

# Prioritizing Self-Care – a Facilitated Discussion

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## Extended Abstract

Succumbing to illness at the end of the semester is a common occurrence among both faculty and students. We seem to accept cycles of overwork and burnout as a necessary part of the academic calendar. But does it have to be that way? The growth mindset we encourage our students to embrace in the classroom can also be used to explore ways to make our work and personal lives more balanced and sustainable. I want to share my personal take on the importance of developing self-care habits to shift from overwhelming stress, wasted work time, and frequent illness to a greater feeling of balance, more efficient work, and increased joy. In a society that values busyness, it can be difficult to include personal time for rest, rejuvenation, and celebration. As I have been working to build my own personal self-care habits and find ways to encourage them in my colleagues and students, I am feeling more energized and able to do my best work. I will share an annotated bibliography of resources that have been helpful to me as well as facilitating group discussion about these ideas.

Because the proposed presentation and discussion did not fit the format of any of the normal ABLE presentation types, it was run as a special facilitated discussion session overlapping some with both lunch and the poster session. Approximately 40 people participated in the discussion. We began by taking a moment to check in with our bodies and think about the quality of energy we were feeling (positive vs. negative) and the energy level we were feeling (high or low). It was not surprising to me that towards the end of an ABLE meeting, everyone was feeling positive energy, but there was a wide range of folks with high energy levels to low energy levels. A range of goals from the session were shared including getting new ideas and strategies, relaxation, finding more tools, and mindfulness. Several examples of self-care were shared as well, including getting outside, crafting, turning off phones and social media, taking guilt-free time away from work, exercise, gardening, dancing, and yoga.

The presentation was focused around these four key concepts: (1) You are exactly where you should be. Being more aware and accepting of your feelings, thinking, and habits lets you choose how to respond. (2) Taking care of yourself is an act of generosity. Protecting time to focus on self-care makes us able to do our best in work and life. (3) We are role-models. Students are looking to us as examples – we owe them more than the cycle of burnout. (4) We all need support. The more support we get, the better we are able to thrive and support others.

In the discussion that occurred during the session, there were multiple instances when individuals asked questions that led to multiple participants suggesting ideas or techniques that had worked for them. Discussion was lively, and while some common themes emerged, individual perspectives varied. Participants completed an open-ended evaluation form in which the vast majority of participants emphasized the importance of having this forum to share concerns and strategies regarding self-care. Many specifically expressed relief at not being the “only one” to be dealing with difficulty in prioritizing self-care. Several reviews suggested having more time in a session on self-care to allow for more self-reflection, and small group discussions in addition to sharing as a larger group. My hope is that by initiating this discussion, we can all be more open to further conversations at our home institutions about prioritizing time for self-care on an individual level, but also on a departmental or institutional level as well.

**Keywords:** self-care, quality of life, burnout, growth mindset

## Resource List

### *TED Talks*

- *Study LESS Study SMART – Motivational Video on How to Study EFFECTIVELY*. Motivation2Study, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL08YZCYShc&feature=share>
- *The Way We're Working Isn't Working*. Tony Schwartz, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smrMWv5rcCo>
- *The Power of Vulnerability*. Brene' Browne, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

- *How to Make Stress Your Friend*. Kelly McGonigal, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGyVTAoXEU>

### Books

- *How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing 2nd Ed*. Paul Silvia. 2018, APA Life Tools.
- *Overwhelmed: How to Work, Love, and Play When No one Has the Time*. Brigid Schulte. 2015, Picador.
- *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. Brene' Brown. 2015, Avery.
- *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. Charles Duhigg. 2014, Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- *Your Brain at Work: Strategies for Overcoming Distraction, Re-Gaining Focus and Working Smarter All Day Long*. David Rock. 2009, YCS Publishers.
- *The Upside of Stress: Why Stress is Good for You and How to Get Good at It*. Kelly McGonigal. 2016, Avery.
- *I Know How She Does It: How Successful Women Make the Most of Their Time*. Laura Vanderkam. 2017, Portfolio.
- *Never Split the Difference: Negotiating as if Your Life Depended on It*. Chris Voss with Tahl Raz. 2016, Harper Business.
- *All the Rage: Mothers, Fathers and the Myth of Equal Partnership*. Darcy Lockman. 2019, Harper.
- *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Brene' Brown. 2010, Hazeldon.
- *The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play*. Neil Fiore. 2007, Tarcher Perigee.
- *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*. James Clear. 2018, Avery.
- *The Energy of Money: A Spiritual Guide to Financial and Personal Fulfillment*. Maria Nemeth. 2000, Wellspring/Ballantine.
- *The Bullet Journal Method: Track the Past, Order the Present, Design the Future*. Ryder Carroll. 2018, Portfolio.

### Additional Books

- *The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, Is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal*. Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz. 2005, Free Press.
- *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It*. Kelly McGonigal. 2013, Avery.
- *Smarter Faster Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity*. Charles Duhigg. 2017, Random House Trade Paperbacks.
- *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*. Daniel H. Pink. 2019, Riverhead Books.

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## About the Author

Pamela L. Connerly is an Associate Professor of Biology at Indiana University Southeast, where she teaches Cell Biology, Molecular Biology, Biology Seminar, and Introduction to Biological Sciences. She works with many talented undergraduate researchers to find and characterize novel bacteriophages that infect the bacterial host *Caulobacter crescentus*. She strives for balance in life, and is actively developing support networks to help nurture work, family, and personal time.

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