

7 Steps to Better Employee Self-Care in the Workplace



Balancing work, family, and personal life has always been challenging for employees. It is even more challenging today. Our technological advancements are overwhelming us with its information overload. The workday is filled with multi-tasking expectations and increasing emphasis on efficiency, productivity and global competitiveness. Employees find themselves competing not only against peers but also against a global workforce. These workplace pressures continue to mount, especially with the current economic and political challenges and uncertainty. Such pressures can lead to the experience of cumulative stress for employees. It may also compromise the quality of their performance in all areas of their lives, and their emotional and physical well-being overall. According to a national poll by the American Psychological Association (APA), two-thirds of men and women have said that they experience significant stress while at work, and one in four has missed work because of stress.

Fortunately, there are actions we can take to improve how we cope and respond to the challenges ahead. There is no better time than NOW to begin taking care of our health and well-being, and to make Self-Care a priority. Many of us associate self-care with getting adequate exercise and proper nutrition. Self-care practices are often done either before or after work, but not during. Being at work, however, does not negate the need for continued self-care. Considering the total number of hours we spend weekly at work, it is actually more important to our well-being and for our relationships, to practice good professional self-care while at work. There are many health-enhancing behavioral strategies and self-care practices one can apply that would make a significant difference - one health step at a time.

There are two important points to remember when beginning. First, the effects are cumulative, so making one small change in one area will positively affect other areas of your life. Second, (this might make you smile), you can start anywhere! It is less difficult than you think, and there is no one right way to begin. For example, if you begin with taking a lunch break at work (at least 30-45 self-enhancing minutes), you'll notice over time that you now have more energy at the end of the day, to engage in whichever creative, healthy or fun activity that brightens your day

The following is a list of 7 recommended steps to better self-care at work (to apply in any order). Think of this as a starter list. As you become more aware of your own unique self-care needs, feel welcome to expand this list by adding your own!

1. Set and maintain professional boundaries.
2. Balance your work schedule and life demands so no one day or one week is too much.
3. Make time throughout the work day for intermittent self-care breaks (i.e. lunch or afternoon walk; social time with co-workers; listen to relaxing music).
4. Create a healthy work space for yourself
5. Develop a short list (2-3 items) of top priorities each day
6. Minimize procrastination and maximize a sense of control.
7. Before committing to a project, assignment or committee position etc., first consider your needs and available resources, and whether it will lead to overextending yourself - a sure way to compromise your self-care.

Check my upcoming posts for a more in depth discussion, with practical examples, on each of the 7 steps. In the meantime, you may find it helpful to review any of Cheryl Richardson's books on self-care. I've found them invaluable both personally and professionally.

About the Author



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