

1 Taking Care of Yourself as Well as You Do Others

The trouble with the rat race is even if you win, you're still a rat.

—Lily Tomlin

KNOWING YOURSELF

The need to harmoniously connect our outer lives with our inner lives has been the subject of many books over literally thousands of years.

- Does my work reflect what I value?
- Do I know what I value?
- To what extent do the demands of others agree or conflict with who I want to be as a person?
- How do I maintain a balance between my personal and professional life?
- Am I paying attention to all aspects of my life?

These are difficult questions, but the answer may be found in the old adage *Know thyself*. If you work on getting to know who you are, not just in terms of what you do, but as a person with certain attributes, needs, and

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dispositions, as a family member, as a friend to others, you will answer such questions from a point of centeredness and purpose that unites what you do with who you are. Are you aware of your connections with the interior landscape of your life, with the invisible dimensions that include your mind, your emotions, your spirit, and the deepest desires of your heart?

When Principal Steve comes to school on Monday morning, his mind is on the parent conference he has scheduled for 7:30 to discuss why the eighth grade daughter didn't get selected to the cheerleading squad. As he approaches, he sees a fire truck in front of his school and is greeted by his agitated custodian because of a broken water pipe that has flooded the restrooms.

Steve needs to quickly sort out his priorities and be able to respond appropriately to each situation. Steve thrives on such challenges, but by the end of his 10-hour day, which will also include a bus accident, shortage of a substitute in the science class, a presenter who doesn't show up for the assembly, and the superintendent's call to get in that safety report that was due last week, Steve's head hurts and his mind is still racing on his way home.

He wonders if he did the right thing in each situation (he can't even remember all the ones he handled that day). What will he do about the fights on the playground that seem to be increasing? Why can't other people take more responsibility for tasks assigned to them, so that he doesn't have to keep checking? How will he find classrooms for the extra students he is expecting next spring?

In the evening, his family also wants some of his time, and Steve sinks into bed dead-tired at 11:00, not having had a minute to reflect on his own needs. He has had no downtime just for himself all day. He enjoys jogging, but hasn't been able to find time to do any lately. And tomorrow will be the same.

Principal Steve can take a few such days, but if he doesn't find some space to renew himself, it's only a matter of time before signs of stress will appear in his body and in his actions, and he will begin to wonder how long he can continue this way. This pattern of rushing from one thing to the next—is he doing any good for anyone, including himself?

The graduate students in my administration classes, most of whom are teachers, observe their own principals and wonder if they really want to go into administration. The apparent stresses, the workload, and the lack of time for their personal lives are barriers that loom large before those considering jobs as administrators. Administrators already in their positions, like Principal Steve, wonder if they wouldn't like to do something else—perhaps leave the profession or transfer to a small school in the countryside—before they burn out and become ineffective.

In today's working climate, the rewards of being an administrator seem to grow increasingly internal, as everyone seems poised to criticize and condemn the leader's performance. It's hard not to take such attacks personally. To survive, succeed, and continue to enjoy the job requires inner strength, courage, and the knowledge of one's purpose for being in such a position. It is no wonder that there is a shortage of administrators!

This chapter will look at some reasons why administrators need to live a more balanced life and pay attention to their Personal Growth. Too many administrators succumb to stress and burnout and can hardly wait to retire. Some become discouraged, ineffective, unhappy, and resort to a survival mentality while continuing in their jobs. Too few teachers want to go into administration because they see what their own principals have to endure. And everyone agrees that we need more good administrators and great leaders!

WHY IS THERE A SHORTAGE OF ADMINISTRATORS?

There is a well-documented shortage, a decreasing pool, of administrators, especially for superintendent and school principal positions (Cohn, 2001; Educational Research Service, 1998; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; McAdams, 1998). Many states and universities have recently implemented a fast-track mode for preparing administrators to meet this need. I doubt if such rushed preparation programs will result in administrators who have the necessary knowledge and skills and the personal competencies required for the job today.

In her surveys of graduates of educational administration programs, Adams (1999) learned that one of the major reasons why so many students do not intend to go into an administrative position after they complete their preparation programs is that they do not wish to subject themselves to the workload, long hours, and stressful environment that they perceive to be part of the principal's job.

