Self-Care to Self-Awareness

Ger McHugh
Life and Business Coach, Trainer & Facilitator

I recently had the pleasure of facilitating a couple of workshops called Self-Care to Self-Awareness with people working on the frontline in social services with clients who need high quality care and support. The dedicated workshop participants have chosen this career because they want to make a difference in people’s lives. They believe their clients deserve a better life. However in caring for these vulnerable and often challenging clients, in a climate of unprecedented financial cuts over the past number of years, they are often ‘guilty’ of neglecting their own well-being. I use the word ‘guilty’ purposefully and with compassion here, because in these cases people are committing an offence or doing wrong against themselves and what their mind, body and soul is often crying out for.

It’s not just people working in the caring professions that find it hard to look after themselves and put their needs first (at least some of the time). Parents, carers, teachers, managers, entrepreneurs, athletes, bankers, builders, students, researchers, Doctors etc.... I don’t think it matters what your profession, formal or informal, it can be hard to find time to look after yourself in today’s busy, constantly ‘turned on’ society.

Demanding work environments and deadlines, hectic family schedules, financial pressures, non-stop connectivity challenge us all. To cope and in our attempt to be successful, we often give up the things that we don’t think are important, the very things that nourish us! This generally happens over a period
of time and suddenly you ‘wake up’ one day, weeks or months later and realise you haven’t really been living. You haven’t been out for a jog in weeks, haven’t made your art class, have cancelled nights out with friends, are living on take-away dinners, have stopped playing with your children before bedtime. You don’t feel very good or happy. You find yourself wondering ‘is this it - what life is all about’?

So the clue is in the title with this one. No one else can take responsibility for our well-being. Caring for ourselves is down to each and every one of us. It is putting on our own oxygen mask first before helping those around us, to use the airplane analogy!

We know what self-care is, in practical terms, right? Self-care could be any behaviour that seeks to improve the quality of our lives. Things like taking time out to relax. Learning to say ‘No’ if it doesn’t feel right to say ‘Yes’. Getting enough sleep. Being kind to ourselves. Meditating. Doing some physical activity. Letting our creativity flow. Having fun. Connecting with other positive people in our environment. Having some time alone. Cooking our favourite meal. Having a bath. Doing some gardening. Talking about our worries with a friend. Putting first things first and taking action on the priorities. Singing or listening to music. Breathing and knowing we are breathing. It might be different for all of us and that’s okay too.

However, I think it’s amazing that we find so many reasons not to prioritise self-care which can help resource and nourish us for all the ups and downs of life. No time. No energy. Can’t afford it. Worried what other people will say/think. The weather too bad. Don’t want to upset other people or their routines. Don’t think it’s important (enough). Not worth it. Are these simply excuses? Do we really want to give other people the power and responsibility for our well-being? I think not!

Answering these questions will help you develop your own self-care plan:

- What do you want less of in your life?
- What do you want more of in your life?
- What healthy coping strategies can you apply to reduce stress/pressure building in your work or home life?
- What small changes can you make to nourish you – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually – right now?

Self-care is your job. Your right. Your responsibility!

And now for the great news. YOU, and those around you will reap the benefits!

**Author:**
Ger McHugh
Life and Business Coach, Trainer & Facilitator
germchughlifecoach@gmail.com
www.germchugh.com