



What's at the Top of Your To-Do List?

Take a look at your to-do list for the coming week. Right now.

Are you on it?

And if time for you IS on the list, where is it?

At the top?

If you answered "no" to either of these questions, read on.

I like to describe self-care as "saying yes to you". This is often a misunderstood concept. It does not mean neglecting everyone else in your life. And it has nothing to do with being selfish. It's as essential to life as breathing.

So, what IS self-care? While it does involve addressing your own basic needs (food, water, shelter, etc), it also involves taking care of your higher needs, wants and passions. It means being nice to yourself and treating yourself with love and respect. For women in health care who are in demanding roles, carving out even 15 minutes a day of peace and quiet for themselves is a loving act of self-care.

Simply stated, self-care involves whatever it takes to make you feel energized, happy, balanced and at ease in this world. For me, that means getting a really good night's sleep, eating well, getting a monthly massage and taking at least 10 minutes every day to just be still and let the committee in my head take a break. It also means thinking positive thoughts and talking kindly to myself. When my inner critic shows up (I call her Miranda), I get to gently tell her she has the rest of the day off.

There are challenges to creating an ideal self-care routine. The most obvious one is time. When you're working a 12-hour shift or its budget time in the department, things get a little more challenging! But there are ways to creatively keep space for yourself. Scheduling the time is the most reliable way of making sure there's something left in your day just for you.

Another, less obvious, barrier is the guilt that creeps in the moment you decide to start doing something for yourself. Miranda marches into the room with her hands on her hips screaming "that's selfish!"

But here's the truth.

It's more selfish to NOT care for yourself. If you do not feed yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually you will starve to death in one of these ways. It's that simple. Lack of self-care causes a great deal of stress which can lead to chronic illnesses, depression and burnout.

If your job involves caring for others, how can you perform at your best if you have nothing left to give? How can you be a fully present, engaged parent or partner when your inner well is empty? I am sure most of us have felt that feeling of emptiness in mind, body or spirit.

So, if you're thinking, "Great, one more thing to feel guilty about NOT doing", please let it go. The point of this is not to add to your overwhelm. The point is to start creating a life you love instead of reacting to the "crisis of the moment" or saying yes to something that is meaningless for you. It doesn't take huge amounts of time or money to get started. If all you do is allow yourself 10 minutes a day for some quiet time alone or say no to something you really don't want to do, then you are caring for yourself.

What fills your well? Think of all the things that bring you balance and joy. Write them down. Give yourself permission to take a baby step by doing one of these things in the coming week.

So, pull out your list again.

Write your name in PEN at the top.

And if Miranda shows up, show her the door.