



## Self-Care for Mutual Benefit

By Leila Martin

Solid, mutual relationships are essential for successful business: clients depend on you for help and advice, and you depend on them for referrals and continued success. You know that.

But what you might not realize is that one of the best ways to ensure you'll be there to take care of your clients over the long term is to take care of yourself.

"A lot of people aren't cognizant that self-care needs to be done," said [Dr. Cynthia Marco-Scanlon](#), career counselor and educator at John Carroll University and the current past president of the National Career Development Association, in an interview. "There's this sense of 'business is business; let's just plow through my day' every day. We're not trained to take care of ourselves. But if you don't, how will you be worth anything to anyone else?"

### Self-Care for Business Success

A perfect example is the case of David Hays, president of [Comprehensive Financial Consultants](#) in Bloomington, Indiana, and his co-workers, who have a self-improvement program in place to benefit all employees and their clients.

It started, Hays said, with an in-house gym that one of their advisors put together to offer high-intensity, adaptive-resistance training. "We all banded together and started doing that, and it's made a real difference," said Hays, "and not just health-wise. The camaraderie in the office is stronger, too."

The facility is open to all employees and their clients at a discounted rate, and Hays has seen peer and client relationships strengthen as a result of time spent together in friendly competition at the gym.

The program soon expanded to a broader self-care initiative in which every employee gets time off every week for self-betterment, whether that's through exercise or some other enrichment activity.

"Our philosophy is that if you look sloppy, you're perceived to be sloppy – even if you're not. You need to take care of yourself so the perception is that you're well put-together, and you're going to pay attention to the details when it comes to your clients as well."

## Make a Self-Care Plan

It's tough to find time for self-care in the midst of a busy schedule, but it doesn't have to be a time suck. The key is to have a plan.

"You set goals and objectives to help your business thrive," Marco-Scanlon said; "treat self-care the same way. Make a plan. And then set some time aside each day – it doesn't have to be more than a few minutes – and really think about who you want to be tomorrow, and what to do to help you get there."

Whether you choose to perform your self-care early in the morning, midday, or late at night, make sure you take a little time each day to go through the personal, professional, family, and spiritual or community aspects of your life and decide how you want to grow in each.

Here are a few things Marco-Scanlon encourages her own clients and students to keep in mind:

*Start with a goal...* Begin by asking yourself who you want to grow into. You can't get where you're going if you don't know where you're going, so first know what you want to achieve out of taking better care of yourself.

*...but don't overdo it.* "I see some people with goal lists that are so long. To me it would produce an anxiety attack to look at! Start small," Marco-Scanlon said. "Don't overwhelm yourself."

*Look at the balance in your life.* People tend to not be cognizant, or to actively ignore it, Marco-Scanlon said, when work takes over and life gets swept under the rug. This is where the imbalances start, and they grow if they're not addressed.

*Simplify.* "There's an old adage," Marco-Scanlon said, "that you're not doing one thing well, you're doing several things poorly." Wherever you can, she said, step away from multitasking and choose what to focus on.

*Give yourself small rewards.* Give yourself small rewards, whether it's 20 minutes on the deck in the sun, or a hot bath, or half an hour with a good book. "It doesn't have to be huge," Marco-Scanlon said.

*Take vacation time.* Small, daily rejuvenation breaks are great, Marco-Scanlon said, but people need to take bigger chunks of time, too.

"A lot of people are afraid to take vacation because they think that their employers look at that as not a good thing to do," said Marco-Scanlon. "Workers are afraid to take advantage of the time they're given, but it's crucial to take the time so you can get back to yourself and be at your best for others who depend on you."

*Find a community.* Just like in a business setting, self-care is often best learned from a good mentor. “I had a professor whose outlet was photography,” Marco-Scanlon said. “All of a sudden in the middle of the day he’d say, okay, I’m going out to take pictures! He’d go out and take some pictures, then come back, share them with me, and get back to work with more energy. He was modeling behavior I needed to learn from.”

*Get past the stigma.* “Sometimes,” Marco-Scanlon said, “I’m asked about the stigma associated with self-care equaling ‘not strong enough.’ It’s almost like you’re saying, if I have to take time out for self-care there’s something wrong with me, because I’m not strong enough to just carry on. But don’t think of self-care as a way to ‘fix’ something that’s broken. Think of it as a way to stay healthy, to make sure you can be your best in your own life and for the people who depend on you.”