Self-Care in Challenging Times: The New Non-Negotiable for Senior Leaders

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1. Increase Compassion for Yourself and Others

Hard driving leaders are often hardest on themselves. They hold themselves to such a high standard that anything that doesn't meet these high standards during the day is re-lived over and over in their mind. Do you lose sleep beating yourself up over a decision or the way you handled a situation? Do you find yourself caught in the loop of regret or self-critique? Does this self-chastising hold you back from enjoying the present, enjoying your life, and even thinking to the future?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then a focus on compassion will give you a great deal of stress relief. We can't *always* make the right decisions and we *will* make mistakes. This also means that everyone else is flawed too. No one is left out of this imperfect human experience.

We often hear highly productive leaders say that self-criticism and being hard on themselves drives them to be better, but it doesn't. In the long run it causes an overactive self-focus, reduced self-confidence, greater stress and more unhappiness.

It's equally important to remember that the effects of self-criticism don't end with us. If we're highly judgmental of ourselves, we judge others more quickly and come across as overly critical. While we have helpful biases biologically ingrained in us to form quick judgements and be discerning, these judgements, on overdrive, can cause magnified reactions that create a negative ripple effect in our organizations.

> *Being more compassionate and kind toward yourself makes you less biased and judgmental toward others and you're better able to create deep, meaningful connection with other people.*

Increasing Compassion

We can learn to be less judgmental while still being appropriately discerning. There's a fine line that we can train our brains to notice so we can more quickly snap out of harmful judgment. This frees our minds from a whole host of negative thinking and effort, so we can focus on what's most important.

Here's how to be more accepting of yourself:

➢ When you notice you are beating yourself up, remind yourself that you're human just like everyone else. Say to yourself, "I'm human, I'm not perfect. I will learn from this and resolve it the best that I am able."
➢ First thing in the morning or right before bed, put your hand on your heart and forgive yourself for whatever didn't go well in the past 24 hours, breathe into your heart and feel your heart softening.
➢ When you notice you're judging yourself or someone else, give yourself/and them permission to not be perfect and say to yourself, "I choose to see the good in myself/this other person."
➢ Try other ideas. Tara Brach's book, Radical Compassion, contains terrific stories and a step by step process to increase compassion.