that most organizations do not do much to help their members to care for themselves. There are certainly overt nods to the importance of self-care: fitness centers and health insurance rebates for exercise, flex time, and improved cafeteria choices all reflect some awareness in this area. Still, there are also many barriers that prevent us, as individuals and organizations, from doing all that we can to lead ourselves through effective self-care.

What holds us back as individuals?

- Habits
- Fears
- Entropy
- Conflicting Demands
- Belief that it isn't important
- Inability to act on belief that it is important
- What are some organizational barriers?
- "We've all got work to do."
- "We are all trying to do more with less."
- "We respect privacy and personal boundaries."
- "Diverse team membership entails diverse needs, expectations, and values."
- "We are committed to hero worship and the mythology of the individual."

This resource is designed, in part, to help you overcome these personal and organizational barriers.

Chapter 1

Work Environment/Staff Morale

“Every interaction is a seed; if you plant crab apples, don’t expect to harvest Golden Delicious.”

Bill Meyer

Many people don’t realize that stress is an important part of our life. And although we need stress, we certainly need to manage it and keep it under control. Our work place is often a large source of stress, and as leaders, it is important to take care of our selves for our selves and those we lead.

It is critical for leaders to be aware of their own needs in order to earn respect, demonstrate accountability and engage staff. Productivity on teams generally increases when staff members have a high level of trust within their workgroup and for their leadership. As leaders, we must first model taking – care of ourselves so that our staff feel safe making their own self – care a priority. We must also take care of ourselves to be at our best. Self - care and awareness are critical attributes for all successful leaders.

What managers or employers can do to reduce work – place stress:

It is in a manager’s best interest to keep stress levels in the workplace to a minimum. Managers must act as positive role models, especially in time of high stress.

Surveys suggest that the main source of stress in the workplace, at every level of the organization, is interpersonal relationships. Studies further indicate that the two most important factors that make staff feel positive about their roles in the workplace are the respect they are given and recognition of their contribution in the workplace.

The following list suggests changes that can reduce workplace stress and improve employee satisfaction and retention.

Awareness - What really fills your day?

Be aware of what causes your stress; look at how you fill your day.

Group your tasks into the following categories

- Really important
- Less important
- Low priority
- Obligations
- What can be delegated
- What can be eliminated

Complete tasks according to this list.

Personal Mindfulness - Change your focus

Quiet your life. On a daily basis, enter into a space of solitude:

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Reflective silence

Create an atmosphere at work that is comforting to you with:

- Music
- Pictures
- Allow others to give to you
- Allow time away
- Balance work with personal life

- Allow yourself and others to have fun at work
- It isn't the laughs and giggles that waste company time

Embrace Change - As a positive challenge

- If you do not show support for change; your employees will never accept change
- Speak positively about change and challenge within your work

Consult Your Employees - Show them the opportunity that exists

- Give employees opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their jobs
- Consult employees about scheduling and work rules
- Be sure the workload is suitable to employees' abilities and resources; avoid unrealistic deadlines

Cultivate a Friendly Social Climate

- Provide opportunities for social interaction among employees
- Provide an atmosphere where employees feel safe bringing up concerns
- Encourage them to voice their stressors
- Offer suggestions for changes to help them when they feel overwhelmed
- Be approachable
- Show employees they are appreciated
- Be respectful
- Remember that strict and unreasonable demands leave no room for individual judgment and ownership

Books, Links and Resources

Myth of Time Management: Misinformation You Thought Was Helpful, Anne Newell

Your Brain at Work: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Regaining Focus, and Working Smarter All Day Long, David Rock

www.career-future.com,
Leitschuh Leadership Consulting

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/> Podcast,
Krista Tippitt, Speaking of Faith

A Journey into the Heroic Environment: A Personal Guide to Creating a Work Environment Built on Shared Values, Rob Lebow

The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari: A Fable About Fulfilling Your Dreams and Reaching Your Destiny, Robin S. Sharma

Chapter 2

Nutrition, Exercise and Stress

“Though I don’t believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there and I am prepared to expect wonders.”

