

**Energizing Change: Transforming Compassion Fatigue, Finding Balance, and
Sustaining Effectiveness
Equal Justice Conference 2010**

Practical Suggestions

“To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. Frenzy destroys our capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our work because it kills the inner wisdom which makes work fruitful”

Thomas Merton

TECHNOLOGY: Take control of technology: don't let it control you.

- If responding to e mail is part of your work, never do it FIRST when you begin your workday. Complete some other task or project before opening e mails. Schedule the time for e mail, and do ONLY that in a focused way until completed. Don't let it be a constant interruption in your day.
- Make decisions about e mail immediately. Do not allow to pile up.
- Turn off the sound indicating a new e mail
- If an issue is urgent, serious, or controversial, pick up the phone and avoid e mail.
- Do not check office e mail at home, unless you are working at home that day.
- Limit your availability by cell phone. Strictly limit access to your cell phone number.
- Turn off or silence your cell phone whenever possible, choosing if and when to return calls. Even the 'vibrate' setting causes a disruption in your concentration.
 - Use your cell phone as a convenience that serves your needs, not as a way to extend your work day. Ditto Blackberries and laptops
- Relearn the lost art of focusing. Multitasking creates frenzy and stress, and recent studies indicate that it also makes us less-productive than focused work. If in a meeting, BE in the meeting, turning off all cell phones, blackberries, etc. Do ONE thing at a time with great attention: it stretches time.
- Do not encourage or in any way support the idea that you are accessible at all times. (Also do not assume that others are accessible to you at all times)
- Do not encourage or in any way support the idea that people can expect a response from you immediately. (Also do not assume that others will be getting back to you immediately)
- Control to whom you respond as well as what you participate in. Is every listserve necessary? Is it a group where you can opt to receive and check it on the web when you choose to do so? Is it really necessary to 'reply all' ?

TIME MANAGEMENT: Do what is essential, not what is merely important.

Schedule a block of time to figure out what the essential IS in your life. Reassess regularly. Do not be easily swayed by other people's priorities for you.

- Organize your day according to your priorities, as opposed to spending your day reacting. Remember, anticipate, and schedule for whatever the necessary amount of interruption and 'emergency' is in your job.

- Divide your daily calendar (all 7 days) into three, 5 hour 'zones': 8 A.M.-1 P.M., 1-6 P.M., 6-11 P.M. Make sure that eight or more of these zones are reserved each week for non-work-related activities.
- If your job necessitates, focused, quiet, work periods, strictly enforce "Do Not Disturb" segments of time. If you have an office with a door, close it. Assure co-workers that this is not rude, just efficient.
- If possible, work at home ½ or an entire day. (Monday through Friday, not weekends)
- Use time on public transportation or in the car as creative, restorative time. Play your favorite music. Reflect. Sing. Dream.
- Live in the present moment. Focus your energy on the here and now.
- Block out time for YOU on your calendar during the week, and don't schedule anything in that block
- Whenever possible, schedule appointments for the farthest-out date possible. Don't schedule yourself tightly. A blank spot in your calendar does not mean you are available.
- Allow sufficient time for tasks, especially larger projects. Be realistic about the time projects require; we tend to underestimate.
- While working on an essential project, drop other things for awhile, trusting that what gets done is what needs to get done. Other important, but non-essential tasks, can wait. Some tasks simply disappear or are resolved without us.

SELF/SOUL CARE

- **BREATHE!!!!!!** Put small signs on your computer, mirror, car dashboard, etc., reminding yourself to BREATHE! Three short minutes of deep abdominal breathing rids the blood stream of stress hormones.
- Schedule time for yourself: see above.
- Insist on taking blocks of vacation time, and regular, odd days off.
- Leave the office at lunchtime.
- Take breaks: a walk, run errands, etc. Do not stay glued to your desk chair or work space all day.
- Have a staff retreat away from the office every year. Have a portion of the day be devoted to self care: yoga, back massage, etc.
- By example, demonstrate to your co-workers that self-care is a priority.
- Take comp time you earn.
- Exercise
- Create a nurturing office environment: decorate your work space/office(s) with favorite colors, plants, pleasant scents. Play soothing music. Get a miniature fountain.
- Learn to say **NO!** Know yourself well enough to know what your priorities are and stick to them.
- Find meaningful ways to nurture your own growth: spiritual practice, reading, immersion in nature, artistic expression, etc.
- Be humble; avoid over-reliance on yourself. Delegate, collaborate, cooperate, invite others into your work and world. Burnout, cynicism, and hopelessness can be rooted in an over-reliance on self, and a subtle form of arrogance.....a sense of our own indispensability.

MANAGEMENT/ENVIRONMENT

- Delegate, delegate. Help everyone feel responsible for the success of your organization.
- Monitor office culture. Is there an office value that 'rewards' (even if only by compliments and admiration) those who work excessive hours and devote themselves utterly to their work to the exclusion, and possible detriment, of their private lives?
- Foster an atmosphere of open and honest communication. Make it safe to disagree and express opposing viewpoints.
- Say "thank you" at every available opportunity. Celebrate each other.
- Have celebrations and parties whenever possible. Celebrate everything: birthdays, marriages, exam successes, births, grant awards, etc.
- Be sensitive to co-worker trauma and issues. Appropriately acknowledge that someone is in a difficult place.
- Have staff tea time once each week.... A 20 minute social break where all gather and discuss anything EXCEPT work.
- Eat lunch together on a regular basis. Enforce a no-work-discussion rule.

BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES TO EXAMINE:

- What are the dimensions of healthy compassion? Do you blur professional and personal boundaries, becoming enmeshed with clients or staff? Do you need to be needed?
- What is a healthy work ethic? In our culture of addiction, workaholicism is rampant. Do you believe that you are more valuable, a better person, or more important if you put in more hours at the office? Who is your audience for this behavior?
- Do you allow yourself to take time for self and soul care, family, leisure? If not, why not?
- Do you believe in a culture of self-sacrifice? Do you believe that it is noble to put your own needs last?
- Do you believe that worry is productive in some way? How much of your energy is spent in fearful apprehension of what MIGHT happen?
- Do you live with a scarcity mentality: there is never enough funding, resources, time, love, energy? How would your life change, both personally and professionally, if you believed in an abundance of all of these things?
- "Free yourself from the tyranny of time." (Jon Kabat Zinn). What are your beliefs about time? Remember: time is a product of thought. Minutes and hours are conventions that have no meaning **other than what we give them.**
- Do you believe that you often act because you 'have no choice'? How would your life change if you believed that **everything** you do is a choice.... that we may not control what happens to us, but that we absolutely make a choice about how to respond and what to initiate?
- What are your dreams, your joys? How does your work enliven these? What are your strengths? How can you best utilize them in your work, or in what kind of work do you believe they can best be utilized?