

LOOK OUT for the LEADER

Principals are responsible
for the well-being of
teachers, students,
and themselves

By Allyson Apsey



As a principal, you focus on the whole child, making sure your students are engaged, supported, challenged, and healthy. And you also need to support the whole teacher in recognition of the increasing demands they face. But who is looking out for the whole leader?

Take a look in the mirror. You're the one looking after your health and well-being. And if you are going to be the person everyone needs you to be, you'll need to make self-care a priority.

From the moment the alarm goes off in the morning to the time you crawl back into bed, you have opportunities to uplift yourself while taking care of everyone around you. The most important question each morning is likely not, "What do I need to accomplish today?" but instead, "Who do I *need to be* to accomplish great things today?"

Let's take a look at the principal's day to identify a few opportunities for self-care:

The messages you tell yourself when you wake up. As you rub your eyes awake in the morning, what messages do you tell yourself? Do you berate yourself for not going to bed earlier? Do you look at the day ahead and groan because of the 12 meetings scheduled? The messages we tell ourselves matter more than the messages we tell others. If you focus on just two positive things when you wake up—one reason you're proud of yourself and one thing you're grateful for, for example—it can have a huge impact on the day ahead.

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There are plenty of resources that can help you create this new habit. I often play a "morning motivation" YouTube video, a Brené Brown audiobook, or a selection of inspiring songs in the morning. Other people might read devotionals or write in a journal. Use whatever tools necessary to make the first words you tell yourself in the morning positive and uplifting.

Lead with a smile. Principals' schedules and to-do lists make others cringe. The job is often described as "lonely," but it doesn't have to be that way. Instead of allowing a list to lead the day, lead it with connections and smiles. I greet

students each morning with warmth and positivity. What would happen to your connections with teachers if you greeted them the same way? Strong, positive connections with adults can have a significant impact on school culture and help satisfy a principal's needs, too.

Move. I admire principal friends who run, but running is not the only beneficial way to move. Incorporating movement and play into each school day is a great habit to curate in addition to exercise before or after school. Get out of the office and into the halls, classrooms, and playgrounds to get your steps in. Whether you want to become a #FitLeader through running, strength training, or Zumba, you'll not only improve your health, but you'll also positively impact the way you feel physically and mentally.

Make connections. When I get to spend time with educational leaders across the state and country, I am re-energized. I love meeting up with them face-to-face at conferences, and I am happy we can stay connected through social media. I'll never have to face a problem alone, because I have connections with other leaders across the country. I turn to district colleagues for advice often, but I can also pick up the phone, send a Voxer message, or tweet a request to get a different perspective. This has transformed my practice and supplied copious amounts of ideas and inspiration.

Sleep. When I'm running on little sleep, I joke that I'll sleep when I am dead. But research shows that sleep is no joke. Our bodies might need different amounts of sleep, but getting at least seven hours is crucial to health and well-being. It impacts our health as much as diet and exercise, but principals often burn the candle at both ends. Creating a consistent bedtime routine can help maximize the amount of sleep we get and its quality. If your bedtime routine consists of checking email and Twitter one last time before a fitful night, try another routine, such as taking a bath or reading a few pages of a book. Prioritizing sleep the same way you prioritize email can contribute greatly to wellness.

Our daily habits can make us or break us. Principals do such a great job of taking care of others that they can lose sight of the importance of taking care of themselves. If you have self-care or wellness tips, share them using the hashtags #NAESPchat and #SerendipityEDU. We are better together. 

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KNOW WHEN TO UNPLUG

Electronic devices are affecting users' ability to sleep well, the National Sleep Foundation says. The blue light that screens emit suppresses melatonin, the chemical that regulates circadian rhythms, making it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep. To get the rest you need, make the 30 minutes before bed gadget-free, or ban screens from the bedroom altogether.