Over the past few years, we have experienced a series of ongoing, often sudden challenges and changes. While some changes have opened up new opportunities, some have entailed loss -- from loved ones to workplace structures to cherished routines. As we prepare for the new academic year, we want to acknowledge those of us who are struggling with exhaustion, stress, and even burnout.

This special edition newsletter, *Be Well in AY24*, provides strategies and resources to integrate into your life to develop and maintain well-being throughout the year. Since tending to one’s well-being is an ongoing process, we will continue to provide resources and encourage you to revisit this topic on an individual, department, and team level.

--The Well-being Team, Human Resources

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**Practical Strategies to Maintain Your Well-being**

We are unique individuals with various roles and responsibilities in the workplace, our homes, and other communities. Real self-care entails understanding who you are, what’s important to you, and what choices are available to you.

Here are strategies that have worked for other Northwestern colleagues to try or adapt. See if any meet your needs *and, if so*, include them as regular practices to reap the associated benefits. Want to share practices that work for you or hear more from others? Join the [Well-being MS Teams Channel](#)!

- **Acknowledge what is within your control.** When dealing with difficult situations, consider what is within your power, such as how you frame, respond to, or accept a situation. Doing so can help address unease or stress.

- **Try habit stacking to build into your daily routine.** Pair a new habit with an already established habit, such as writing your to-do list after pouring your morning coffee, or taking three deep breaths after logging off your computer. Remember these habits don’t have to take a lot of time; micro breaks can have a huge impact on your overall well-being.

- **Eat lunch away from your desk.** Give yourself a physical break from your workspace, coupled with a brain break, so you can recharge and take on the rest of the day with a fresh perspective. Skipping breaks on a regular basis can lead to burnout and high stress levels.

- **Schedule time off.** Vacation time is part of your compensation; don’t let the time go unused. Using your vacation time is good for your mind, body and soul, as it provides a chance to rest mentally and physically, which can boost your immune system.
- **Connect with others.** Take time to regularly connect with others who make you feel cared for and valued. Having strong social connections increases happiness, the ability to cope during difficult times, and contributes to positive health outcomes.

- **Establish time management techniques.** Creating a strategy can help decrease stress, while improving productivity. This flowchart is a good starting point to learn what technique might suit you.

- **Aim for work-life integration.** This is a holistic approach in which both worlds co-exist in harmony and are not competing against each other. This is critical, especially for caregivers who can have competing work-life demands at varying times in their lives.

- **Be kind to yourself.** If you have a difficult time giving yourself grace, try speaking to yourself with self-compassion. This can look like talking to yourself the way you would to a loved one or reframing thoughts rooted in perfectionism.

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**Foster and Build Upon a Culture of Well-being**

Whether you’re an individual contributor or oversee a school, unit, or team, acknowledge the impact your leadership style can have on your colleagues’ well-being, and how role-modeling can go a long way in setting the tone of the culture.

**Know your values and priorities.** Share your unit’s mission statement and yearly goals regularly to help understand the year’s priorities and why they matter, which can be a source of motivation and direction. It also provides guidance for what can or can’t be taken on, or what must wait. Jointly identify tasks or processes that are redundant or could be automated. Focus on clear communication and shared expectations.

**Create safe and respected spaces.** Having a safe work environment, both physically and psychologically, is essential for workers’ well-being, engagement, and productivity. Some ways to create a respectful workplace include collectively defining your team’s culture, leading by example, incorporating DEIB practices, making decisions as a team, and having regular check-ins.

**Be flexible.** Flexibility can apply to the team as a whole and individuals alike. If an unanticipated project is added to your team’s workload, consider what can be adjusted, removed, and/or which deadlines can be extended. If an employee needs to update their Workplace Strategy, discuss the plan together, and if changes are implemented, revisit after six weeks to learn how it’s going.

**Practice good meeting “hygiene”:**
- Instead of a meeting, commit to turning communications that don’t require feedback (e.g., status updates) into a digital vehicle (email, Teams message, etc.).
- Start meetings with a well-being practice and/or with 5 minutes of non-work conversation or activity.
- Send an agenda for the meeting at least 1 day in advance.
- Rotate responsibility for leading the meeting among team members.
- Schedule meetings 5 minutes after the hour and end at least 5 minutes before the hour to give attendees (virtual or on-site) time to re-set between meetings.

**Plan vacations as a team.** At the start of each quarter, use a team meeting to discuss and plan time off. This can help reduce the stress associated with being out of the office and managing your workload upon returning. Check out these tips from NYU and Employee Benefits News about how to prepare to be out, disconnect, and return to work.
Celebrate accomplishments and each other. Acknowledge team and individual successes, small and large. Understand how each person prefers to be recognized and consider team celebration ideas. A Team User Manual can help inform about preferences and serve as a great team activity.

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Resources to Support You and Your Team

Upcoming Events
- Creative Problem Solving, Thursday, August 24, Noon – 1 p.m.
- Preventing & Overcoming Burnout, Wednesday, August 30, Noon – 1 p.m.
- Care Talks

University-Sponsored Resources
- Employee Assistance Program
- Health Partners
- Professional Development
- Caregiving Resources
- Manager’s Corner Teams Channel
- Join the Well-being Mailing List to receive weekly event and resource updates
- Request an individual and/or team well-being consultation

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How do HR professionals maintain their well-being when feeling stressed?

**Chris Tondini, Director, HR Operations, Payroll & Support**
I manage my stress by balancing it with a sense of humor; taking solace in any light-hearted moment can temper an otherwise tense time. It’s also important to home in on how much control I have over any situation. Things that I can’t influence are simply items on a list that must be checked off, and that realization saves me a significant amount of mental energy.

**Janet Walzer, HR Chief of Staff**
The best way for me to manage stress is to maintain a sense of balance overall -- so every morning I take a walk with my dog and do yoga. But stress is inevitable, so when I’m feeling it, I try to identify what I can do about it. I’ll also seek out people who provide perspective and humor -- which always makes me feel better.

**Ericka Wrencher, Senior HR Business Partner**
I try to maintain a healthy perspective when dealing with stressful situations, both at work and in my personal life, by remembering that no matter what’s happening, the current crisis won’t last forever. I also like to decompress by taking walks while listening to my favorite music and I love spending time with friends and family who know me well and love me anyway.
The mission of Human Resources is to promote an innovative and inclusive workplace where individuals thrive and collaborate to advance Northwestern’s direction.