The last year has been undeniably stressful. The COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and separation from friends and family have taken a toll on everyone. While most people have had to adapt to a new work reality, managers have dealt with extra challenges, such as leading a remote team or incorporating new safety procedures into work routines.

With so much on your plate, you may have let your self-care fall by the wayside. But managing stress and nurturing wellbeing isn’t just for employees — it’s a needed and essential part of maintaining physical and emotional health and mental acuity for managers, too.

There are numerous steps you can take to improve your own self-care. Start with evaluating whether you are managing effectively. Do you:

- **Prioritize.** During periods of stress, there may be less time and energy to go around. Ensure that you are using your resources wisely by determining what tasks or projects must take priority and which could be put off until a later date.

- **Delegate.** If you are performing a task that another member of your team could handle, hand it off so that your time is free to focus on your core duties. Make certain you are assigning tasks fairly and providing opportunities for employees to grow and expand their skills.

- **Communicate.** Focus on articulating clear expectations and providing constructive feedback. Be present with your employees. Listen to their suggestions about the best ways to achieve goals or streamline tasks.

In addition, it is important to evaluate how you handle stress and the impact your behavior may have on others. As the old saying goes, the first person you manage is yourself. Ways to engage in self-management include:
Assess your energy management. How does your energy level ebb and flow throughout the day? Is there a particular time of day that would be better for certain essential tasks? For instance, if you are not a morning person, then scheduling team meetings or difficult conversations for early in the day may be counterproductive.

Practice realistic optimism. A “realistic optimist” occupies the middle ground between perpetual pessimism and blind faith that everything will work out in the end. Having a positive, “can do” attitude that is also grounded in reality will help you build resilience and weather challenges.

Listen. In the rush of dealing with day-to-day concerns, you may neglect your physical or emotional health. If a colleague, friend, or family member expresses concern about your wellbeing, pay attention. Consider if it is a sign that you should make some changes to your daily routine or schedule some downtime.

Finally, it’s important to engage in self-care. Try these helpful strategies:

Make healthy choices. Taking care of yourself is an essential aspect of leading a team. Not only will you feel better and have more energy, but you will likely be more resilient and adept at making good decisions under stress.

Create work/life balance. Work smarter, not harder. Set boundaries that allow you to manage your personal responsibilities, and block off time to recharge your depleted energy reserves, too. Demonstrating a healthy work/life balance will also set a good example for your team.

Access company resources. LifeMatters and other company benefits aren’t just there to help employees—they can assist you as well. Review what benefits are available to you and use them as is appropriate to manage personal concerns or simplify your daily routine.

Use the LifeMatters Management Consultation Service. LifeMatters is a helpful resource for resolving difficult management issues. Professional consultants are available to help you address an employee’s workplace behavior and other performance concerns. Consultation is available anytime, day or night.

If time or motivation for personal self-care is hard to find, LifeMatters can help. We’re here to assist with management concerns and to address any personal issues, too. Call 24/7/365.
How Do I Say That? Returning to Work

If your team has largely been working remotely, returning to partial or full on-site work may pose some challenges. While it is likely that company leadership will determine the timing of a workplace reentry, many of the details may be left to individual managers.

If your team is about to return to the workplace, these suggestions may help:

1. **Consult with Human Resources.** Talk to HR to confirm all pertinent details and review any concerns you may have. The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help you plan your message and prepare for possible negative reactions.

2. **Schedule a meeting.** Many organizations find it helpful to schedule a town hall meeting that reviews general details about what employees can expect during a return to work and offers a platform to air concerns. After this event, it may be helpful to have a second meeting with your team to review specifics, including any anticipated changes in roles or responsibilities. Material changes to a specific employee’s role should be communicated privately and in advance of any announcement to the full team.

3. **Express appreciation.** Thank your team for adapting during the pandemic and for all that has been accomplished while people have been working remotely.

   **Sample language:** “Thank you for staying focused and continuing to meet our customer’s needs in difficult circumstances. I appreciate your willingness to adapt.”

4. **Recognize that there may be mixed feelings about the return.** Acknowledge that the change may create personal challenges for some people, and that others may now prefer to work from home.

   **Sample language:** “I know that this change may disrupt personal or family routines, and that for some of you, it may be challenging to adjust to being back in the workplace.”

5. **If flexibility is available, explain expectations.** Some organizations may be offering a mixed schedule that allows employees to work from home some or most days. When determining scheduling, factor in individual employees’ preferences for their work location, while also ensuring that key responsibilities are covered.
For those who still wish to work from home, options are available. My goal is to set up a fair arrangement that ensures we have sufficient coverage onsite, while doing what we can to accommodate those who want or need more flexibility.

Remind your team about LifeMatters. LifeMatters can help employees locate resources that may simplify their reentry into the workplace.

Sample language: “LifeMatters is available 24/7/365 to support you during this transition. They can offer useful resources as well. I recommend you call.”

Plan a social gathering. Arrange a time for your team to gather in a relaxed environment. (Follow CDC and local guidelines regarding safe gatherings.) This will help “break the ice,” while also giving new team members a chance to meet their colleagues. Keep in mind that your team’s dynamics may have shifted after so long apart.

Follow up. Check in with your team and individual members often. Be prepared for a “one step forward, two steps back” period of adjustment. LifeMatters Management Consultation is available to help you sort through any challenges.

LifeMatters is available to help with:

- Confronting an employee about performance issues
- An employee’s personal problem
- Suspected drug or alcohol use on the job
- Interpersonal conflicts between team members
- Establishing clear, attainable expectations for performance
- Addressing crisis situations, such as a violent incident, the death of an employee, or a natural disaster
- Your own personal concerns
- Any other work-related issue

LifeMatters offers professional management consultation when you need it, as often as you need it. Call anytime.

Call the LifeMatters® by Empathia Management Consultation Service toll-free anytime. 1-800-367-7474

Assistance with Life, Work, Family, and Wellbeing • 24/7/365
Call collect to 262-574-2509 if outside of North America
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Language assistance services in your preferred spoken and written languages are available at no cost by calling 1-800-367-7474.