Henry David Thoreau

It can be a vicious circle: Nutrition and exercise affect one’s ability to handle stress, and stress can interfere with proper nutrition and regular exercise.

What is important for leaders in healthcare to know? People working in health care tend to be care – givers; far more willing to care for others than to care for themselves. Health care workers have changes in scheduled shifts which make it difficult to have a regular exercise program and may make it more likely to eat on the run (i.e. fast food or vending machines) or skip meals altogether.

Being in good physical shape may reduce the possibility of a work-related injury. It can also increase self-confidence giving you a stronger feeling of control over your life. Physical exercise is one of the best ways to reduce stress by allowing muscles to work and by releasing endorphins.

Good nutrition is necessary to fuel the body and mind so that they can work efficiently. Sometimes feeling stressed can lead to a case of the munchies.

Choose Healthy Snacks - Having healthy snacks available at your desk or in your car will help stabilize blood sugar levels. Major drops in blood sugar levels can lead to feeling fatigued, mood swings or craving something more to eat. Examples of healthy snacks include whole grains, hummus, almonds, granola, protein bars, yogurt, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Limit Caffeine Intake - Caffeine consumed in moderation can lead to increased energy, but excessive amounts of caffeine can have the same effects on the body as stress, such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Start by replacing one caffeinated beverage with water each day.

Avoid Skipping Meals - Don’t skip a meal because you don’t feel hungry, “don’t have time”, or you are trying to diet. This can interfere with your metabolism and blood sugar levels, which could eventually lead to eating more later, and to weight gain.

Incorporate Nutritional Supplements - Take a nutritional supplement daily. Having adequate amounts of certain nutrients, especially magnesium, potassium, calcium and vitamin B can help combat fatigue and tension and keep our bodies in balance.

There are always challenges to finding time to exercise, cook healthy meals or stick to a new program. It takes about 3-4 weeks to break a bad habit or start a new habit.

Recommendations

Start by taking baby steps. Choose one thing to change (one new habit to start or one bad habit to break) and focus on that one thing for this month (i.e. I will drink 8 glasses of water a day). Don’t kick yourself if you miss a day. Just pick up where you left off.

Work on a new habit each month. If you are choosing a new exercise routine, make sure it is something you enjoy doing (don't plan on training for a marathon if you hate running) and set reasonable goals for yourself. If you have not exercised in some time, check with your physician before starting a new exercise program.

You may want to have an exercise buddy to help you with these changes. You will be more likely to go for a walk if your buddy is waiting for you to show up at the park. You could plan 3 short sessions of exercise during the day rather than a 1/2 - hour session depending on your schedule.

Get a pedometer and plan on adding steps throughout your work day by parking the car farther away from the door (parking just 10 parking spots further from the door at work will add an extra 8.8 miles in a year), using a restroom that is on a different floor at work, taking the stairs instead of the elevator. Any movement that increases your heart rate will cause your body to release endorphins so if walking the treadmill is not your thing, turn on the radio and start dancing.

Check out this website for suggestions on exercises you can do at the office: www.exercise.about.com/cs/exerciseworkouts/1/blofficeworkout.htm

Pick a diet that is suitable to your tastes and cooking skills to increase the chance you will stick with it. Make small changes, such as changing from regular coffee to decaffeinated coffee, or tea. Plan meals ahead of time, i.e. when cooking dinner for the family, plan on making extra that you can pack for your own lunch. Keep a food diary and include everything you eat throughout the day. Write in your calendar a

lunch break (or dinner break) to make sure you follow through. When changing your diet, don't deprive yourself of treats. An occasional cookie or piece of pie isn't the end of the world. You can find healthier recipes online at sites such as www.cookinglight.com or www.tasteofhome.com/healthy-cooking-magazine.

Don't expect immediate results when you change your diet or exercise routine. The goal is improvement and overall wellness, which will take time. Again, it takes at least 3-4 weeks to change a habit.

