Part I: Identifying and Treating Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is real. The American Institute of Stress defines it as, “the emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.” It can produce a number of detrimental symptoms in our professional and personal lives, including feeling worn out, overwhelmed, irritable, and impatient. Finding ourselves this drained does not mean we have failed, nor does it mean we have lost our passion for our work. It means that we need to find ways to recharge our emotional batteries through self-care.

Self-care is anything that we do that is intentionally caring for our own physical, mental, and emotional well-being. It could be exercise, spending time with friends, spending time in nature, or getting a massage. There is extensive research on the effectiveness of one self-care technique, the practice of mindfulness meditation, to help heal the limbic system and restore balance in the brain when we are affected by trauma. Perhaps the biggest barrier to the practice of self-care is our internalized notion that such prioritization of self is selfish. Is it possible to reframe this belief as an understanding that self-care is actually a critical leadership skill? We cannot effectively serve others for the long term if we don’t first care for ourselves.

Part II: Personal Reflection

Compassion fatigue keeps our limbic system in overdrive. Our bodies stay flooded with stress hormones, such as cortisol. We may experience sleep disruptions, physical pain, emotional numbness, or irritability as a result. We may feel confused, wondering why the work the once fueled us now feels so difficult or unsatisfying. The following questions are intended to help you process your own experiences with compassion fatigue in the workplace and begin developing a plan for self-care.

How do I feel at the end of most work days? Are there triggers I notice when I feel particularly drained?

Can I talk openly with my co-workers or supervisor about workplace triggers that affect me? Do we address trauma and compassion fatigue by name within our workplace?

How do I currently prioritize my self-care? What barriers prevent me from regularly engaging in activities or practices that support my well-being?

What is one thing no longer serving me of which I can let go?

After reflecting on these questions, you may have a deeper sense of (a) if you are experiencing compassion fatigue, (b) how supportive your workplace currently is or is not in the acknowledgement of compassion fatigue, and (c) how you currently are or are not prioritizing your own self-care. The resources below, as well as the webinar Preventing and Treating Compassion Fatigue with Self-Care, may be useful as you work toward creating your own self-care plan.

Preventing and Treating Compassion Fatigue with Self-Care

Submitted by Katie Scherrer, host of Preventing and Treating Compassion Fatigue with Self-Care, https://vimeo.com/329902517.
Part III: Resources

You may find some of the resources below helpful for connecting with others who are working to build self-care into library workplace culture.

@mindfulinlis – An active account on Twitter and Instagram run by librarian Amanda M. Leftwich which encourages real-time mindfulness and self-care practice in librarianship.

Insight Timer – A free smartphone app that provides access to more than 50,000 guided meditations.

Mindfulness for Librarians – A closed Facebook group that anyone can request to join which supports mindfulness and self-care within the library profession.

Self-Care Starter Kit – From the University of Buffalo School of Social Work, this thorough resource can help anyone learn how to build self-care strategies into their personal and professional lives.

http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit.html

Submitted by Katie Scherrer, host of Preventing and Treating Compassion Fatigue with Self-Care, https://vimeo.com/329902517.