

Dear Master Coach

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Dear Master Coach:

When I'm under stress how do I bring my best self to coaching my clients?"

Yours truly,

High Blood Pressure

Dear HBP:

Well, if you're talking about chronic stress—feeling too much of it for more than a few days at a time with no break--I don't think you can bring your best self to your clients, no matter how smart you are. There's a huge difference between time-limited performance stress and constant stress.

There's an old Greek legend about a man who noticed the great fable-maker, Aesop playing marbles with children in the streets of Athens. The man ridiculed Aesop for being undignified. In response, Aesop picked up a bow, loosened its string and placed it on the ground. Then looking back at the mocking Athenian, he posed a riddle, "What is the meaning of this unstrung bow?" The clueless man stared back and Aesop said, "A bow that is tightly strung will soon lose its power or break. If you let it rest, it will be strong and ready when you need it."

A great coach knows what strong and ready looks like and feels like. People hire us for our ability to be present and to deeply pay attention—and to be resilient with the unexpected. Our ability to practice self-care and self-management is related to the ethics, the economics and the enjoyment of what we do. It's a big deal.

Here are a couple of questions as you think about your self-management:

1. Do you have an unambiguous understanding of your personal early-warning signs that stress is starting to take a toll? For me, it's the quality of my voice (I start whining and I'm not a whiner), and how quickly I feel resentful of the unexpected (I know that my best self is energetic and resilient). Even better . . .
2. Do you know how to anticipate and plan on "unstrung time?" I know that our lives hold lots of unpredictability (filled as they are with human beings). Personally, when I'm facing a busy string of days, each with three 4-hour parts: morning, afternoon and evening, I know that I can't go for more than four parts in a row without insisting on one part off. (Sometimes I have to fight with a saboteur who tells me that everything depends on me.)

Finally, if travel is part of your work, see if you can plan to come home just a little bit rested. It's possible if you pay attention to those questions. The level of energy you bring home will be contagious.

Keep breathing,

PEB, MC

Listen to Patty's "Dear Master Coach" monthly 3-minute answers at: <http://www.seattlecoach.com/dearmastercoach.html>