

Don't Let Your Calling Catch Up with You: The Importance of Self-Care

By Monique Perry

I've had my Apple Watch for a couple years now, and one day at work it was a signal to me about the importance of self-care. While having a performance review meeting with one of my direct reports (a very positive one!), I started to feel a bit weak. My watch started to ping me that my heart rate was increasing rapidly. While I had never experienced any heart issues or blood pressure challenges, something wasn't right. So, after a quick vitals check in our Public Safety area, I went to the ER. In 20 minutes, I had blood work completed, a series of x-rays, and two EKGs; all tests were negative! The ER doctor asked "Has anything stressful happened to you in the past 48 hours?" Little did he know that I had planned and executed a family reunion out of town that weekend for 100 plus people and returned to work the very next day (the day in question). So he said, "Oh yeah, that is it. I am writing you out for rest. There isn't anything wrong with you other than needing that. And ma'am, while you were very pleasant, make sure you are getting your rest so I don't see you again!"

While I have always managed a large workload and multiple priorities—including being a single mom and always having a demanding leadership role—I had never experienced the impact of managing multiple priorities on my physical health. This "episode" highlighted the importance of self-care. One could arguably say that other than those in top positions at a college or university, those who work in enrollment management have some of the most high-pressure roles at an institution. This is often due to the student-facing as-

pect of enrollment management coupled with the direct and visible focus on enrollment performance. With that in mind, it's critical to be mindful of self-care. It's certainly not a nebulous concept to start considering. Here are some practical tips:

- ◆ **Self-care doesn't have to be magnanimous.** To get refreshed and relaxed does not require a super-expensive luxurious vacation all of the time. There are little things on a daily, weekly, or periodic basis that one can do to practice self-care. Things like massage therapy, "no activity" weekends, after-work travel, and reading/devotional time help re-center and keep me going during the week.
- ◆ **You don't have to go on vacation to use your vacation days!** I used to think you had to have something planned to use a vacation day. Sometimes you need a day just to fit in the local errands or doctors' appointments that are difficult to schedule after hours. You can even use vacation time in order to spend a day at home with your family or to be home when your kids get there. One day's mental break from work in order to focus on the mundane is sometimes the mental self-care and reset one needs.
- ◆ **Charge your batteries before and after peak periods!** We always tell staff within the enrollment division to make sure they take time off before peak periods. I ask my leadership team to monitor time off and whether anyone has worked for an extended period without taking at least one day off; I encourage them to have a conversation about self-care. This applies after peak

periods as well. While I so appreciate a dedicated team, I want the team to be well holistically. Having these conversations has also helped other team members remain conscious of this priority.

◆ **Don't let work get in the way of your routine health appointments!** The importance of eating well and exercising as means of self-care is always reinforced. While I struggle with these (and certainly am not the poster child for either), I have colleagues who are super fit but still struggle with other issues. Sometimes our days are so long and full that we put off our routine self-care. One strategy that I learned from someone recently is to schedule all of your routine appointments—dental, physical, and other—during your birthday month in order to “keep the batteries charged.” It is easy to let these things slip, and it's critical to check these things off one's to-do list.

◆ **Convenience is care!** Depending on the demands on your personal and professional life, self-care may mean freeing yourself from the routine work you have to do and redirecting that time toward your personal life—family and friends and/or yourself. I detest going grocery shopping, so having a delivery service is a small budget item I am willing to sacrifice for. Others may choose meal prep services, housekeeping, a sitter for a regular date night, etc. Remember that sometimes investing in convenience helps manage stress and gives back time for more productive or enjoyable things.

◆ **Sometimes a “no” is a “yes.”** It is hard to say “no” to things you want to do—and if you are like me,

you want to do everything! But I have learned as my professional life has grown (and as my community involvement has) that I sometimes have to say no to things. While this is not something I have to do all of the time, it does happen (or I may have to offer an alternative to someone who asks me to do something personal).

◆ **Keep the energy and people around you positive.** Spending time with family and friends is key to self-care as relationships help make us whole. Maintaining a circle that is positive and uplifting assists with self-care too. While our loved ones may have challenges that we of course want to support them through, be careful of individuals who are constantly negative or who sap your energy when you are around them. There is a difference. At work, for the most part you really can't choose the people you are around (but outside of work you can).

The good news about self-care is that it's all about you. What I have learned and continue to learn is that as I do more, I must be more vigilant about the self-care I provide. Being attentive to self-care has made me more productive (which is surprising to those who didn't think I could do anything more!). I'm able to continue to do the variety of things in support of student success and higher education that I enjoy, and this makes me happiest. Take time today to do your inventory. Don't let an ER visit force you to.

About the Author

Monique Perry, Ed.D., is an award-winning administrator, author, leadership coach, and speaker who utilizes a hybrid of leadership experiences from over a decade in the private sector and higher education arenas to support student success. Dr. Perry is Associate VP, Enrollment & Campus Operating Officer – Chester and Lancaster Campus Sites, leading the enrollment management division off-campus sites at York Technical College in Rock Hill, South Carolina. In this capacity she is the Chief Campus Officer for off-campus sites in Chester and Lancaster Counties, and also serves as the college's Chief Enrollment Management Officer leading five departments including admissions, outreach and orientation; financial aid; academic records/registrar; one-stop center and call center operations, and enrollment data and communications. While in this role, Dr. Perry was selected by the South Carolina Technical College System as the statewide recipient of the A. Wade Martin Innovator of the Year Award in 2017. In 2018, she was selected as one of 40 national leaders as an Aspen Institute Presidential Fellow for Community College Excellence.

Prior to leading the enrollment division, Dr. Perry served as the college's public information officer and director of strategic marketing and communications. Preceding that role, she served as a full-time faculty member and advisor in the English department at York Tech. Before transitioning to higher education, Dr. Perry spent several years in the private sector in various marketing and communications leadership roles including executive speechwriter and project manager.

Dr. Perry earned her doctorate in higher education administration from the University of Florida; and completed a graduate degree in strategic communications and leadership from Seton Hall University. Her undergraduate degree in English is from North Carolina Central University. She has a coaching certificate from the Association for Talent Development (ATD), and is an alumni of the Center for Creative Leadership.

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