



## Self-care tips for nonprofit leaders during a pandemic

I have not left my house much in the last 203 days due to being in a higher risk category for the coronavirus (COVID-19). I'm either living at work or working from home, along with my entire family. Looking out the window from my home office in California, I can't see the sky or mountains through the thick haze. The air quality is in the hazardous range due to the wildfires. If that wasn't enough stress, there is also the fight for racial justice, election worries, a financial crisis, and the looming mental health crisis.

Everyone is feeling it. I realized after the first days that I needed to gather every tool from my [Happy Healthy Nonprofit](#) toolkit to try to keep calm, focused, and positive. This is a marathon not a sprint. I will be honest with you, it isn't always easy, but practicing self-care does help to create calming norms for yourself.

Here's a roundup of tips for building your personal resilience to make it to the finish line.

### #1 Get enough sleep, nutrition, and exercise.

Focus on these three activities: sleep, nutrition, and [exercise](#) to help strengthen your immune system and feel better. I continue to use a [Fitbit](#) to make sure I get 10K steps a day, but I'm giving myself permission to get in fewer steps when wildfire smoke doesn't allow me my daily walk. The blessing of shelter in place is that you can still exercise by walking, jogging, or running as long as you keep your distance from other people (and wear a mask). And as much as I want to [binge eat all the ice cream](#) in my freezer, I'm trying to avoid that and [keep healthy food on my plate](#).

I've also dedicated myself to get the recommended [six to eight hours of sleep per night](#) to help me feel better, although I do admit that in the beginning, I suffered from plague induced insomnia. Sleep is so important because it bolsters our immune system, and well, we feel much better if we are well-rested.

### #2 Practice mental distancing.

The public health advice is to social distance, but we also need to mentally distance from news and discussion about the virus. You simply [can't obsess about every news report](#) or the worst possible outcomes. I put myself on a [news diet](#) by only consuming one hour of news a day to be informed enough to keep my family safe. It is also important to practice information hygiene and consume news from trusted sources,

especially medical information. Here's some more tips on how to practice [mental distancing](#).

### **#3 Socialize at a distance.**

It is very hard not to be able to see family, friends, or coworkers in real life. So, I've been experimenting with [how to socialize at a distance](#) using technology. I've been using FaceTime or Zoom to go on virtual walks with people. It's a lot of fun to show off our neighborhoods or dogs with friends and loved ones.

In the workplace, nonprofits have been experimenting with Zoom and social activities. [TechSoup has been hosting a weekly themed Happy Hours with staff](#). Participants get to do a show and tell and of course bring their own beverages. Packard Foundation Organizational Effectiveness (OE) staff [hosted a birthday party on Zoom](#). In addition to [Happy Hours](#), your workplace can also host [virtual coffee hours](#), watercoolers, and more.

### **#4 Create new workplace norms for meetings.**

Since this crisis has unfolded, I have had to ask myself, what expectation of normal am I giving up today? One of those expectations is that children, dogs, and cats should not be seen or heard on Zoom calls. I think we need to be more gentle with ourselves given that many people are juggling home-schooling with their work. We have to [replace this norm](#) of pushing family away from the camera to [this norm of welcoming them](#).

Here's a [fun process to establish meeting norms](#) during a pandemic that can be done online.

In addition, given that we are all sitting in front of a screen for more and more hours, we need to make desk stretches and energizers norms for meetings as well. Here's a simple [set of desk stretches](#) that you can do alone or as a group. Also, don't forget to avoid eye strain by doing [eye yoga](#) exercises.

### **#5 Incorporate quiet time during your day.**

In times of uncertainty, we often get overwhelmed and don't know what to focus on. As our routines change and we have to shift our behaviors or even the day-to-day tasks that we do, we also spend a lot of time switching between tasks, but not tackling any of them in a disciplined or intentional way. The result is that we feel that we are not accomplishing as much as we should be, which adds to our feelings of anxiety and further contributes to our perception of a lack of control.

This [resource](#) provides lots of individual and organizational level tips for reducing anxiety.

I had to reclaim my morning routine of doing quiet activities that include stuff journaling, reading, or writing. I have also used that time to set my intention for the day. I use a Chrome and Firefox extension called [Momentum](#) that helps me maintain focus when I'm online (I'm not always successful or productive, but I'm getting better at it).

It is also helpful to set a [regular routine](#) if working from home is difficult for you.

## #6 Focus on positive thoughts.

Negative thoughts can influence how you feel, increase anxiety, or get in the way of getting things done. Look for positives. Look for blessings. I encourage you to ask yourself some of the below questions, or use them to check-in with your staff at the beginning of meetings.

- What am I grateful for today?
- How will I get outside today?
- What is one thing that made me laugh today?
- What beauty am I creating today?

There is a whole field of [scientific research](#) about the power of gratitude practice for not only individuals, but also in the [workplace](#). There are also lots of [ideas](#) for different rituals that your nonprofit can establish to help people keep positive.

## #7 Spark joy, and spread kindness.

With such negative and ugly things in our lives today, why not make space to remind yourself what makes you happy or sparks joy. Our family put up some hummingbird feeders on our windows, and I can't tell you how happy it makes me to watch them every morning at the feeders. Kicking off my day with a few minutes of hummingbird joy makes a big difference.

There are lots of useful resources created by nonprofits to help facilitate kindness. For example, [GivingTuesday](#) has [a daily kindness text and email](#) action alerts. Another thing our family did was [adopt a senior dog](#) from [Muttville](#), a local animal rescue. His name is Tigger, and he has been a [joy to add to our family](#).

Ask yourself everyday, what will spark joy for me today? What can I do for others? We are all in this together, and we will get through it together.

## #8 Eat a rainbow everyday.

My friend, John Haydon, who passed away from cancer before the pandemic, shared this one tip on how he remained optimistic in his book, [Donor Care](#). When he wrote, "Eat a rainbow," he was talking about eating a rainbow of healthy fruits and vegetables.

In our neighborhood, there are many families with young kids. They have taken to using colored chalk and drawing rainbows on the sidewalks outside their house. Other families walk by, and they are counting rainbows.

We need to look at the rainbows yet to come at the end of this horrible nightmare.

Learn more tips and how to apply them to your team at my upcoming virtual workshop, [Self-Care for Nonprofit Leaders During a Pandemic](#), on Friday, November 6. I'll also share strategies to help you develop your own self-care plan and connect with other leaders in the nonprofit sector.

<https://learning.candid.org/resources/blog/self-care-tips-for-nonprofit-leaders-during-a-pandemic>