Radical Self-Care Isn’t Nice — It’s Necessary. Redefine Boundaries Between Your Life and Career to Perform Your Best.

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Does this sound familiar? You’re on the edge of burnout. You haven’t done anything “nice” for yourself in a while and you’re constantly putting other people’s needs above your own. The needs of your company, the needs of your family and the needs of your community are always a higher priority, and now there’s no more energy or room for you.

As a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) consultant with a background in organizational psychology, I understand why some people constantly put themselves behind others and, consequently, burn themselves out. Marginalized people often do that. They code-switch to fit in with the dominant culture as a means of survival. Their needs are always last in the hierarchy.

It turns out, that up to 89% of Americans have experienced symptoms of burnout. That has to change. You can’t show up as your best — at work or with others — if you don’t take care of yourself first. I’m inviting you to take a step back from burnout and embrace radical self-care. Here’s how.

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What is “radical self-care”?

Radical self-care is a continual process that involves the conscious and proactive decision to care for yourself by engaging in activities that regularly feed your wellbeing. Radical self-care allows you to prioritize yourself and put self-supporting needs before others’ needs to reduce the impact of stress, burnout and emotional disarray. Self-care isn’t just a “phrase;” it involves intentional actions that allow you to be more cognizant and aware of your physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and relational health.

Why radical self-care matters for professionals

You’re running a company or you’re an employee with lots of responsibility and stress. People depend on you to lead and contribute. But if you’re burned out and exhausted, how can you be your best self? How can you show up when it matters most?

Before burnout and ball-dropping happen, be radical about your self-care – that is, don’t just make it a “nice to have” practice in your routine. Make it a *necessity*. This is particularly important for professionals belonging to marginalized communities. Marginalized people face a disproportionate burden in society dealing with microaggressions, glass ceilings, and the like. Fortunately, prioritizing radical self-care can be a tool to counter some of the draining impacts of systemic racism, discrimination and trauma.

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3 pillars of radical self-care

If you're new to self-care, here's what it can look like in practice. The three pillars of radical self-care involve the mind, body, and spirit which – contrary to popular belief – are not all separate entities working independently to keep you alive. They're cooperators in your lived experience, and all work to keep you balanced and well for all of your endeavors. For practical purposes, let's reframe mind, body, and spirit and refer to them respectively as mental and emotional, physical and purpose. Each area needs nourishment, so schedule time to engage in activities that provide that nourishment. Here are some ideas.

To nourish your mental and emotional wellbeing:

- Have a lazy day.
- Say "no" more often.
- Limit your news consumption.
- Spend time communing in nature.

To nourish your physical wellbeing:

- Eat healthy foods.
- Go on a walk.
- Drink water.
- Sleep 6-8 hours per day.
- Hit the gym or go to a studio.

To nourish your purpose and get closer to it:

- Meditate
- Journal
- Do a good deed.
- Volunteer for a cause.

How to prioritize radical self-care

If you struggle to make time for yourself, try this: say “no.” I know it’s tough, but hear me out. When you say “no,” you make time for your “yes.” If you’re assigned an obligation that isn’t in your skillset and would take you days and weeks to figure out, you can say “no, thank you” and request it be assigned to someone else. If colleagues are meeting for drinks after work, but you know drinking alcohol isn’t great for your mental or physical wellbeing, simply say “no” and use that time to do something that nourishes your spirit instead.

When it comes to your family, if taking a half day away from the kids or family members would be nourishing to you, say no to obligations that force you to be present and find a way to negotiate some private time. You have more power with the word “no” than you might think.

For those with busy schedules, set aside a particular day or time of day as your radical self-care block — whether it’s every Friday or noon on weekdays. Tell your friends and colleagues you won’t be available and do something for *you* during that time slot. Don’t skip it when something comes up — instead, stick with it. Whether you’re simply going for a 30-minute walk on your lunch break or taking that time to journal and meditate, have a dedicated time every day or week that you can rely on to deepen your radical self-care practice.

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Final thoughts

Despite common belief, you don’t have to be “on” all the time, moving through the world as if you are impervious to trauma, stress and burnout. You can manage the effects of losing your stamina, falling out of touch with your purpose, and generally

needing time to rest by implementing radical self-care.

That can look like saying “no” to obligations that drain you and assigning those obligations to someone else. It can look like taking mental health days once a week or month. It can look like *actually* using your paid time off instead of letting it accumulate for the holidays. Self-care can be more of a choice than we think, and it’s *not* a selfish choice. Prioritizing it in your professional and personal life can help you stay well and present for all of the endeavors and people that matter most.

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