STRESS AND BURNOUT: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A LACK OF BALANCE

The following brief review of the topic of stress and our response to stress will be useful in coming to understand that one of the major reasons for paying attention to our Personal Growth is to better cope with the stress we experience related to our work and our personal lives.

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A few years ago, the term *burnout* was coined when referring to teachers and administrators whose effectiveness went up in smoke, so to speak, because they were unable to take care of themselves while performing their jobs. Burnout is said to be brought on by unrelieved work stress and results in depleted energy reserves (Wax & Hales, 1990, p. 3).

Many books have been written on what causes stress, on various aspects of stress, results of excessive stress, preventing excessive stress, and managing stress (Benson, 1975; Giammatteo & Giammatteo, 1980; Miller, 1979). Early researchers in the field of stress, such as Walter B. Cannon and Hans Selye (Brantley, 2003), described the feelings you experience in your mind and body as a fight-or-flight stress response. In fact, Selye defined stress as a response to a stressor or demand.

In his classic book, Dr. Herbert Benson (1975, 2000) described the physical symptoms associated with stress and explored a multitude of practices from various religions, cultures, and traditions to recommend what he called the Relaxation Response. This technique requires a quiet environment, a mental device to calm the mind, a passive attitude, and a comfortable position for the body.

Since Benson first wrote his book, much continues to be discovered about the important connections between mind and body, between physical and psychological experience, and the impact of thoughts and emotions on health. I often think about what my friend Gordon, a Jungian analyst, said about stress in his lecture called "Gifts My Father Never Gave Me" (Nelson, November 14, 2003): "Stress leads to the birth of the soul, the birth of inner consciousness. You have to find your own soul—no one else can give it to you."

Many authors agree that stressful events, in and of themselves, do not produce stress. For example, King (1981) showed that the stress associated with certain events come from the individual's reaction to the event, and are based on the beliefs about the event or about the individual's relation to it, rather than by the nature of the event itself. Thus, it is our response to life situations that makes the difference in how we experience stress.

WHAT CAUSES YOU STRESS?

Awareness of what events seem to create stress for you is the first step to managing stress, and planning a different response. What factors cause stress for you?

Malnar (1996) summarized research on factors that contributed to the stress and burnout experienced by administrators, in particular of superintendents: increased workload demands, diminishing financial resources,

lack of respect as professionals, lack of support, a sense of isolation, and powerlessness over decisions.

Here are some of the factors reported by administrators in my studies that created stress for them:

- work overload
- time constraints/workloads
- staff/personnel issues
- unrealistic expectations and requirements of others
- too many policies and laws
- political agendas of those in charge
- financial problems in the organization
- inadequate support from superiors
- dealing with parents
- inadequate resources and support

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO STRESS?

If the experts are correct that it is our reaction to external events that creates stress, it supports a basic premise of this book that we need to take care of ourselves to effectively respond to the stress factors inherent in our jobs. Many experts emphasize that stress is experienced especially when you are required to make decisions in your job where there is a conflict with your belief system.

For example, Principal Steve really wants to get angry and tell the mother how unrealistic she is about her daughter's potential for cheer-leading and that the tryouts were conducted in a totally fair manner. However, he also knows it might be best to control his emotions. When should he back down and when should he stand up for his beliefs? He knows he should finish the superintendent's report, but he wants to be at his son's open house that evening. The decision to choose one or the other creates stress which he perceives as having "too much on my plate."

You may experience stress if you have to discipline a teacher who has been your fishing buddy, or if you disagree with the new zero tolerance policy that requires you to expel a second grader for bringing a kitchen knife, or if you really believe that children learn to read in many different ways, but your district mandates a "phonics-only" program.

Knowing yourself, what you believe in a particular situation, what your ethical standards are, reflecting on the conflicts you are experiencing, and how to let go of some of the alternatives becomes key to managing stress. And knowing yourself has to do with paying attention to your inner dimensions.

