

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# BEING IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

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*As I think about “self-care” and our ability to weather the tumultuous times we’re in as a profession and as professionals, I often think about this phrase. For me, the work we do as generalists requires we’re in it for the long haul, and self-care is a critical component for this “race.” Self-care is important not only for sustaining us in the work we do each day but also for making space for innovation and creativity.*



**M**y father loves words. As my siblings and I were growing up, he gave each of us a phrase or adage that he thought we would need or would find to be a source of comfort. After I missed being valedictorian in high school by a fraction of a point in my GPA, he told me to remember, “The race is not for the swift but for the sure”. Many times since high school, he’s reminded me of this phrase when I became frustrated or disappointed or as he reflected on a single disappointment, while he celebrated my successes. As I think about self-care and our ability to weather the tumultuous times we’re in as a profession and as professionals, I often think about this phrase. For me, the work we do as generalists requires we’re in it for the long haul, and self-care is a critical component for this “race.” Self-care is important not only for sustaining us in the work we do each day but also for making space for innovation and creativity.

In *Atomic Habits*, James Clear describes the literature on how to support behavior change, information with which many of us are familiar.<sup>1</sup> He describes four “laws” of building better habits: making it obvious, making the habit attractive, making it easy, and making it satisfying. I really like the idea of using the principles of automaticity and habit formation to move closer towards the goal of self-care. Clear also describes the notion of the 1% change—that small changes compounded over time can lead to important dividends. He notes that starting somewhere, anywhere and making “atomic” changes—small, single units that be a source of energy or power—bring us incrementally closer towards our goals. So, while my self-care practice is definitely a work in progress, I try to be intentional about incorporating as many of the following elements in my day as I can.

**Magic Mornings:** I have always been a morning person and have come to really cherish that time of day when I can incorporate the building blocks of self-care that work for me before I start working on email or checking the news. The literature on productivity has also endorsed the importance of how you start your day. For example, Hal Elrod, author of *The Miracle Morning*, describes how you can build your morning to improve your health and well-being.<sup>2</sup> For me, my morning routine starts the night before. I have always needed more sleep to feel rested, so making sure I get to bed early is critical for me to maximize my day. I try to wake up early enough to incorporate several things (in addition to coffee!).

*Meditation* has been a tough one, but I started with simple goals—practicing meditation during the five minutes it takes for the coffee maker to brew. I now have incorporated using apps for longer guided meditation. *Reading at least 10 pages:* I have always been a reader but as life got busier, I felt I couldn’t fit in reading if it wasn’t work related. I find this simple goal of 10 pages manageable and it allows me to make some headway on the growing stack of books on my bedside table. *Thirty (30) minutes of “work” on personal and professional goals:* In my personal and professional life I have several passion projects that I am trying to accomplish over the coming years that go beyond what I am currently doing at work. I try to use some time in the morning to chip away at some of the reading, researching, or writing I need to do to move toward those goals.

The last thing I am working on is incorporating the *reflective practice of journaling*; I’m not quite there yet but it’s on the list!

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**Food and Exercise:** After decades on this earth and lots of experimentation, I have a pretty good idea of what works for me in terms of diet—whole grains, lots and lots of veggies, and plant or fish-based protein at every meal. It's simple, I eat pretty much the same thing each day, and I enjoy every bite. I started running when I was 12 years old and have only really stopped for injuries. While I still consider myself a runner (even though I'm currently on a several-month hiatus), recently I noticed a shift in the way I approach exercise as a self-care practice. Over the last several years, exercise for me has evolved from a “gotta” for weight control to a “must-have” for some time outside with my thoughts or with a loved one—still consistent but less intense and with a different motivation. For me, the essential food and exercise parts of self-care are all about consistency and simplicity—reducing decision-making about what and when so I ensure I have the building

blocks to feel physically, cognitively, and emotionally at my best.

**Connections:** We are social beings and I believe deep, meaningful connections are essential to our well-being. Yet, the world we live and work in often seems at odds with this fundamental part of our humanity. As someone who is more of an “introvert,” my preferences are for connecting one-on-one or in small groups (I often need some down time after our SGIM annual meeting!). In my day-to-day world, I try to be intentional about connecting with those I care about at work and home in some way, such as making space in busy days for tea or coffee with a colleague, thinking about meeting structures that allow for exchange of ideas one-on-one or in small groups, or regular breakfasts with my middle school son on teacher work days.

These are some of the ways in which I try to be intentional about

self-care so that I can be at my best for the people and projects in my personal and professional life. How are you taking care of yourself? What resources are you using or could use? Paying attention to and addressing our own physical, emotional, social, and cognitive needs and desires will help each of us be more fulfilled, find space for innovation and sustain us for the long haul.

**References**

1. Clear J. *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*. <https://jamesclear.com/atomic-habits>. Accessed February 1, 2019.
2. Elrod H. *The Miracle Morning: The Not-So-Obvious Secret Guaranteed to Transform Your Life (Before 8AM)*. <https://www.miraclemorning.com/>. Accessed February 1, 2019.

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