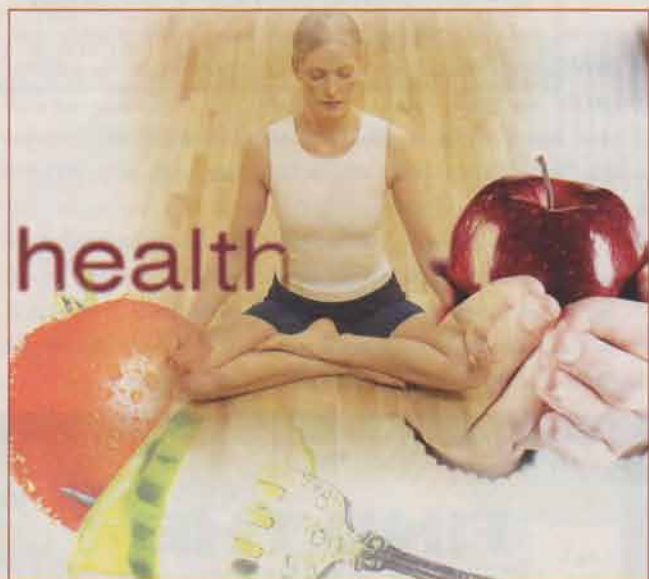


# Self-Care for Helping Professionals

Take care of yourself  
Take care of your business



By Sara Hauber

**Y**ou have chosen the career path of a helping professional, and you have done so because you have a passion for helping others improve their lives. But many of you potentially face a difficult challenge simply BECAUSE you excel at investing in others' lives: You risk losing sight of your own self-care needs, putting your clients' well-being before your own — all in the name of building a successful business.

## Taking a Look at Your Own Wellness

The pressures of growing a business as well as a list of steady clientele can often overshadow the desire to lead a healthy, sustainable lifestyle. Many wellness and fitness professionals, especially those who make their own schedules, overbook their days with clients, effectively eliminating any time to take care of their own health. Often, by booking clients back-to-back, it leaves little time to prepare or eat healthy foods; instead, they find themselves relying on meal replacement shakes, bars and,

in the worst scenario, bad diet choices. In extreme cases, relationships with friends and loved ones also fall by the wayside — all because you feel you must say “yes” to every client. After all, they are paying for your attention!

But just because you CAN conceivably squeeze one more client into your day, should you? Is it better to forgo your own health and well-being so you can accommodate a client whose schedule changes suddenly? The answer is “no,” and the reason is simple: Without honoring your own values, boundaries and self-care needs, your health and business will ultimately suffer. In order to enjoy a long, successful, energizing career as a helping professional, you must put your own self-care first. If you don't, exhaustion and career burnout await, leaving you unable to provide anyone with your professional assistance. And isn't that the last thing you want?

## Prioritizing Your Self-Care

So, how do you honor your own self-care priorities and still make room in your schedule for a successful career? The key is to define “self-care” as it pertains to your life, and then, create a list of your own personal values — “life rules” that you aspire to honor on a day-to-day basis in your personal and professional lives. First, you must define “self-care.” What does it mean to take care of yourself? What conditions are necessary to feel your best and perform at an optimal level each day, week or month? For example, one definition of “self-care” might be: “Taking care of myself means sleeping past 6:30 AM each morning, being home with my family by 7:00 PM each night, working out four times per week at the gym, having weekends free to play, having time, at least three days a week, to prepare healthy meals and feeling I am in control of my own work schedule. When I do these things, I feel great and perform at my best.”

Next, ask yourself what your personal values or “life rules” are. What are you living for? When do you see yourself living the ideal life; how do you feel and what helps you feel this way? What does your optimal daily experience look like? How is your health? With whom do you share the majority of your

time? An example of such values might be: "I value my freedom to make my own schedule and work with clients that I choose. I value the ability to make equal time in my schedule for family, work and personal time. I also value my choice to stay healthy, eat well and be physically active for the rest of my life."

### Putting Your Well-being into Action

Now, how can you honor your definition of self-care and personal values while sustaining your business at the same time? Your first step is to compare your current life circumstances (when, where, with whom and for what pay do you currently work?) to what your life would be like if all your values and self-care requirements were met. What's missing from your current situation? What have you let slide in order to put your clients' needs first? What have you chosen to emphasize at the expense of your values or self-care?