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STRESS AND YOUR HEALTH

The connection between stress and health has been well researched and documented. Studies have connected stress to a variety of physical ailments such as infectious diseases, heart attacks, ulcers, and even cancer. The consequences of stress overload include exhaustion, depression, estrangement from work, powerlessness, alienation, burnout, depersonalization, the meaninglessness of work, and premature death (Malnar, 1996). Goleman (1995) discusses research that linked toxic emotions such as anxiety (defined as “distress evoked by life’s pressures”) to onset of sickness and course of recovery.

Sounds scary, doesn’t it? But we’ve all seen colleagues who’ve experienced it. You have perhaps felt some of these symptoms yourself. How do you respond to stress, and how good are you at taking care of yourself, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually?

We also know that there is positive stress and that a certain amount of stress is good for you (Benson, 1975; King, 1981; Miller, 1979; Sweere, 2004). What leaders need is to develop effective strategies for coping with and managing stress.

The practices described in this book will help leaders to achieve a needed balance in their lives by getting to know, and taking care of, all aspects of themselves. By learning and selecting appropriate strategies, such as physical exercise or meditation, experiencing the power of creating something through art, or feeling the healing touch of a piece of music, the leader will gain a reservoir of resources to use in times of stress.

It is important to be able to recognize when stress gets too high. In the words of one administrator I interviewed,

You can’t keep doing everything. Take the pressure off yourself. You need time to reflect on the “tyranny of the shoulds” and which balls you can drop . . . Of all the balls you juggle, one will drop, and you’ll get yelled at about it. Focus on the most strategic ones.

To this administrator, it was focusing on the people in his business. Ask yourself in each situation where your priorities are, which ball you can afford to drop, and to which request you can choose to say “No.”

When I was a principal, I had a little card on my bulletin board right next to my desk that said “People before Paper.” As a result of setting this priority for using my time, I tried to do my paperwork after most people had left.

Another principal friend of mine, Tom, had a habit of coming in to his office to catch up on paperwork every Saturday morning. I’m not necessarily

advocating this, but it illustrated his priority to pay more attention to the human elements of his job during the week. By the way, Tom also took time to participate in a community softball team as a way to maintain his balance. Tom was always open to the needs of others, appeared relaxed, and was a great listener, because he took care of his own needs and knew what kept him going. And Tom was said to be the best principal in the district.

STAYING BALANCED IN CRISES

Another reason you need to take care of yourself is so that you will be better able to deal with the crises that are a part of the rhythm of everyday life. Personal or organizational crises can have a major role in creating awareness of the need for taking care of oneself.

Crisis cause self-reflection and examination of the meaning of life. In their book *The Hero's Journey*, Brown and Moffett (1999) demonstrate that the quest for a new identity always leads through some crisis where innocence is lost, where some breakdown occurs, which then leads us through chaos in order to find a new way. Crises may be related to family or to the job. Crises make us realize how much in life is outside of our control, and we feel temporarily lost or frustrated.

The poet Dante is famous for his statement that "midway on our life's journey, I found myself in dark woods, the right road lost" (Pinskey, 1994, p. 3). Sometimes we feel lost, and what used to work for us no longer does. What are some crises that have impacted you? How have they led you to acknowledge your need for inner strength and perhaps a new identity?

Crisis bring changes and send us into periods of transition. The psychological process people go through in such times includes having to let go of something, parts of their old reality. Discovering the new reality takes time, and the road there is often confusing and painful. Bridges (1991) calls managing these neutral zones one of the most difficult aspects of the transition process. In his chapter entitled "Taking Care of Yourself" he describes the inner chaos experienced in these neutral zones. One of his recommendations is to take time-outs for reflecting on what is happening and to experiment with new possibilities.

Think about when you have experienced a loss. Have you lost a loved one to death? Has an important relationship broken up, perhaps through a divorce? What about your physical health? What happened when you or a family member were affected by some life-changing illness? Have you ever lost a job? A serious reassessment of priorities occurs when such crises touch our lives. In such times one needs inner strength to cope, to survive, and to rise again, like the legendary phoenix bird from his ashes.

