



John C. Norcross and Gary R. VanderBos: *Leaving It at the Office: A Guide to Psychotherapist's Self-Care* (2nd ed.)

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Patricia A. Rupert¹

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This book is the second edition of Norcross and Guy's (2007) classic book on psychotherapist's self-care. This edition has a new coauthor and has been revised to include up-to-date research, to reflect new trends in this rapidly expanding area (e.g., a chapter has been added on mindfulness), and to offer new self-care examples and activities. Recognizing that self-care is not a "one-size fits all" endeavor, the authors conceptualize their book as a field guide, not an instructional manual. With this in mind, they focus on principles or broad self-care strategies that can be implemented in many ways and adapted to each individual's unique situation and preferences. The book is organized according to 13 self-care strategies, with a chapter devoted to each strategy. Each chapter draws upon clinical wisdom from a range of theoretical perspectives, research, the authors' experiences, and the experiences of workshop participants and master psychotherapists (prominent psychotherapists that the authors have interviewed) to offer insight, encouragement, and a wealth of ideas for implementing a strategy both inside and outside the office.

Norcross and VanderBos effectively guide readers through a process of thinking about self-care systematically and creatively. Their initial chapter on valuing the person of the psychotherapist reminds us of the important role that the individual psychotherapist plays in successful psychotherapy, inspires us to view self-care as central to our professional and personal well-being, and sets the stage for developing a self-care mind-set and intentionally incorporating self-care into our daily lives. As the authors note, "self-care begins with our own awareness" (p. 13) and, in that

spirit, chapters on rewards and hazards prompt us to think about our work and ourselves - about why we were drawn to this line of work, about what we value and gain from this work, about the demands and difficulties of this work, about the unique impact this work has on our lives, etc. With this background, discussions of self-care strategies in the remaining chapters gently challenge us to think critically, but compassionately, about how well we care for ourselves and to explore multiple ways of applying each strategy to our unique circumstances.

Throughout the book, the authors' approach is a positive, proactive one. From the outset, they emphasize that the goal of self-care is not just to manage stress and survive, but to flourish both professionally and personally. In their words: "Not only to keep your nose above the waterline, but to swim naturally and joyfully" (p. 17). This uplifting vision permeates the book and provides a consistent tone of optimism and encouragement. It contributes greatly to the book's effectiveness in helping us appreciate the importance of self-care and motivating us to practice self-care with enthusiasm and commitment.

Although not an instructional manual in a prescriptive sense, *Leaving It at the Office* is filled with valuable insights and practical information. The 13 self-care strategies cover a wide range of methods of engaging in self-care that are especially relevant for practicing psychotherapists, including, for example, nurturing relationships, setting boundaries, restructuring cognitions, sustaining healthy escapes, and fostering creativity and growth. The authors even include a strategy that emphasizes environmental control (creating a flourishing environment) and ways that we can "harness the subtle but pervasive power of the environment" and "make the working environment work in the cause of your self-care" (p. 177). In the chapters devoted to each strategy, the authors skillfully integrate research on psychotherapist stress and self-care with clinical knowledge and experience. Their

✉ Patricia A. Rupert
prupert@luc.edu

¹ Department of Psychology, Loyola University of Chicago, Chicago, IL 60660, USA

well-informed, enlightening discussions include many concrete real-life examples and specific activities that are actually doable, that can reasonably be incorporated into hectic, busy lives. Of particular value are their practical suggestions for structuring our work days, for replenishing our mental and emotional resources throughout the work day, and for disengaging from work after leaving the office. Recognizing that we all have unique circumstances and personal preferences, Norcross and VandenBos propose an impressive “smorgasbord” of self-care activities. For those who like structure, each chapter ends with a self-care checklist that summarizes key points and, for those who thirst for more knowledge, a short list of recommended resources.

Leaving It at the Office is a very well-written, engaging, and thought-provoking book. The authors’ style is conversational, at times humorous, and always compassionate. As experienced psychotherapists and researchers, Norcross and VandenBos are open in sharing their own perspectives and anecdotes from their lives and in acknowledging not just the importance, but also the challenges, of engaging in self-care. Further, they are adept at integrating information from a wide range of sources and presenting it in an accessible,

relatable, and encouraging manner. In fact, the book’s title doesn’t seem to do the book justice in terms of reflecting its comprehensiveness, its optimistic focus, and its overall potential for influencing the professional and personal lives of practicing psychotherapists.

In their Preface, the authors indicate that the book “is intended for all current and future psychotherapists” (p. vii). They have indeed written a book that is appropriate (I might even suggest “a must-read”) for practicing psychotherapists from diverse educational backgrounds and theoretical perspectives. This book also has much to offer psychotherapists-in-training and with the increased emphasis on developing self-care skills in graduate education, this could be a very beneficial book to include in the curriculum of graduate programs.

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