

If there's a loss of cabin pressure...

By Lori Silverman

Looking back on the past few weeks, I see a life overcrowded with demands. I have been completing a book manuscript that is three months past deadline while performing consulting projects and caring about a father who needs surgery, a close friend who has many challenges, and a colleague whose surgery for cancer has taken unexpected turns. Add these to the furnace that stopped running, the washing machine that shut down, the downspout that disappeared and the closet organizing system that decided to detach from the walls. This is just the beginning of the list!

What types of demands are competing for your time and energy? A work project with unrealistic deadlines? Sick kids? A move to a new job or residence? Like me, I bet you are feeling worn out.

Because I travel frequently by airplane, I am reminded of the safety message given to passengers before take-off: If there is a loss of cabin pressure, put your oxygen mask on first before assisting others around you. Do you put your oxygen mask on first or do you help others before taking care of yourself?

Recognizing the predicament

In many ways we are like the characters in the video game *Star Wars Battlefront II*. Each one has an energy meter in the corner of the screen. As they confront evil in their galaxy, the energy in their meters gradually goes down. At some point, no matter what is happening, they have to stop and recharge or they will "faint." Have you recharged your energy meter lately? Or are you waiting until you faint?

Women tend to run their energy meters to the fainting point, especially in times of stress. We ignore our oxygen mask, believing we will catch our breath when life slows down. What happens in the meantime? We do not sleep well, we either forget to eat or eat sweets and carbohydrates, and we become irritable, distracted and forgetful.

The first steps in keeping your energy meter on high are recognizing your behavior and giving yourself permission to change. As my acupuncturist, Joan Fuller, says, "You do not need to be sick—or to make yourself ill—to take a break." You do not need—nor do you want—to ignore your oxygen mask. By caring for yourself first you will be better able to attend to the needs of others.

Filling up your meter

Once you have chosen to take care of yourself first, what can you do to recharge yourself? Consider these alternatives.

- Take little time-outs—even 30 seconds helps. Close your eyes and breathe slowly and deeply.
- Schedule time to do what brings you pleasure. Dive into a good book or movie. Have lunch with a friend. Call or e-mail someone you have not spoken to in a while. Or sit quietly in a peaceful spot.
- Eat well. Get away from your desk when you do!
- Get physical. Take a walk in the arboretum, along a lake or around the block. Or attend an exercise or yoga class.
- Put on tunes. In your car or on your i-Pod, listen to those songs that inspire and energize you.
- Tickle your funny bone. Have cartoons sent to your personal e-mail address. Exchange humorous stories and jokes with others. Go to a comedy club.
- Rest. Sleep deprivation is an epidemic. While naps can help, a solid seven to eight hours of sleep is best.
- Escape. Plan a day at the spa or a weekend at a place you have always wanted to visit. Take close friends with you—as long as they do not deplete your energy!
- Get support. Build a support system of



people you can call on when you need help—with the kids, with work, with things around the house.

Taking the first step

I was 46 years old when I finally recognized that I need to take care of myself every day in order to care for others and my business. To my life I have added playtime, a new way of eating, acupuncture treatments, contact with people I care about, a cadre of colleagues who can help me, a good night's sleep, and spa visits. Was it easy to change? Nope. Was it necessary to my health and my work? Absolutely. Do I slip? Every now and then—but my body quickly reminds me to return to my new habits.

What about you? What's the reading on your energy meter? Remember, to be fully present for others—at work and at home—you need to put your oxygen mask on first.



In her oxygen-enriched world, Lori Silverman is a business strategist, speaker and book author and the owner of Partners for Progress, a management consulting firm. She can be reached at lori@partnersforprogress.com.