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Even the everyday crises of the job can cause someone to lose his sense of balance and become one-sided. We have probably all seen an administrator who has given up and has chosen the path of least resistance, or one whose impatient responses indicate some unresolved internal conflict.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF YOUR LIFE?

Stresses, crises, and changes in our lives cause us to examine the purpose and meaning of our existence. When we are young, we approach our careers and our lives with enthusiasm and courage, like warriors ready for battle, knowing we will win. As we experience some of life's disappointments and failures, we begin asking the important questions of life, and search for our reasons for living. When I interviewed the superintendents who had involuntarily lost their jobs, their situation forced them to ask such basic questions, and to examine parts of their lives that they had perhaps neglected in their busy careers.

How do you respond to questions about the purpose of your life? I have observed some who, as they age, become bitter, cynical, and closed off to life's possibilities. Others seem to be able to rebound and make new sense of their existence. Maybe you are too young in your career to even ask yourself those questions.

The "encounter with the meaning of life is the most important task we have to accomplish in the years after midlife," states Jaeger (1995, p. 16). Victor Frankl (1984), reporting on his amazing survival in a Nazi concentration camp, found meaning in little things to get him through the senselessness and despair of his situation. He developed a form of psychotherapy he called logotherapy (logo comes from the Greek word *logos*, having to do with "meaning"). What brings meaning to your life?

Each person discovers his own meaning by being connected with his inner self. By practicing ways of taking care of yourself and engaging in your Personal Growth, you will begin to find the answer to the all-important questions about your life's mission as a leader and as a person. It is crucial to know yourself and your purpose, so that you can stay on course through whatever challenges may come your way.

One of the administrators I interviewed said it this way:

You've got to reflect on who you are, the inner core of your Self. What are your values, your sources of strength? How do you translate who you are into your relations with others? How do you blend your values with the facts of your job?

ORDINARY MONDAYS

Sometimes it isn't a crisis that drives us inside ourselves and causes us to search for meaning. It could be boredom or weariness, fatigue, discouragement, or the tedious routine of the things we do. I call it *Ordinary Mondays*. It's that feeling of listlessness as you drive to work on a Monday morning, or when you have to do the laundry, when you have to sit in a dull meeting, when it's rained for too many days, or when you wish it would rain again. It is the time when you have to work hard at being a good listener as you hear the same parent complaint for the tenth time that week. It's the discouragement you feel when your staff has worked so hard, and yet your school's achievement test scores seem not to be going up enough.

How do you get through those dull or depressing times until you can feel light and energetic again? Here, too, you need some strategies to take care of yourself, some way of touching your inner core that gets you through this.

There wasn't much excitement left in my colleague Vic. He'd been a principal for more years than could be counted. He'd done and heard it all before—the same issues, the same talk at PTA meetings, the same reasons for why a teacher wanted that kid removed from her class. The faces were different, but it had all become boring and routine. Vic's way of dealing with this was mostly to laugh about it. He'd prescribe the same solutions and went home early every day. Somehow he got by and survived. I often wondered if he'd ever thought of self-renewal, or even knew that he needed it. But then he was just a couple of years from retirement.

Maybe in today's harsh reality of accountability, Vic too would have been more motivated to change. Not that he was a bad principal, but not much happened in his school. I wonder what might have ignited Vic's passion and sent a lively spark to those whose lives he affected. If I knew him today, I'd sit down with him and show him my list of Personal Development practices and perhaps have him find himself in one of them. But maybe he wouldn't want to listen to all that. I wonder what he's doing now in his retirement.

THE NATURE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR'S JOB

Greater expectations of our institutions by the public, the fast pace of technological changes, and higher stakes tied to accountability have impacted the job of the administrator today. This comment by a high school principal on one of my recent surveys illustrates how bad it may be getting: "If

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superiors would stop threatening to fire administrators, that would relieve some stress.”

Administrators are caught in the middle of many conflicting demands. More work added, fewer positions due to budget cuts, longer reports to satisfy the doubts of those who perhaps don't even read them, and an ever-growing to-do list—these are certainly some of today's realities.

