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Turning Desperate to Respite

Tips for the Busy Businesswoman Who is a Caregiver, Too

By Cheryl Smith

Long hours at the office, family commitments at home, and now you're taking on care for another loved one. How can you pack one more thing into your day? You bring, of course, a great deal of commitment to the task, but are you secretly wondering how you and your business will survive? A strategic plan, flexibility, and an attitude of self-care are essential.

Start with what really matters

Let's start at the end of the list: **Self-care**, usually the last priority, is actually the most essential. Don't even think about strategies until you've settled on a half-hour each day to enact some kind of ritual that replenishes *you*. Arrange to engage this ritual at the same time each day, a time when you can count on fewer interruptions. Will you walk through a park or a quiet neighborhood? Write your heart out in a journal? Attend a yoga class—even if you have to arrive late or leave early? Perhaps you want to just sit in the sunshine or by candlelight. You get to decide! Just be certain it is something you don't even need to think about, where space will be available, and you can easily access what you need.

Expect the unexpected

Flexibility means you will be open to changes without ruffled feathers. Most surely, things won't be resolved easily or quickly. Prepare for the unexpected by repeating a short prayer or affirmation as you move into the care-giving segment of your day. Caring for a loved one is not about effectivity or efficiency. Often, it means just sitting listening to someone's complaints or redoing a task you've just completed. Arm yourself with a calm mind instead of caffeine. If possible, change into some easy-care clothes or at least a pair of soft shoes to signify you will go with the flow. If you entertain creative options when things get tough, you'll find yourself working smarter not harder.

Organize and integrate

When you've committed to the first two priorities, self-care and flexibility, a **strategic plan** will guide you into organizing your time and energy.

- Create a list of "helpers" (with contact info) for occasional, last-minute or emergency care. Friends or neighbors of your loved one may be willing to run errands or sit with your loved one while you're out. A local home care company may be called in to manage medicines, help with bathing or just provide companionship. Volunteer or community organizations (such as Meals on Wheels) may step in with food preparation or advice on practical matters. Doctors, nurses, attorneys or geriatric care managers will give you professional consultation when needed.
- Document tasks required, in order of necessity, and plot a time table of your availability to do them. Create a (flexible!) schedule for coming and going, and then make a copy for your loved one who may frequently forget. Call her if you're going to be more than 10 minutes late, or check in early as a reminder and to inquire if she needs anything.

- When you arrive, spend some time with your loved one evaluating her physical and emotional state before you proceed into accomplishing things. Move slowly and speak slowly. Smile, make eye contact. Extend a warm affectionate gesture. You'll be amazed how this will grease the wheels for more productivity in the long run.
- Move mindfully from one task to another, while detaching from the expectation of doing it all. Entertain interruptions as angels. As things arise you hadn't thought of, jot notes to yourself. If you begin to feel frazzled, call a "helper" or one of your own friends who can offer soul-soothing counsel.
- Integrate the expectations of your loved one into everything you do, if possible. When you finish, go over her needs again and update your calendar with her, assuring her of your desire to make it work for her. If you make an attempt to keep her as the center, chances are things will go more smoothly.

With these tips in mind, you'll be less distracted as you slip back into your career shoes, and that pile of email that arrived since you left the office. Each day, as you practice your strategy, exercise flexibility and extend kindness to yourself, you'll get better at the job of caregiving. Here's to a healthy, happy time of it!

Cheryl Smith is the president of Kansas City Home Care, Inc. For more information or for a listing of local caregiver resources call 913-341-4800 or visit www.khomecare.com.

Props for Self-care

- ✓ *A pretty apron for popping over your business clothes as you arrive.
- ✓ *A special candle to burn when you have five minutes to sit in solitude.
- ✓ *A pair of comfy walking shoes ready to grab and go.
- ✓ *A small notebook and pen for jotting notes to yourself.
- ✓ Names of friends, support groups and home care agencies (+ phone #s) to call when you're frazzled or befuddled.

- ✓ *A bottle of water to boost your energy and hydrate your system.

Finding Help

Whether you need a break for an hour or for a week, consider calling a home care professional. Since privately paid home care isn't regulated, be careful of who you hire and make sure that they have been background checked. Find respite and supplemental home care that meets high standards and adheres to strict guidelines through the National Private Duty Association.

Web: www.privatedutyhomecare.org

Phone: 317.844.7105