

The Embarrassing Truth of Self-Care

Mindful Editor, Anne Alexander, shares some cringeworthy reasons why self-care might just be something worth considering.

February 13, 2019



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[Self-care](#) can be a touchy subject. It certainly was for me.

I used to think that “self-care” was for privileged, entitled, lucky folks who were out of touch with the lives of real people. And that made me angry. Jealous and snarky. I conjured self-care as something for Lululemon-wearing stay-at-home mommies heading off to pilates vs harried, hectic, frantic single

working mothers like me who were barely keeping it together.

Yep, I was one of those people who sneered at self-care.

Instead, [I ran myself ragged](#), giving all of my time, energy and attention to my work, my kids, keeping up with my bills, the house, the dog, until my frantic, precarious world exploded in one horrifying moment. No, thank God, I did not contract some awful disease—unless you count five root canals. No, I got “downsized.” Let go. Laid off from a job that I had moved my family hundreds of miles to take, the one that paid my bills, kept a roof over our heads, where I loved my colleagues, where I tap-danced like mad to turn around the company’s stomach-churning financial problems. In one short conversation, I got jolted out of a job that I thought was the center of my being.

As the shards of my life got blown to smithereens, I discovered—if I’m being embarrassingly honest with you—that there had been one very important missing ingredient all along. That ingredient was [self-love](#).

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Self-love. Ugh. Another awkward subject. Self-love is even harder to talk about than self-care. In fact, the sound of self-love can still give me the creeps; it makes me feel weak, pathetic, and [vulnerable](#). Like it’s an admission to being such a loser that no one loves you, so you’ve got to love yourself your own damn self. How pathetic is that?

Well, pathetic, or not, what I learned is that ultimately, everything, including self-care, grows out of self-love. You first have to [care enough about yourself to take care of yourself](#). You have to know that you matter in order to treat yourself like you do. And for some people, like yours truly, learning that was a long, slow journey with a priceless payoff.

What I discovered is that the gift in falling apart is getting to mindfully stitch yourself back together, starting with self-awareness. [Meditating](#) in the mornings and driving on long stretches of highway hustling from one work gig to the next, I became deeply aware of the thoughts running around in my head. I started to tune into the messages that I was telling myself, especially the ones urging me to keep going *no matter what*, that there was no slowing down, no Off switch, that saying No was for sissies or wimps or people who didn't "get" it, that there was no space reserved for me, my needs. No time for the dentist! Damn the torpedoes! Full steam ahead with that PowerPoint!

I realized that, while I had been working so feverishly on all fronts, I was actually running away from—ugh—another terrible confession: low self-worth. I had papered over feelings of not being good enough, smart enough, loveable enough, by doing more, going all out, being friendlier, more helpful-ier, competing in a fantasy game of one-upmanship of [people-pleasing](#).

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By leaning into the voices, thoughts, emotions roiling around in my head nonjudgmentally—and then plenty judgmentally when I discovered what garbage I had floating around up there—I could hear what I believed about myself. And it was not pretty. Plenty of *You better go the extra mile, or else. You better get it done, or else.*

And this is where the really icky part came in. Over time, I had to learn like myself and eventually, learn to love myself. (I told you this was cringy territory.)

So, dear reader, if any of these true confessions rings a bell with you, if you think self-care is for other people or your supply of self-love is embarrassingly low, I highly recommend some [mindful self-awareness to see what you're saying about yourself](#). Let those thought bubbles gurgle up, see them, hear them, let them go, and perhaps experiment with a heavy dose of [loving-kindness](#). And see what happens.

How I “Do” Self-Care Now

Personally, I have come to see that self-care, to me, isn't about someone else's mid-morning pilates classes. It's about knowing my worth, taking the reins of my own power, and believing that I have the right to thrive even in the midst of the daily hurly-burly.

Self-love and self-care are priceless—worth every embarrassing cringe.

These days I still don't “do” self-care in lavish ways. I'm still a very busy single working mother of three teenagers. But I am someone who takes time to meditate every morning, [says “No, thank you”](#) with increasing frequency and decreasing guilt, gets to the dentist twice a year, and fights to put my personal “to-do's” on my big running To-Do list. I've also learned to pause and breathe, to be grateful for the simple gifts as they come my way: a sunny car ride with my kids, listening and laughing along with them. Being there, present, in the midst of an ocean of love, soaking up every ounce.

One more true confession: I also realized that the job was not the center of my being. I am the center of my being. And I would venture to say that you are the center of your being and that self-love and self-care are priceless—worth every embarrassing cringe.