Chapter 3

Compassion Fatigue

*“Oak trees come out of acorns, no matter how unlikely that seems.
An acorn is just a tree’s way back into the ground for another try.
Another trip through. One life for another.”*

Shirley Ann Grau

Compassion fatigue is an important topic for most healthcare leaders. To give to others before giving to yourself is a heroic gesture, but often results in unexpected negative outcomes such as compassion fatigue. The first step in addressing compassion fatigue is providing a common definition of the topic. The second issue is addressing the symptoms or issues that arise from compassion fatigue. Third, we must be able to find solutions to overcome compassion fatigue to effectively serve others for a long period of time.

Our definition of compassion fatigue is complete and utter giving through the medium of service, resulting in exhaustion and giving away our own spirits. Compassion fatigue, also known as Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder, was first diagnosed in nurses in the 1950s. It refers to a physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue or exhaustion that takes over a person and causes a decline in his/her ability to experience joy or to care for others. Constant empathy results in us looking outward and neglecting the inward disturbances/problems that develop when we ignore of our own issues. We are always solving problems for those we service rather than ourselves.

The fact that as health care leaders, we operation facilities that function 24 hours a day/seven days a week/365 days a year, make it difficult for us to separate from work. Since long-term care facilities not only treat physical ailments, but focus on the

care of the whole individual (social, mental, spiritual, physical, etc.), it is an unusually complex form of care - giving. The constant attention to so many issues of so many lives can become quite stressful over a long period of time.

Symptoms

The following are symptoms of compassion fatigue: apathy, frustration, hopelessness, depression, poor concentration, isolation, poor hygiene, abuse of chemicals, difficulty concentrating, blood pressure to increase, resulting in clammy hands and a sense of anxiety, a general feeling of anxiety and an inability to have clarity in thought, the inability to think about anything else other than the care of those who need the caregiver, and the emotional and mental exhaustion that limits one’s ability to make informed, positive decisions. Overall, compassion fatigue results in the negative health of the care - giver and it can take a significant amount of time to recover from its devastating effects.

Overcoming Compassion Fatigue

The first step to healing is acknowledging that you are suffering and to start refocusing on yourself. To sustain a long-term career in health care, you can learn some ways to prevent or reduce compassion fatigue: getting plenty of rest/sleep, physical activity, exercise, meditation, developing a healthy

support system, cutting out negative addictions, travel, spending time with friends/family, spiritual involvement, eating healthy food, being involved in a community group (civic, spiritual, business, etc.), listening to good music, and reading are all ways to help aid in diverting your attention to something other than the stress associated with care giving. Overcoming compassion fatigue requires honest self-reflection. As noted in the Introduction to this document, the aviation industry has an adage that applies to healthcare: first adjust and situate your own oxygen masks before assisting others. Healthcare leaders and providers must first focus on their own individual health before assisting others. Although many healthcare staff members enter the industry to help others, they must realize that to help others is a marathon, not a sprint. Healthcare leaders must pace themselves in their goals/accomplishments.

To help others, requires more than a positive disposition. You must have an enduring temperament to strive towards the assistance of others. Although many healthcare leaders and providers would prefer to solve all ailments in a twenty-four hour time period (like acute care can often achieve), long-term care providers must realize that the success of such a career takes a long time. Through the giving of oneself, long-term care providers can neglect the most simple important aspects of life, such as caring for one's self through the aspects of daily life (nutrition, sleep, activities that decrease stress, etc.).

Long-term care organizations and the leaders of these organizations must realize the implications of this issue, and address its most dire needs to be able to provide the highest care to those these organizations serve. The definition of service is to focus on a need that is external to the individual, but to effectively

achieve this very laudable goal, healthcare providers must understand: 1) the definition of compassion fatigue, 2) the symptoms of compassion fatigue, and 3) the solutions that allow an individual to provide continual care to those that have many needs in the context of long-term care. Simply being aware of the problems and addressing it can allow a long-term care leader and provider the sustainability to be able to care for those that require their assistance.

Further reading/resources

Please reference www.compassionfatigue.com for topics relating to compassion fatigue. Also reference the “Professional Quality of Life Scale”, “The Eight Laws Governing a Healthy Workplace”, “The Caregiver’s Bill of Rights”, and the further reading section all located on www.compassionfatigue.com. These documents help to define if an individual might be suffering from compassion fatigue and provides ways to find relief and support.