The impact of such a working climate on the administrator is clear. In such an environment, it is increasingly difficult to find time for oneself, for thoughtful reflection before making decisions, or for maintaining a healthy balance of all aspects of one's life. This has been called a loss of soul and the great malady of our century (Moore, 1992).

In *Leading With Soul*, Bolman and Deal (1995) ask the key question of whether the dazzling array of remote controls available to us today satisfies our hunger for a richer, fuller, more meaningful life, or whether our contemporary emphasis on progress has put us on a one-way street to personal anguish and social disarray (p. 5). They advocate infusing our organizations with soul and spirit.

In her study on the levels of balance between the personal and professional lives of women superintendents, Malnar (1996) described the phenomenon of work addiction. She found that many of these superintendents suffered from work addiction and seemed to be so driven by their compulsion to work that they demonstrated a profound loss of ability to control the level of balance in their lives (p. 114). Malnar also concluded that some organizations foster and even reward behaviors associated with work addiction because of their long-established patterns of excessive work schedules at the expense of personal time for oneself, family, or recreation (p. 123).

Do you know someone who is a workaholic? Perhaps you are one and in denial of it, as were many of the superintendents in Malnar's study.

In a recent journal published by the American Association of School Administrators (McKay, 2004), the subject of workaholism was labeled as a serious mental health problem for school administrators, resulting in negative impact on their families as well as on their productivity.

A LEADER WHO TAKES CARE OF HIM OR HERSELF

What does such a leader look like? In the last chapter of this book, I will further describe the qualities and characteristics of leaders who are engaged in their own Personal Growth. In summary and essence, such a leader is a life-long learner who pays attention to all aspects of her existence. She is a leader who seeks to maintain a balance in her life, incorporating all of her

major life goals. Such a leader reflects continuously on his activities to make sure that what he does, thinks and feels, is related to what he values in life. A leader who is working on his Personal Development is not perfect, nor completely self-actualized, but seeks to get to know himself and what is important in his personal and professional life. He then allocates and prioritizes his time and energy toward those values.

How does this process work for such a leader? The practices described in this book serve as paths to one's inner self, helping the leader to get to know herself by touching a deeper part of herself and developing an awareness of all aspects of her being. When the leader makes such practices a part of her life, she will be able to live a more balanced life, a less compartmentalized life. She will be better able to handle the stresses and crises of her work and personal life. She will be better able to connect her values with her work—to relate “who I am” with “what I do.”

In his best-selling book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (1989) calls this Habit 7, the principle of balanced self-renewal. He includes four dimensions of renewal: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual. He shows how this habit of balanced self renewal surrounds all the other habits, and is the one that makes all the others possible (p. 287).

By examining and transforming his own life, by engaging in practices for his own Personal Growth, a person will learn to be the kind of leader that all the leadership books in the world talk about: a servant leader, a transformative leader, a charismatic leader, a highly effective leader, a leader who will make a difference with her life and work. He is a leader who is able to lead with soul (Bolman & Deal, 1995). She is the kind of leader you and I long to be.

REFLECTIONS AND EXERCISES

Reflect on the following questions. You may want to record some of your answers in your journal and review them periodically.

1. Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the center. On one side of the line, draw a picture or use symbols, to show what causes you stress. On the other side, depict what you do to take care of yourself when you feel stressed. Discuss it with a friend you trust.
2. Think about a significant crisis in your career or personal life. Write down the feelings and insights you experienced. How did this experience change priorities in your personal and professional life?

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3. Which of your ordinary routines do you find meaningless? What could you do to change them?
4. What is your mission, your purpose in life, and how is that expressed in what you do in your job and in your personal life? List what is most important to you in the areas of your life listed below. Begin each category with "In my _____, I want to be . . ."
 - physical health
 - mental health
 - feelings and emotions
 - relationship with others
 - spiritual life
5. Imagine your inner world as a garden. "By 'fixing up' your inner garden you can symbolically work out mental and emotional tensions relating to health and other situations in your life" (King, 1981, p. 116). Sit with this image and become aware of what is going on there. Maybe you want to draw a picture of what you see. Revisit your inner garden periodically and observe how it might have changed.