

Work in the World: Getting Personal About Self-Care

by Brian Hutchison, Ph.D., CCCE, ACF21

At the request of my Editor, I am writing a column about the self-care journey of a career practitioner during COVID-19 - this time using myself as the subject instead of an interviewee.

I work full-time as a Counselor Education Professor while running a business where I provide career focused clinical supervision, coaching, training, speaking, and consulting. My work provides me the great privilege of meeting and knowing people from around the globe. Just in the past week, I have spoken with career professionals from the US, Canada, Russia, South Korea, China, Qatar, and the Philippines. One aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic is that, for the first time in my career, all with whom I speak are experiencing the same issues around anxiety and self-care. This is a bit about my journey.

The First 3 Months

As the pandemic hit the US in March 2020, I quickly jumped into helper mode by giving many webinars, interviews, and podcasts about *Coping with COVID*. As I did my research and determined my message, I implemented much of it into my own life. I paid attention to my day-to-day relationships and behavior patterns as coping mechanisms. I felt quite proud of myself for coping so well!

The Next 3 Months

The realization that my coping strategies, while science-based and durable over a lifetime, were framed with the assumption that "this will be over sometime soon" hit me hard. My life began to feel monochromatic. I was depressed. Intentional coping, with a clear purpose in mind, became essential. As a helping professional, I had to manage my own deficits in mood, focus, and energy to continue to show up for my students and clients appropriately.

Unwilling to break social isolation, I kept forcing myself to follow my healthy patterns as much as I could: walking outside every day, communicating with maximum kindness with my spouse, participating in an online counseling support group, and focusing on my favorite hobbies.

This is Life; This is My Life (7 months and counting)

I can now see in my clients, my loved ones, and myself the acceptance of the knowledge that this too shall pass one day, just not one day soon - and never back to what we were.

Today, as I write this, there are good days and bad but they are in the typical proportion for me from when there was no pandemic. I no longer find myself fighting pandemic life. I am no longer "just coping" until my idea of normal returns. I am



Brian and his wife, Marlene adventuring together outdoors.

living freer in the spirit of today which has taught me so much about myself and how I wish to live.

I have learned that I picked the right partner for me, something that may have been known but not felt when we were constantly moving around away from one another on global work trips. I learned that I can watch bees pollinate or a campfire burn for hours and not miss a crummy tv show one bit (although I still watch a bit of crummy tv). I have learned that there is no, and never will be, a sense of caught up in my work life; like many, I worked long hours without disruption since being at home and it got me no closer to the "all caught up nirvana" that I thought always existed.

In the end, right now today, I guess I have simply learned that this is my life... this, what I have today, is my life. If you have attended a recent webinar or workshop with me, you will recall that this lesson is now infused in both my public speaking and individual client work. I hope that you too find this sense of being and time.

"[For] the first time in my career, all with whom I speak are experiencing the same issues around anxiety and self-care." - Brian Hutchison

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