*“Seeds of faith are always within us;
sometimes it takes a crisis to nourish and
encourage their growth.”*

Susan L. Taylor

Chapter 4

Managing Priorities

“The mere fact that you get a lot of seeds in a packet, doesn't mean that you have to plant all of them.”

Henry Mitchell

In recent years, long-term care managers have had to confront increasingly complex challenges caused by rapid changes in technology, customer expectations, and corporate ethics. It is common knowledge that effective management is the key to establishing, growth, and long-term success of any organization. Good management can make or break a company. Trying to meet the needs of our stakeholders (those we serve, our staff, and our community) in an environment of heavy regulation and constant change makes managing priorities a must.

Planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling are important functions for every manager. In order to be successful in the implementation of those functions we must be able to prioritize our workload. Our intent is to provide some strategies and tips for managing time. These strategies and tips include planning, defining and setting priorities, scheduling activities, delegating, and avoiding distractions. Wanting to get everything done and not delegating appropriately are probably two of the main reasons managers become stressed. They try to do too many things and fail to realize that there are only so many tasks that one person can accomplish in a day.

Strategies and Tips for Successfully Managing Priorities

1. Instead of focusing on getting everything done, the focus should be on things that need to get done. Separating what's important from what's not important helps prioritize tasks. The link below will assist in determining task prioritization.
<http://www.suite101.com/content/managing-time-and-setting-priorities-a114207>
2. Are you addicted to urgency? Click on the link below to evaluate urgency assessment.
www.thinkingmanagers.com/masterclasses/covey-picking-your-priorities
3. Analyze your use of time. ACTIVITIES
 - Trivia, busy work
 - Some mail
 - Some phone calls
 - Time wasters
 - Pleasant activities

Urgent and important.

If you are an urgency addict, you are probably spending nearly all your time in Quadrant I - engaged in "urgent and important tasks." This means that you will not be doing enough of the "important and not urgent" tasks belonging to Quadrant II.

According to Covey, this quadrant includes seven requirements that are fundamental to good performance. Ask yourself: "Am I spending enough time on these seven important activities?"

- Improving communications with other people
- Preparing my activities more effectively
- Improving my planning and organization
- Looking after my personal business
- Taking new opportunities
- Developing my skills and knowledge
- Empowering other people

If you are not paying enough attention to these activities, you need to change. To gain time for Quadrant II activities you must take strong action in Quadrants III and IV, where activities are either unimportant or not urgent, or both. Look at the amount of time you spend in these two Quadrants and ask yourself: "What tasks am I doing that need not be done at all?" Now ask yourself: "What am I doing that could be done by someone else?" You will find that many of the activities in Quadrant I, III and IV can be undertaken just as effectively by others, lightening your own load considerably.

Stephen Covey's "First Things First" Quadrants

1 Urgent Important	2 Not Urgent Important
3 Urgent Not Important	4 Not Urgent Not Important

Getting Started

The link below will provide you with assistance in setting priorities.

<http://tinyurl.com/4zntry6>

Vision for Success

The tree represents an illustration of a leader's contribution to the growth of an organization. The roots represent the mission, vision, and values of the organization. The trunk represents the individual

leader's role in nurturing, strengthening and guiding relationship building. The branches identify the priorities the leader must balance in order to achieve the goals represented as the leaves.

Resources for further study or practice

Stephen R. Covey – **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People**

Habit 3: Put First Things First: Principles of Personal Management



Chapter 5

Mindfulness as a Route to Sanity and Clarity

“Every moment and every event of man’s life on earth plants something in his soul.”

Thomas Merton

Mindfulness, or the practice of meditative awareness, can be very beneficial to all leaders but it is particularly important for health care professionals. As we support both our staff and our clients the practice of mindfulness meditation can enable us to become centered and gain clarity. Mindfulness meditation has even been known to stimulate both brain and immunity function.

The ...“three key elements of mindfulness are awareness, being in the present moment and acceptance (Jacobs & Blustein, 2008)”.

