

Self-Care For Managers

By Michelle Dolan



Introduction

As restrictions ease and employees move back to the workplace, a key focus for managers is supporting their team to transition smoothly back to the office. Thoughtful processes, mindful of employee concerns are key to a successful return. To facilitate this process, managers are asked to dig deep and tap their own energy reserves as they navigate these changes on a personal level, and lead their teams through it. Given the stresses and strains of working life, it would be all too easy to become depleted. Managers need to prioritise their own self-care, otherwise, you will be pouring from an empty cup. This article addresses what self-care for managers means and ask that you consider developing new work habits; integrating moments of self-care throughout your working day – helping you manage your stress, build resilience and be a more productive, efficient, happier manager.

Self-Care Culture

The act of self-care - looking after one's own wellbeing - can include many facets; emotional, social, physical, spiritual, financial, and occupational. Wellbeing means being healthy in many interconnected aspects of our lives. Remember, you can't give anything you don't have. You must keep your own cup full. No one else will do this for you.

Typically if asked to imagine self-care, we might think of a day at the spa or trying a new mountain bike trail or simply a walk and a chat with a friend. We usually have a good sense of what works best for us, unfortunately we often neglect to plan for it. If at all, we think about it as something to fit in after work or leave it to the weekends or holidays when we have more time.

A large portion of our days is spent at work; in fact, the average person will spend 90,000 hours at work over a lifetime¹. In recent months, reports from the UK and US suggest a rise in employee stress and anxiety, leading to unprecedented levels of job burnout. It is safe to say that that your job can make a huge impact on your quality of life. Doesn't it make sense that we integrate self-care into our working day, rather than just leaving the 'me time' for later?

¹ One Third of Your Life is Spent at Work
<https://www.gettysburg.edu/news/stories?id=79db7b34-630c-4f49-ad32-4ab9ea48e72b&pageTitle=1%2F3+of+your+life+is+spent+at+work>

Self-care as a regular part of your routine

- **Prioritise self-care**

Give yourself permission to look after yourself, it's the smart thing to do. Self-care can help to prevent burnout, reduce stress, and build resilience. Furthermore, it can help ensure ongoing good health, mental and physical. Assign time in your diary - preferably before work stressors become too much - to think about what self-care looks like for you. What is your recipe for self-care success? Everyone's plan will be a bit different.

- **Focus on the positive**

It helps to focus on the positive. It's too easy to get bogged down in negative self-talk when work is stressful. Remember that self-talk affects the way you feel so be kind to yourself. Why not tell yourself a different story, a more positive one? Make a list of your strengths, and accomplishments. Read over your list and add to it often. Use positive self-talk to remind yourself of your achievements, how capable you are. Keep a record of any positive feedback and start your 'Praise' file.

- **Recognise unhealthy patterns**

Self-awareness is such a helpful muscle. Developing self-awareness allows managers to assess their growth and effectiveness and change course when necessary. What are the warning signs that you are feeling overwhelmed? Keeping a journal can help identify patterns in behaviour. This could include things like being distracted; disturbed sleep, skipped meals; headaches or, becoming isolated at work. With a heightened awareness of the cues your body is giving you, you can name the emotion at that moment and choose not to be overwhelmed by it.²

- **Create Balance**

Achieving balance in our work and personal lives is an important aspect of self-care. Make sure you have time to do the things that make you feel happy and fulfilled. We each have our own sense of what we consider to be 'balance'. For some talking with a friend in the morning may start the day off on the right foot. For others, achieving a good night's sleep is paramount. A lack of sleep can make us irritable; emotional; may impact productivity and our ability to concentrate on tasks.

Next time you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed or obsessing about work deadlines, take time out to recalibrate and focus on you. Ask yourself what in that moment could be helpful, could make you feel better? Reach out to a friend, a peer, a mentor to chat it through and start to develop - and pay attention to - your own self-care action plan.

