

## POWER POINTS

# To be more productive, we must realize that self-care is not negotiable

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Time management coach Risa Williams tells her clients that self-care is not negotiable. She urges them to pick out three top goals that will rise over the flotsam and jetsam of daily life and work steadily to achieve them – but one of those three must be self-care.

“We need to befriend ourselves, not turn against ourselves in the pursuit of our goals,” she writes in *Get Stuff Done Without the Stress*.

Practising a self-kindness mindset for many years has brought her a surprising twist: She somehow is far more effective at getting things done. That self-kindness mindset includes:

- Resting when your brain and body need to rest.
- Recognizing downtime is not lazy. It’s a necessity. It helps our brains and bodies to function.
- Finding ways to connect to your calm is a daily practice that can help you manage your time more effectively.
- Give yourself permission to feel “done” with things at the end of each day.

She advises you to map out three goals from a higher-level perspective that you can keep in mind as you plan your weeks and days. Those goals might be issues that

require a few months to be completed or even several years. Whatever the time frame, break down steps required to achieve those goals – remember one must be self-care – over the weeks and months ahead. At the end of each month, review what has been accomplished and re-calibrate as necessary. Swap goals if necessary, but keep to three tracks, a manageable number. Don't try to accomplish the goals instantly. Work in a steady, consistent pace.

The purpose of the self-care track is to actively bring your stress down. Write down activities that help you stay mentally and physically balanced each week – and happy. They might range from meditating, walking, exercising or knitting to being in green spaces or blue spaces (near lakes, oceans and marinas). Schedule some for the coming week – every day if possible.

This is not about damage control. Or treats and rewards. “Daily self-care practices should be things we can do consistently, easily and without too much planning. Our self-care should include activities that actively bring our stress down in small notches through the day,” she writes.

Familiarize yourself with how stress accumulates in your body. She suggests a one-to-10 scale, and learning how you feel for each gradation from mellow to freaking out.

What number is the tipping point, when it starts to boil over? That number will differ for each of us but it's important to identify the internal and external signs it is approaching so you can act before it becomes far more difficult to regain productivity. Write down a few activities that can bring your stress down, one notch at a time.

“It's helpful to remember that stress doesn't just turn off like a light switch. We can't go from a 10 down to a one instantly. We have to bring our stress down one level at a time, by purposefully choosing to take actions that calm us down,” she says.

If you share your scale with others, it can be a way to communicate your state of mind. One of her clients would tell his wife “I'm at an eight” so she wouldn't take his mood personally.

Small steps add up to big things. She recommends acknowledging your progress toward your goals and enjoying the feelings of accomplishment. Keep a small-steps journal that you write in every night so you can cheer yourself up and along.

And don't forget: Self-care is not negotiable.

## Quick Hits

- It's common to be curious about what's new but Basecamp software co-founder Jason Fried argues it's more interesting to be curious about the old. What stood the test of time? What worked before and still works now? "Longevity isn't a fluke. It's an opportunity to get on board when you missed it before," he says.
- Author Mark Manson suggests the most impactful things you do are often the things you don't do. Examples: The distractions you don't indulge, the toxic people you don't engage, the fights you walk away from and even, in some cases, the opportunities you turn down.
- Your time is better spent championing good ideas than tearing down bad ones, notes author James Clear. Feed the good ideas and let bad ideas die of starvation.

*Harvey Schachter is a Kingston-based writer specializing in management issues. He, along with Sheelagh Whittaker, former CEO of both EDS Canada and Cancom, are the authors of When Harvey Didn't Meet Sheelagh: Emails on Leadership.*

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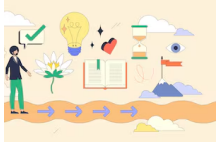
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