Benefits of mindfulness meditation (umassmed.edu):

- Stress reduction & an increased ability to respond to stressful situations in a nonreactive manner
- Understand first hand, the relationship between outward and inward knowing
- Step out of outmoded or imprisoning mental constructs, “catch” emerging insights and innovative ideas,
- Deliberately stop – often in the midst of fast-paced, highly charged business situations - and ask themselves the question, “What is called for now?” rather than falling back on habitual patterns and habits, and
- Become increasingly familiar with a deep and abiding awareness.

Mindfulness involves a “being in the here and now” approach that lets life unfold without judgment.

(Borysenko). This involves being aware of where you are right now and living the moment as it happens. As leaders this practice is particularly helpful in order to stay engaged with our staff and clients in more meaningful and attentive ways.

Cultivating mindfulness in your own life need not be an overly involved process. The practice of meditation is one way, however there are also more informal ways. One practice is encapsulated in the acronym STOP (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010):

S=Stop.

T=Take a breath.

O=Observe.

P=Proceed.

By taking a moment to stop, take a breath, and observe whatever is happening, including your own thoughts, emotions, and sensations, you can reconnect with your experience and then proceed and respond more effectively (Stahl & Goldstein). You may even try to schedule various times during the day to S.T.O.P. and check in with yourself.

To get started on your own journey to cultivate mindfulness in your life please see the following resources:

Websites

Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at University of Massachusetts

<http://www.umassmed.edu/Content.aspx?id=41252>

Jon Kabat-Zinn's website

http://www.mindfulnesscds.com/meditate_daily.pdf

Center for Spirituality and Healing at the University of Minnesota

<http://www.csh.umn.edu/>

Reading

A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook, Stahl & Goldstein

<http://www.amazon.com/Mindfulness-Based-Stress-Reduction-Workbook/dp/1572247088>

Minding the Body, Mending the Mind, Borysenko

<http://tinyurl.com/68q2qk4>

Full Catastrophe Living, Kabat-Zinn

<http://tinyurl.com/5usywq2>

Arriving at Your Own Door, Kabat-Zinn

<http://tinyurl.com/67dga44>

Mindfulness as a Coping Mechanism for Employment Uncertainty, Jacobs & Blustein

<http://tinyurl.com/6xhn3fs>

Suggestions for daily practice, Kabat-Zinn

http://www.mindfulnesscds.com/meditate_daily.pdf

Audio

Mindfulness for Beginners Audio CD, Kabat-Zinn

http://www.amazon.com/Mindfulness-Beginners-Jon-Kabat-Zinn/dp/1591794641/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1287955456&sr=8-2

Guided Mindfulness Meditation, Kabat-Zinn

http://www.amazon.com/Guided-Mindfulness-Meditation-Jon-Kabat-Zinn/dp/1591793599/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1287955581&sr=8-1

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Jacobs, S., & Blustein, D. (2008). Mindfulness as a Coping Mechanism for Employment Uncertainty. *Career Development Quarterly*, 58 (2), 174-180.

Joan Borysenko, P. (2007). *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*. Philadelphia, PA: Perseus Books.

Kabat-Zinn, P. J. (1990).

Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness. New York: Delta.

Stahl, P. B., & Goldstein, E. P. (2010).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger

Chapter 6

Managing Thoughts & Perceptions

“When man learns to understand and control his own behavior as well as he is learning to understand and control the behavior of crop plants and domestic animals, he may be justified in believing that he has become civilized.”

Ayn Rand

Did you know that 80% of our thoughts are negative? Our thought patterns, whether positive or negative are the base of our motives for what we do and the choices we make. Our thoughts influence the degree of confidence we have in ourselves, and our ability to make positive things happen.

Negative Thoughts

Your body reacts to every thought you have, whether about work, friends, family or anything else. Our physical health is connected with our patterns of thinking and feeling, and the quality of relationships with others. Negative feelings, such as hopelessness, anxiety, cynicism, and an inability to express feelings are particularly toxic.

When negative thinking becomes chronic and automatic it can cause irritability, depression and moodiness. Recognizing these automatic negative thoughts is the first step in learning to change them.

When you have positive, kind thoughts our brain releases chemicals that make your body feel good. When you correct negative thoughts, you take away the power they have over you. People who have an optimistic perspective and the ability to ‘let go’ of bad events, tend to be healthier.

