

# EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

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**Avoiding burnout by prioritizing emotional health**



Have you ever felt like you couldn't keep it all together? Have you been stretched too thin and felt like you were at your breaking point? Have your feelings come out sideways and negatively impacted your relationships at work or home?



Photo courtesy of Onsite

When you're burned out, it affects everyone around you. You may think you can keep your struggles, anxiety, depression, grief, pain or exhaustion "under-wraps," but left unaddressed, it eventually bubbles up. ►



Photo courtesy of Onstie

We have to follow the advice that we get any time we board an airplane — we have to put on our oxygen mask first. We have to take care of ourselves first, and then we can care for those around us.



That's how I felt the spring of 2017 — overwhelmed and burned out; I resigned from a nonprofit that I had helped build and lead. During this challenging transition, grief, anxiety and hurt got the best of me. I didn't know what to do with it all. It all felt too big, and I felt small, fragile and unequipped.

I needed emotional health resources, and while feeling stuck and aimless, several people I knew were encouraging me to attend Onsite's Living Centered Program. The program was truly life-changing. The masterful team of therapists at Onsite helped me move through some lingering grief and anger, allowing me to see and better understand patterns that were hindering my relationships and giving me a healthier understanding of forgiveness.

### **Getting to the Root**

A few months later, I joined the Onsite team to lead our marketing and business development team to build awareness and community around Onsite, our programs and services. I get to work with an incredible team of leaders who so beautifully live out the vision of Onsite — to connect the world through empathy, self-awareness, resiliency and compassion.

While I love the work I do at Onsite, a well-worn pattern of my life reappeared as I began working there. I began to feel overwhelmed and stressed by all the responsibilities and opportunities.

Like many of you, I am naturally drawn to jobs that align with my passion and purpose, that are more 24/7 than 9 to 5, where people depend on me — jobs that can bring high stress. I enjoy taking ownership of problems and finding solutions. Responsibility consistently is my top strength on StrengthsFinder. Passion, responsibility and a lack of self-care are my favorite recipe for burnout.

Similarly, the work you do matters. It has both immediate and eternal consequences. The work you do is making an impact on a generation and for the kingdom. That's a lot of responsibility, a lot of pressure, a lot of stress. It's no wonder that many of you and your team members are struggling with anxiety and depression. ►

But there's hope for us all. We have to follow the advice that we get any time we board an airplane — we have to put on our oxygen mask first. We have to take care of ourselves first, and then we can care for those around us.

To sustainably do the work that we believe we are called to do, we have to prioritize our emotional wellness.

There are a few tools that have helped me carry stress differently and show up for the people as the best, most whole, version of myself. I am a better boss, friend, leader, sister, daughter, when I implement self-care, set and model healthy boundaries, build in a little margin and ask for help.

The following are four ways you can prioritize emotional wellness and prevent burnout.

### **1. Implement a Self-Care Plan**

As Richard A. Swenson shares in his book *Margin*, “It is important to understand our emotional reserves. It is important to understand how much we have at the beginning of each day and which influences drain our emotions dry or recharge our batteries. It is important to learn what our limits are, and not to make further withdrawals if we are already maximally depleted. And it is important to respect these limits in others.”

We can't pour out when we haven't filled ourselves up. What fills you up? Time with God? Time alone? Time with your friends and family? Time in nature? It's important to identify the things that bring you life and schedule time for them.

A couple of practices that are universally good for our emotional health are mindfulness and exercise. Mindfulness is the act of noticing, paying attention to and accepting oneself by slowing down and focusing on one's breath, feelings and environment. Mindfulness has been linked to the reduction of stress and the prevention of anxiety and depression. And while we all know the physical health benefits of exercise, did you know that exercise has immediate stress-relief benefits? It increases the production of “our brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins,” according to the Mayo Clinic.

It can be difficult to make time for ourselves, but we must make ourselves a priority. ►



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Photo courtesy of Onsite

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## **2. Model Healthy Boundaries**

Setting healthy boundaries in relationships and around my time at the office and time on my phone or online has not only served me but has also benefited my entire team.

When you set healthy boundaries, you give the people in your life permission to do the same. As a leader, you're modeling and creating a safe environment for your teams. Create a place where boundaries are expected and honored.

As Henry Cloud said in his book *Boundaries*, "Boundaries define us. They define what is me and what is not me. A boundary shows me where I end and someone else begins, leading me to a sense of ownership. Knowing what I am to own and take responsibility for gives me freedom."

## **3. Build in Margin**

"No" has always been a hard word for me. I want to be a "yes" woman, consistently modeling a positive and helpful attitude. But as I've grown and learned to embrace my "no," I have found that it affords me the ability to say "yes" to the right things. Saying "no" creates margin.

As one of my mentors, Michael Hyatt, says, "You must create more margin so you have room for what's important, not merely urgent."

## **4. Ask for Help**

We need one another. We were built for community. We must invite people into our struggles and our fear.

Many times our family and our friends offer the support we need. But I have found during seasons of my life, I've needed additional support — professional support. As I mentioned before, attending Onsite's Living Centered Program provided me the time, space and resources I needed to walk through an unusually heavy season. I'm in a season of flourishing now, but I have continued to meet with a therapist every few weeks to help me break some behavioral patterns that are no longer working for me.

Just remember, you don't have to navigate it all alone; help is only a phone call away. ►



## Emotional Awareness

### Checking in on your feelings

One practical tool I learned at Onsite is called “an emotional body scan.” I use it on a daily or weekly basis to help me feel more grounded and connected. It’s as simple as taking a quick time-out to connect with your dominant emotion. Where in your body do you feel that emotion and how strong do you feel it on a scale from 1 to 10? For example, today, I am feeling anxious in my chest at about a 4.

Resist the urge to explain the feeling or to try to talk yourself out of the feeling — just be aware of it. This exercise is about awareness, not change. Often we strive to manage or change our “negative” emotions, but the real goal is to be aware of the feeling, to own it and realize how it can serve us, so it doesn’t come out sideways. Our sadness, anger and fear actually can help us.

I love the Chip Dodd quote, from *Voice of the Heart*, “Feelings are the voice of the heart, and you will not have fullness until you’re adept at hearing and experiencing all of them. ... Whenever you don’t feel, you are blocked from living life to the fullest.”



Photo courtesy of Onsite



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For the past 40 years, Onsite has helped tens of thousands of people feel more equipped to handle the challenges of life. Their life-changing, therapeutic framework combined with healing hospitality enables people to find the emotional healing needed to thrive in the future. Learn more at [www.onsiteworkshops.com](http://www.onsiteworkshops.com).

### Learning the Unforced Rhythms of Grace

Friends, the work you’re doing matters. You are changemakers. The world needs you to be thriving, not merely surviving.

Burnout can come from doing the wrong kind of work, but more often than not, it comes from doing the right work in the wrong way.

Prioritize your emotional health. You’re worth it. Remember, God doesn’t mean to lay anything “heavy or ill-fitting” on us. He wants us to live “freely and lightly.”

I often think about this passage: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly” (Matthew 11: 28–30, *The Message*). ■