

Protecting your wellbeing

I'm writing this article while the world is still in the middle of the COVID19 pandemic. To say the pandemic is tough on us is an understatement.

I can't even find the appropriate words to describe the extent to which the crisis has and continues to be tough on everyone. What I am clear about though, is the people who have been and continue to be the most impacted the most are those on the front line, like you. Not only are you and your colleagues trying to juggle personal demands such as looking after family members but you're also continuing to look after the most vulnerable people through the work you do.



Wellbeing and self-compassion

It's not uncommon for feelings of guilt to pop up when some of my leadership clients talk about taking care of themselves. Even the most mundane things, such as taking time to eat lunch, can lead to feelings of guilt. This happens even at the best of times, let alone when we're in the middle of a pandemic!

When feelings of guilt emerge, I always use the analogy of the emergency instructions air stewards give before a flight – “put your own oxygen mask on first before you help those more vulnerable”. Why do they say this? Because if you don't, the danger is you'll pass out and not be able to help anyone else. And it also means someone will have to help you, taking them away from someone more vulnerable.

Chris Germer, a psychologist specialising in research into the impact of self-compassion, suggests there are five pillars of self-compassion that help us keep balanced and maintain our well-being. I've used these to come up with some tips and which you can use as a pick and mix menu to look after your wellbeing. These ideas aren't exhaustive and although these are things that have helped some of my clients, I'd encourage you to come up with your own menu of ideas for each of the five pillars.

<p>Physical pillar <i>“soften the body”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Daily exercise + Sleep (including cat naps) + Deep tissue massage + A warm bath + A comforting cup of tea
<p>Mental pillar <i>“reduce agitation”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Meditate + Watch your favourite comedy show + Read a book + Draw or colour in a colouring book + Do a puzzle
<p>Emotional pillar <i>“soothe and comfort”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Write about how you're feeling in a journal + Daily gratitude – find three good things + Do some deep breathing + Visualise a peaceful image + Listen to soothing music
<p>Relationship pillar <i>“connect with others”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Meet with friends (virtually if still in lockdown) + Send a thank you card to someone + Play a board game with family + Join a club, such as book club + Give someone a compliment
<p>Spiritual pillar <i>“commit to your values”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Pray + Spend some time in nature (even your garden can have a positive effect) + Walk barefoot on grass (this can help induce feelings of wellbeing as it can help us feel connected to the earth) + Help others + Practice yoga

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Bringing communities together

Leadership and wellbeing

Research led by Diego Montano, in 2017, examined the relationship between leadership style and the mental health and performance of their staff. One of the main findings was around the quality of relationships between leaders and their staff and the researchers found that "Leadership most likely is an important occupational health factor in its own right". The better the quality of relationships between you and your staff, the higher the levels of wellbeing and performance. Here are some ideas to help improve the quality of relationships and subsequently, wellbeing and performance in your team:

Try not to second-guess how people are feeling or what they need to help them. This is a trap that many managers I work with fall into. The best thing you can do is ask people how they are and what they need from

you. This should be a regular thing as, particularly during a crisis, things can change quickly for a person.

Give regular recognition and thanks. As humans, we all want to be acknowledged and seen in some way. No matter how small the act, if one of your team has done something well make sure to acknowledge this. It can give them the boost they might need and it can make you feel good too. Try and do this at least once a day to at least one person in your team each day.

Make sure you create space and time for people to connect and get to know each other. As Professor Adam Grant says in his book, Give and Take, "... there is now a consistent and strong body of evidence that a lack of social support is linked to burnout". The most successful team managers I've worked with have put effort into creating a variety of opportunities for colleagues to really get to know each other. They know that team members who really

know each other are more likely to be able to handle stress because they are more likely to help each other out. Those who manage teams who work different shift patterns have made sure to create opportunities for people to connect at different times on different days. For example, lunches where people bring in their favourite food to share, and then something similar for night shift.

All that's left for me to say is a big thank you for everything you've been doing during this world crisis. The care sector is amazing and you and your team is too.



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