So what can you do? Steve Pavlina suggests instead of trying to resist the negative thought, redirect

it. For example let’s say you hear a voice in your head that says: “I’m an idiot.” You can redirect the thought in three ways: Mental imaging, or selecting an empowering replacement thought and then turning that positive thought into a mental image.

(www.stevepavlina.com Personal Development for Smart People: How to Squash Negative Thought Patterns).

The term “reframing” is the ability to put a positive spin or ‘reframe’ a challenging situation or event. The American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org) shares examples of unhelpful thought patterns and adaptive responses. For example, Discounting the positive. You overlook the good things and circumstances. “I could do more” or “Anyone could do what I do.” An adaptive response would be: “This job isn’t easy. It takes courage, strength and compassion to do what I do. I’m not always perfect, but I do a lot and try to be helpful”.

It is not the stressor, or outside influence, but how you perceive it and then how you handle it that will determine whether or not it will lead to stress. Even if you cannot do anything about the stressor you still have psychological resources that can give you a sense of control that can protect you from despair. Stress hardy people have better coping resources than others because they view life as an opportunity to exercise control over events.

You see, it's never the environment; it's never the events of our lives, but the meaning we attach to the events – how we interpret them – that shapes who we are today and who we'll become.” (Anthony Robbins).

Links

Negative Thoughts

www.stevpavlina.com Personal Development for Smart People: How To Squash Negative Thought Patterns

www.wikihow.com Managing Negative Feelings

Reframing Links

www.urbanmonk.net – Reframing
www.personal-development.com: Controlling your Thoughts by Chuck Gallozzi

Books

100 Ways to Happiness by Dr. Timothy J. Sharp

Change Your Thinking by Sarah Edelman

Minding the Body, Mending the Mind by Joan Borysen

Conclusion: Into Action!

“The greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our disposition, and not our circumstances. We carry the seeds of the one or the other about with us in our minds wherever we go.”

Martha Washington

Where to start? As you might imagine, we have a few suggestions. First, begin with the end in mind. Pause to imagine feeling well-supported, ready and healthy most of the time. Envision, with clarity, how your life would be different if you were able to direct your energies toward your goals, and you supported yourself in that process. You might return to the sections of Seasons that most help you to create that vision.[Chapter 1: Work Environment and Staff Morale; Chapter 2: Nutrition and Exercise; Chapter 3: Compassion Fatigue; Chapter 4: Managing Priorities; Chapter 5: Mindfulness; Chapter 6: Managing Thoughts and Perceptions; Conclusion: Into Action]

If you already feel that way, congratulations! Turn your attention to your teammates and to the people you lead. How can you help them to achieve that level of self-care and self-leadership? Imagine what you can gain as an organization through such an enlightened investment.

Next, make some plans. Start small, and establish a pattern of success and follow-through. Be specific in articulating goals that motivate you, and then articulate steps that clearly lead to those goals. Make timelines, and then ask yourself whether they are both attainable, and urgent enough to spur you to action. Make your list, and check it twice.

Then start executing!

One additional suggestion on execution is in order.

Those of us who journal find it extremely valuable as an aid toward self-care. (We won't start lying to you now! Not all of us journal even if we see the value in it.) The writing process brings us a surprising degree of clarity, and a quick review of our journal gives us renewed insight into even recent events. Holding ourselves accountable is easier when we pause to reflect and to document our thoughts and actions, in whatever way we see fit. There are excellent resources for how to use journaling, including the books listed below:

Journal to the Self: Twenty-Two Paths to Personal Growth – Open the Door to Self-Understanding by Writing, Reading, and Creating a Journal of Your Life, Kathleen Adams

The Handbook of Journaling: Tools for the Healing of Mind, Body and Spirit (Second Edition), Neil F. Neimark

The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-Being, Stephen J. Lepore

Finally, evaluate your progress and continue to improve. Reward even the smallest step, and regard any disappointments only as opportunities for learning and improvement.

Take excellent care of yourself. You owe it to yourself, to the people you lead, and to the communities we all serve.

