



Changing Times and Changing Needs ~ How Do You Refuel?

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Life is not static; it continues to change and brings new expectations and roles throughout our development as people and as professionals. How do we negotiate these changing times, changing roles, and continue to take care of ourselves and the people we serve?

This became all so true to me during my 38th week of pregnancy. I was already 2 centimeters dilated and still had 2 weeks left to see clients. In my consultation group, I asked, what if the baby comes early? This was something I had not anticipated. Early.... this was not part of my personal makeup. One of my colleagues noted, "This is your first lesson in parenthood. It's no longer about you; he's on his

own schedule." With regards to my clients, I thought I had covered all my bases: I explored the transferences and feelings that emerged for them in my taking maternity leave; set up those who desired and/or needed with appropriate therapists, groups, and/or meditation trainings in my absence; terminated with those who completed their work as well as provided supports and referrals for the others in case of unexpected need. But what if I was not there for our last session? I felt quite concerned and explored this first with my colleagues and then with my clients and had them all sign releases of information in case I did deliver early and needed a colleague to contact them. In the end, it all worked out. My little guy and I were in great harmony

and collaboration. I saw my last client, went to consultation, changed my message on my answering machine, walked out to my car and whoosh, my water broke. I do believe there is a strong mind body connection. We need to be mindful of this in order to maximize our health both mentally and physically.

The mind body connection can work toward our benefit as well as to our hindrance. There is a significant body of literature that demonstrates the relationship between stress and depression to heart disease, diabetes II, high cholesterol, and even some cancers. We need to be preventive and engage in early intervention and self care strategies that nurture ourselves as people and as professionals.

We live in a busy world, and as psychologists we give a lot of ourselves. Our time may be divided between our clients, our professional responsibilities/activities, our family, our friends, and our spiritual communities, draining our reserves. During my second year practicing as a psychologist, my individual consultant asked me, "Do you double book your clients?" I was a bit shocked by the question and answered "No." She then

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asked, "Then how come you double book yourself?" It was a good question. Within a giving profession, such as psychology, many people tend to cut themselves out first when time gets tight, and thus, more resources continue to be depleted without an opportunity to be refueled. Refueling is a mental health issue and a self care strategy that is essential for optimal health and well-being.

How do you refuel? It is important to embrace self care strategies, be it exercising, meditation, eating well, connecting with a colleague, spending time with loved ones, going to personal therapy, learning to set limits and boundaries, or developing a sense of safety and comfort in reaching out for support anywhere along the continuum from wellness to crisis. Schedule yourself into your weekly schedule. Block out that time and commit to yourself as you would a client. This is essential for optimal health and well-being (Baker, 2003; Bridgeman, 2006; Weiss, 2004).

Given the number of psychologists in California, there will always be many of us going through similar life stages of internship, dissertation, licensure, starting a practice, cohabitating, having a child, death of a loved one, personal illnesses, financial concerns, unemployment, and retirement. There is no reason to be alone. We can learn from peers as well as the different generations of psychologists. We are all teachers and we are all learners. Developing an openness to be genuine and authentic will allow us to have more of our needs met and, thereby, a healthier balance may pursue. 

References

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