

# Taking Care of Me!

By: Greg Dettinger, Concord High School

Contact: [gdettinger@concord.k12.in.us](mailto:gdettinger@concord.k12.in.us)

## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

This is my 7th year as a high school principal and the 4th different school. Through the years I have learned firsthand what burnout is as a principal and so coming into this new position I recognized that I couldn't sustain myself long term without changes in my non-work life. This new job includes a 38 minute drive each way, so I decided to take full advantage of this time to give myself a mental break from the stress at work, so I listen to books on CD each way which I check out from our local library.

The other action I have put into place in order to reduce stress is exercising three to four times a week for at least 30 minutes. I use a recumbent bike as well as I officiate basketball and baseball.

The feedback I have received thru conversations is that focusing on me has made me a better leader, father, and husband (not always in that order).

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to take care of myself emotionally, mentally and physically, thus reducing my stress and helping me to be a rested, and mentally prepared leader.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

Through the years I have learned firsthand what burnout is as a principal, and so coming into this new position I recognized that I couldn't sustain myself long-term without changes in my non-work life. With this purpose, I wondered if the mental break to and from work as well as reducing stress through exercise would make me a better leader, and in fact a better person in all aspects of my life.

Will listening to non-educationally based books help take my mind off of the stress of life each and every day?  
Will exercising a few times a week help me feel better physically and help me to then get a better night's rest?

## **Methods/Procedures:**

This new job includes a 38-minute drive each way, so I decided to take full advantage of this time to give myself a mental break from the stress at work, so I listen to books on CD each way, which I check out from our local library.

To gain insights into my wonderings, I used several areas of qualitative data collection. I gathered feedback that I received through conversations with my admin team, the counselors and even some of the students in general. I asked questions of those closest around me if they had noticed a change or a dip in my positive attitude since the beginning of the school year, or had I maintained the positive upbeat disposition?

I collected the responses in writing from my admin team, front office staff and guidance and allowed them to respond anonymously so they felt no fear if answering in the wrong way. The feedback I received was quite refreshingly positive.

## **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As stated previously, my real purpose was to create opportunities outside of the workplace that would relieve and reduce the daily stresses of being principal, especially over such a large school where much change was needed and expected.

As I began this process, I informed my admin team, front office staff and the guidance office what it was that I was trying to do and to measure.

After analyzing their written responses I came to the conclusion that what I had been doing as far as stress relief was working. I felt less stressed, especially in high intense situations which we encountered as a school and team throughout the first half of the year and it was clear and evident to my colleagues around me.

I also could tell via my relationship with my wife Shelley that I was bringing less problems home with me, having much less impact than in years past. I also created more time for both her and I to spend time together, such as walks and once a week date night as well as I made more time to spend with our 11 year old son.

Through feedback from the students it was evident that they felt my presence and my attitude significantly changed the entire climate and atmosphere of our school. The seniors stated that this current year was by far their best and when you heard them scream out our new cheer that I incorporated at graduation, it was clear that they still felt the same way.

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

I knew that when I took on the leadership role here at Concord, a school twice as large as my last assignment and nearly ten times larger than my first principalship over seven years ago, that I needed to put into place practices that would take care of me emotionally and physically.

Without a doubt, I feel the effective use of my driving time as an opportunity to listen to books on CD that were non educationally related has really paid off. It clearly let me leave problems and situations at home behind as well as I was able to leave work behind at school and lose myself in the listening and entertainment of the books.

This has proven so effective that still to this date I listen to the books and am now well over 40 books this year. In fact, my recently turned 12 year old son and I have embarked on a multi-state 4,000 plus mile vacation and we are both listening to more CD's along the way.

I also feel that the efforts I put forth in walking with my wife Shelley, as well as riding the recumbent bike along with officiating basketball and baseball helped me lose a little over 12 pounds and thus helped me to feel physically better as well, which also impacted me in the work- place in a positive way.

### **References:**

N/A