

Summer



"RE-CREATION"

*Re-balancing & Re-grounding
to better Re-create ...*

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If you are reading this, then you are nearing the end of the most challenging year of your career. Quite a statement after last year, which also ended under very trying circumstances.

But you already know this, because you have lived it. You led people through it. You were the captain of a ship in rough waters and very stormy seas. You were also the anchor, the rudder, and the sails. You were not the only one keeping the ship afloat, but you were the one that everyone expected would know all the answers, solve all the problems, and answer the bell to all concerns and tasks.

You were the voice of the Ministry and the district to your school community on some days, but also the voice of your school when the message needed to 'go upstairs'. The role of school leader is the pinch point in education. It has always been a challenging profession. COVID-19 has just increased the wind speed to gale force.

As for me, I have been on the Principal sidelines since January of 2020. Pre-COVID. Yes, timing is everything. But my years as a Principal mean that

I can appreciate what you have experienced, while being sheltered from the storm myself.

The ReFresh series published by the BCPVPA has offered many helpful ideas for maintaining balance and personal health through these challenging times. My intent is to augment and revisit those ideas by offering a few concrete suggestions to consider as you head into Summer and some well-needed rest:

- ⦿ Rest that takes you away from the burdens of leading through a pandemic.
- ⦿ Rest for your nervous system so that you can lower your stress and cortisol-based state.
- ⦿ Rest so you can rebalance your family relationships, friendship connections and personal care.
- ⦿ Rest so you can re-ground in your non-work life and your 'other' world.
- ⦿ Rest so you can recreate... and 're-create' your sense of self order and personal peace.
- ⦿ Rest that will allow you to focus on creating conditions for holistic healing.

Rest ...



*so you can re-ground your non-work
life and your 'other' world*

Here are some intention-based thoughts to consider.

1. START now. If you haven't already, start building in activities and actions that prepare your mind and body for an upcoming vacation. I know that is not easy to do. As a colleague reminds me, our school year never 'winds down'. The end of the school year is more like the end of a ski ramp. We launch into Summer at full speed and altitude. As many of you can attest, our first weeks of Summer are often spent with a cold, and are characterized by efforts to just wind down and settle. But with intention, we can try to start that personal wind down now. Even in a chaotic month. Even this year.

So, go for a daily walk at lunch time. Book a tee time or go for a hike as a mid-week, after-school get away. Get in the garden and put your hands in the soil. Prepare the boat. Wear shorts and sandals to work. Catch some rays in the back yard with a good book. Play a Summer playlist of your favourite tracks. Go away camping for the weekend. Fire up the barbeque. Whatever activities you choose, make them a product of intentional choice. Ramp up your Summer activities now. Let your body feel the stimuli of Summer activities and allow it to transition in the last weeks of June. Then, when you hit July, you can start your holidays relaxed and ready to really take a deep dive into vacation mode. You need it.

2. TAKE INVENTORY of your diet and drinking patterns. This school year may have led to times where you reached for the cheap carbs to get you through. You may have also leaned on the bottle a bit more than you know is healthy. Summer is the time to dial that back and reassess the balance between short term relief and long-term problems. Talk to colleagues and family for feedback. Steer clear of shame and blame. Just move toward a healthier diet, exercise, sleep, and fluids... more water, less wine!

3. CONNECT to the present moment. Mindfulness is another way you can prepare for the Summer right now. We can turn inward. We can focus on our breath. We can meditate and try to stay present. If that seems too challenging in a busy school, we can try a guided meditation. Find one on



YouTube that works for you, or make your own. Our nervous systems are designed to interpret incoming stimuli, but that stimuli can come from sensing our surroundings, or from our imagination. Our nervous system cannot actually tell the difference. So, if we close our office door, and put on some ocean wave sounds, we can transport ourselves into our imagined reality, and reap the benefits that being there would achieve...without the sunburn! Make that date with yourself with intention. Plan to take that microvacation at a scheduled time. Follow through *on* yourself, *FOR* yourself.

4. RESET your nervous system. When a deer escapes from a predator in the wild, it will lie down in the grass afterward and shake quite violently. This instinctual response is necessary for the deer to shed the energy it had built up in the chase, and to reset its nervous system and hormone response. The 'threat state' was appropriate for the emergency, but staying in that state long term can cause the deer to see a predator behind every tree and perceive everything as a threat, even members of its own herd. The rise in adrenaline and cortisol also becomes unhealthy for

the deer, and the constantly triggered deer ultimately begins to put the whole herd into alarm. Not good. So, what do they do? They literally shake it off. They have a neurological / hormonal reboot. They release the pent-up energy...and they ground. Literally.