This balancing act can be seen through my own experiences, which I'm sure many of you can relate to. Due to professional ambition and an innate desire to help clients, more often than not, many professionals find themselves stretching their time, efforts and health to appease the client's schedule and preference. Haven't we all said "yes" to a client's request, perhaps to the detriment of our own well-being? Even I fell into such a trap after meeting a potential client, an obese woman who was devoted to working out three times a week and willing to pay a premium — if I came to her house at 6:00 AM. I agreed to take on this client because I deemed her need so great and knew I could help her, not to mention that the extra income was so good that I temporarily forgot my own need to sleep past 6:00 AM. But after four weeks of early appointments, I realized the relationship could not last because, in the end, I needed more sleep: I had started drinking coffee to stay awake on

the days of her appointments; I was forced to nap in the afternoons in order to be alert for evening clients, which altered my sleeping habits even more, and I became irritable due to the caffeine and my variable sleeping patterns. Yes, I was making more money, and my new client was learning how to improve her life during our sessions, but at

what cost? Was I truly giving her, or any of my clients, my best in this sorry condition?

In essence, I had succeeded in putting a client's needs before my own self-care, and it was detrimental to my own health as well as to my clients who were not receiving my best services. As a result, I made a list of my own self-care needs and →

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### Questions to Ask to Evaluate Your Professional Wellness

- What is your definition of self-care?
- What are your personal values or life rules?
- How would you compare your current life circumstances to your optimal life circumstances?

values, and I measured my current workload against this list. In the end, I discovered that I was, indeed, sacrificing my health on many levels so I could accommodate my client's preferred appointment times. Therefore, as I started taking steps to match my work life with my values, my first priority was to set specific working hours and inform my clients of these hours. I risked losing clients, but I also risked gaining peace of mind, better health and more sleep.

Applying a values-based boundary, such as "no clients before 9:00 AM," can affect your business — which I immediately felt, taking a financial hit in losing that early-morning client. But my sanity and health was worth more than the \$240 a week

I was losing. To recoup such losses, you can refocus your marketing efforts, as I did by targeting a population that could meet during the day (stay-at-home moms). By changing business practices that are not in line with your values (good health, good sleep, control of work hours), you can open the door to a whole new market that will simultaneously allow for self-care while adding enthusiastic clients to your workload.

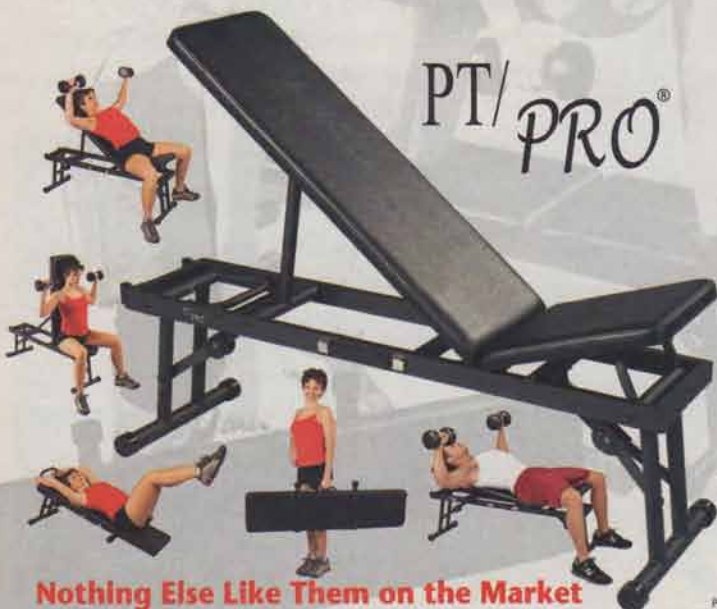
### Finding a Successful Balance

By respecting what your body and mind needs to function most optimally, you also set an example for your clients to aspire to rather than trying to "do it all." With boundaries in place and your own self-care needs met, you are in the best position to help the greatest number of people most effectively. Once you clearly see where you have deviated from your values, you can start to chip away at your old approach that isn't working for you, replacing these old habits with new ways that align with your values, thus, reaping the rewards of a long, healthy career as a helping professional.

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