

Guide to Self-Care for HR Professionals

HR Exchange Network | Francesca Di Meglio | February 8, 2023



Recently, Limeade participated in a fireside chat on HR Exchange Network about how to help employees practice self-care in these challenging times. The topic resonated with the community. Obviously, the audience was Human Resources professionals, who are facing tremendous pressure to help employees with their mental health and wellness and transform the workplace to adapt to the post-pandemic, new normal.

Clearly, HR professionals, who prioritize everyone else's feelings as part of their job, need self-care, too. In the spirit of helping them take charge of their physical and mental

health at a time in which they are under more stress than ever before, HR Exchange Network shares the basics for practicing self-care:

What Is Self-Care?

Self-care is defined by Oxford Dictionary as "the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own wellbeing and health, in particular during periods of stress." Unfortunately, many people misconstrue self-care as a selfish or indulgent act. It is far from it. Although overused as an analogy, putting on the oxygen mask first is a fitting way to describe it. HR leaders must take care of themselves before they can take care of their employees. They must prevent burnout among their ranks before they can do so in the rest of the organization. Frankly, it's a tall order.

Many people confuse self-care for a day at the spa or time out to take a walk. Certainly, those acts could fall under the umbrella of self-care, but it should be much more than a one-off experience. Self-care should be more consistent. Self-care should be habits that people perform as part of their daily routine.

How to Work Self-Care into an HR Career

HR professionals are probably thinking that working self-care into their hectic schedule is impossible. But they need to take their own advice and start small. Many of them have suggested that employees take mini breaks - five minutes to meditate, a 10-minute coffee break, a moment for a deep breath to gather one's thoughts. They should force themselves to start the day with some meditation or a funny cat video or soothing cup of tea, whatever re-energizes them. They can pause for a few minutes between meetings. The point is that these few minutes here and there are easier to work into the schedule than a full day would be. These moments give the mind a break and helps people transition from one task to another.

Prioritize Health

Recently, Harvard's T.H. Chan School of Public Health conducted studies that resulted in pillars of self-care that could extend a person's life. The researchers reminded the public that self-care is about disease prevention and physical health, too. Their recommendations included:

- Maintain a healthy diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, unsaturated fats
- Avoid red and processed meats, sugary drinks, trans fat, and too much sodium
- Never smoke
- Get at least 3.5 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week
- Drink only moderate amounts of alcohol (no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks or less per day for men)
- Have a body mass index (BMI) in the range of 18.5 to 24.9

Use That PTO

As the curators of employee benefits, Human Resources professionals are well aware of what's available to them. Paid time off (PTO) and mental health days are not just for the talent they manage. It exists for the HR employees, too. And they should use their days to refresh and recharge. There are no excuses because HR is the one to hound employees if they are not taking their vacation days. So, they should do the same.

When using PTO, HR professionals should turn off work. This is hard for most. But they should truly take a break. For some, this will mean shutting off devices, putting on that auto email message, and focusing on other things. However, self-care also means accepting things that are out of one's control. It also means avoiding self-sabotage.

If HR professionals have no choice but to check in while on PTO, then they should also go easy on themselves. Sometimes, self-care simply means taking the pressure off one's shoulders and refraining from self-criticism. Sometimes, getting work done will alleviate stress more than a break will. Part of this requires knowing one's self, too.

Give Yourself a Break

Perhaps, no one recognizes that change is hard better than someone in HR. Breaking bad habits and practicing good ones are a challenge. They require a change in mindset, something HR leaders are equipped to navigate with others but not as much with themselves. As a result, they should wade into self-care. They can start small with mini breaks and using the PTO that is coming to them. Once those habits are a part of their routine, they can focus on the physical health habits recommended by Harvard researchers.

Throughout the journey, they must never forget the importance of this exercise of self-care. Recognize when working and getting stuff done will help more than a vacation day. Self-care must work for them, so they should consider their own preferences and circumstances.

"True self-care," according to Fast Company, "is considering what you need, what energizes you, and how you can expand your wellbeing physically, emotionally, and cognitively."

What kinds of self-care practices have you made part of your life? Let us know in the comments how HR professionals can prioritize their own health.