We are wired the exact same way. And yet we almost never reset.

How many times this year did you feel like a deer in the headlights? How often did you feel the wolves at the door? How many times did you have to make decisions in your job from a neurological state of Fight, Flight, Freeze or Fawn? How often have you felt stuck in threat mode? High stress? Fear? Avoidance? How many times have you lashed out at a friend? Loved one? Colleague? And how many times did you just want to hide?

I think we can all admit to being in this state too often. I also know personally that it will negatively impact your health, because it has impacted mine.

Here is the punchline. We need to recognize that this year was a long-enduring trauma. It had its moments of joy and satisfaction, but it was traumatic. Since we store trauma in our bodies, we need to release

it through physical movement and activity. So, get out there. Hike it out. Bike it out. Run. Lift. Paddle. Stretch. Golf. Do it with intention. Dig into the work on yourself. Reset your state from 'threat' mode to 'safe and social' mode. The payoff is getting to spend the whole Summer in a healthier neural state, one that expands creativity, resets our holistic health, and allows for deep social connections with family and friends.

5. EMBRACE nature. A "ReFresh" article referenced the practice of Forest Bathing. But other forms of contact and activity in the natural world can have the same effect. Swim in a cool mountain lake, or fly fish in a cold flowing river. Embark on a berry-picking adventure, or a quiet paddle across a lake. Embrace the calming effect of a forest, the quiet punctuated by the sounds of wind and trees. Birds gliding and water flowing. The forest scents are earthy. Rich. Calming. The light is muted by the shadows of trees and mountains. The mossy forest floor softens beneath your feet. Go there. You do not need a destination or a timeline. You do not need an activity or a contrived purpose. Just go. Just be. You only need the freedom to wander and the desire to experience the richness of nature.

*Experience the
richness of nature*





Love is the only thing that accumulates faster than you can spend it. It always comes back in abundance.

6. MAKE a switch. For many of us, it is not necessarily relaxing to spend the whole Summer unwinding. We may seek to switch from our career activities to our passions and our artistic expression. They say a change is as good as a rest. While the research may not bear that out entirely, I do believe that creative and passion-based activities that induce a state of flow are healthy and richly rewarding. Crafters and musicians, artists, and builders, this is for you. Do your thing.

7. PRACTICE your faith if you have one. If you are a person of faith, and you have felt disconnected to God and your faith due to the pandemic, or just the crazy school year, this may be time to reconnect. If you are not religious, this may be time to explore your spiritual awakening and connection. Do it with intention. Make it a priority.

8. LOVE your people. Love is the only thing that accumulates faster than you can spend it. It always

comes back in abundance. So, let it flow. If you are a dad like me, reconnect with your kids. Play. Invest in them. If you are a mom, be a mom with love and intention. Feel the joy and love of family connection. If you have a partner, check in on them and re-engage. If you are single, build your connections to friends and family. Put yourself out there. If you have lost a friend or feel like you have hurt someone, reach out and unhurt them. Anticipate the new freedoms of a post-COVID life, and open your heart to the love that exists in the world. You need it. It needs you.

9. PRACTICE gratitude. Studies show that one of the best ways to improve your happiness is to express and show gratitude for all you have. It is a mindful and intentional act. Work that gratitude muscle every day. If you say grace at a meal, build from that. If you can wake up and reflect on your gratitude for ten things before you reach for your phone, it will increase your happiness. And it will spill over onto others in your life.

I wish you all the peace and calm you need after a very challenging year. Know that your efforts, successes, mistakes, struggles, victories, and resilience all contributed to the collective good of our society. They made a difference. They were sacrifices that mattered. Now, however, the time is ripe for you to care for you, to reboot, recharge and re-create who you were before. Maybe a you that is better than before. More humble. More aware. More compassionate. More resilient. More loving. More understanding. More determined. More mindful.

There has never been a journey that has not changed the traveler. Calluses on the feet, battle scars between the armour plates, and a heaviness on the heart are the souvenirs of the journey. Now is time to lower your burden and rest.

I am proud to call you all my colleagues. I wish you the Summer you need, and the vacation you deserve.

BE well!



REFERENCES

Chair Yoga - Katie Marren, SD 57

bit.ly/KM_ChairYoga1

bit.ly/KM_ChairYoga2

BCPVPA ReFresh Series

bcpvpa.org/resources/health/refresh

BCPVPA ReCharge Series

bcpvpa.org/resources/health/recharge

BCPVPA The Learning Brain Series

bcpvpa.org/resources/health/the-learning-brain

BCPVPA Health Links

<https://www.bcpvpa.org/resources/health/links>