² Betz, M., 2021, What is self-awareness and why is it important? Accessed April 2022: [https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-self-awareness]

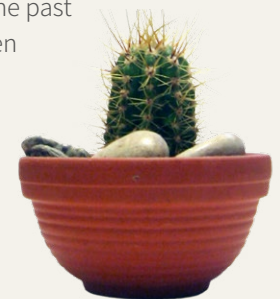
Self-Care Exercise

To ease anxiety, you can use a simple practice derived from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is the 3 C's tool:

- a. Catch the thought** – observe the narratives that are running through your mind.
- b. Collect the evidence** – is what you're telling yourself the full story - is it really true?
- c. Change the response** – choose the preferred outcome and the actions that are in alignment with that.

Maybe you're ruminating about work problems when you're trying fall asleep or beating yourself up over something you said to a friend when you should be finishing an important work project; either way, you aren't focused on the present moment.

Instead, try to switch your thoughts whenever they aren't aligned with what's happening right now. Ask yourself: Do my emotions reflect what's going on in this moment? If not, focus on your senses. What do you see and hear? What's going on in the world around you? Try to be mindful about what's right in front of you instead of what happened in the past or what you're afraid will happen in the future.



My Self-Care Action Plan³

Take some time out to focus on your self-care action plan. It helps to repeat a behaviour until it becomes automatic. A checklist helps ensure that important tasks are not being forgotten. The list below invites you to think of self-care in many dimensions of your life: emotional, physical, financial, environmental, social and, in your working hours.



	Examples. Ask yourself, what makes me feel better?	How will I achieve my goal?	What support do I need?
Physical Wellness	Regular breaks, eating meals at regular times, staying hydrated, getting enough sleep, moving throughout the working day.		
Preventative Health	Schedule those routine check-ups with your Doctor and Dentist. It's too easy to let these things slip with the demands of a busy professional and personal life. Make those appointments!		
Emotional Wellness	Have you found and developed safe relationships with people or groups inside or outside of work, where you can express your feelings and thoughts?		
Financial Wellness	Do you check your bank account often enough to ensure you don't overextend yourself? Are your savings in line with your life goals? Do you have a weekly or monthly budget so you can plan your outgoings and have a little left over to enjoy life?		
Environmental Wellness	Can you cut down non-essential meetings to allow space to recalibrate in the working day. Think about a 'No Meeting Friday' or a 'Wellness Wednesday'		
Social Wellness	Scheduling fun activities with work colleagues to lighten the mood. Setting aside quality time to spend with family and friends? Finding a new hobby you enjoy.		
Occupational Wellness	Think of the elements of your job that give you a sense of accomplishment and pride. File positive feedback and start that 'praise' folder!		

³ Adapted from CREATING A HEALTHIER LIFE: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO WELLNESS, Accessed April 2022:[<https://www.samhsa.gov/programs>]

Resources

Sticking to a wellbeing plan can be challenging, but finding the right information, supports, and resources and tracking your progress can help you get there. See below for some examples. Start to build your own list.

- > [Sleep Optimisation](#)
- > [Importance of Gut health.](#)
- > [An Employer's Guide to Mental Health in the Workplace](#) IBEC
- > [Managing and Supporting Mental Health at Work: Disclosure Tools for Managers](#), MIND
- > [A Lust For Life](#) - Irish Mental Health Charity in Ireland
- > [Self-Care: What It Really Is](#) | Susannah Winters | TEDx
- > [The Missing Ingredient in Self-Care](#) | Portia Jackson-Preston | TEDxCrenshaw



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Michelle is a highly experienced Psychologist, Organisational Consultant and Wellbeing Programme Developer. Michelle has extensive experienced working across global corporations in both Australia and Ireland. She specialises in designing Wellbeing Solutions for Irish Life Customers & Manages a team of highly Skilled Wellbeing Consultants.

Irish Life Wellbeing is a health and wellbeing consultancy from Irish Life, providing organisations with a host of scientifically validated wellbeing programmes; designed to have a real and meaningful impact on the wellbeing of your people and the health of your organisation.

If you're interested in accessing further Return to Office support for managers and employees, link in with your dedicated Irish Life Account Manager or Wellbeing Consultant for more information or [get in touch](#) to find out more.