

What We're Talking About: Self Care for Studio Teachers

As a follow up to Kate Butler's research article in the *Journal of Singing* "Mindful Voice" column, NATS Inter Nos editor Cynthia Vaughn asked the voice teacher social media forums about self-care.

Inter Nos: *What do you do for YOU? How do you stay motivated and balance your studio, performing, and home life with "me-time"?*

Rachel Day Velarde: After the NATS Winter Workshop in San Diego, I started Monday night Qi Gong meditation class. It's really helping me stay centered.

Maryann Kyle: Regarding self care for the voice teacher, I realize that I'm not a good model. I would probably teach until I dropped. But let me offer this piece of advice for how to handle the long days. I was asked once, "How can you teach so many people each day and not get overwhelmed?" This was my advice: I never get up in the morning and look at my entire schedule. I know when I have to arrive at school to teach and I greet each student as they walk in the door. I greet them and meet them where they are on that day and we spend an hour exploring and creating. It's a mindset. If I look at the number of hours I have to teach that day it will exhaust me. But if I just think about each student and their needs and progress I actually get more energized as the day moves on. The next best piece of advice I have to offer is have a "zone out" hobby where you don't check into musical or teacher thoughts. Mine are motorcycle riding and gardening. And lastly, stay in touch with your creative side. I enjoy practicing music each evening and putting together shows in addition to my regular singing contracts. These creative outlets inform my teaching and energize my creative side. All of these things together add to my energy for my passion of teaching and singing.

Thomas Robert Gareau: This year I decided to make a New Year's resolution and take Saturday's off. So far having one "me-day" a week has been incredible. I never realized how much having a single lesson or gig on that day ruins the feeling of freedom.

Cate Frazier Neely: Self care, for me, changes with time. After almost 38 years of teaching in many environments, with a private studio that whole time, performing regionally and nationally, and raising two children with my husband, it currently means this: "NO" is a complete sentence. So is "No." It means going vegan and sticking with that, which takes time and effort. It means really focusing on who I am without taking care of everyone and everything else. It means continuing to learn, and I streamlined who I work with and cut

"Caring for mind, body, soul, and spirit is essential for prevention and treatment of burnout (as well as general health) and should be attended to despite how busy, pressed, or exhausted we believe ourselves to be."

—Kate Butler, *Journal of Singing*, Jan/Feb 2017



my weekly teaching hours by becoming a singing voice specialist. It means I rarely work with groups anymore because I am an introvert and just because you are good at something doesn't mean you should do it for your own sanity. It means I have finally allowed myself time to return to visual art, which was what I loved as a child. Because my family were all professional musicians, I got derailed into the family business and started teaching music when I was 13, and was taking care of younger brothers and family meals and all laundry when I was 14. By the time I finished college I had already been paid for teaching music and playing/singing for ten years! I don't even count that time in the years I've taught....

Robin Anderson: Respond to e-mails and update studio-related social media once a day at a set time during the business week. Doing this forces a prioritization and I make it a habit not to respond to work-related e-mails over my "weekend" (Fridays and Saturdays).

Rachel Brager Goldenberg: I need a bit of quiet time every day. I need to shut my brain off and not listen to or hear anything for 15-20 minutes. Between teaching all day and two loud, screaming boys at home, I need a break! Sometimes my car is my sanctuary!!

Kathy Aregood Crusi: I take Fridays off since I need to teach Saturdays. It does help a lot.

Nikki Loney: Yoga and meditation

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Emily Cox: I work out like a dog all week! It really does help me to get up early and do something for thirty minutes before I sit at the piano all day.

Gina Razon: Know your work personality and try to accommodate your needs. I need time for artistic pursuits or I resent my students. My solution is three hard-packed teaching days and four days "off" to be an artist.

Dale Cox: Ahhhh, so many things. Three lessons, then a 15-minute break, morning time is "me-time," teaching time is afternoon. I teach six days, Sunday off but start late on Mondays (4pm), using mindfulness personally, and maybe at the start of a lesson for a couple of minutes with students, accounting and business issues once a week, traveling and conferences WHENEVER possible. I walk out of the studio, close the door and that's it. Do professional development. Take holidays! This is something I take super seriously. I suspect it depends on your personality and stress levels, but being refreshed makes me a better teacher (I think).

Catherine Coleman Boone:

1. No teaching past 8:30pm, no exceptions. If I teach later, then getting to bed at a decent hour isn't probable, and, since I get up with my children in the morning to get them to school, little sleep leads me to illness. (I have not been sick in almost two years now.)
2. Getting in movement outside/exercise as my body needs or allows. Some days this is cardio, some days I just walk the dog... depends on the weather and my emotional needs.
3. No teaching during the weeks that the studio is closed, no exceptions! Otherwise, a needed mental break doesn't happen.
4. Making sure that I spend time having lunch or coffee with people not connected to my studio...keeps a foot in the "real world" and the "arts world."

5. No teaching on Saturdays. NO exceptions.

6. Getting to bed and rising in the morning at the same time every day. (This one is REALLY hard for me!)

Elizabeth Rotoff: Working out daily. Having some quiet/silent time to let my ears and mind rest. Having one full day off, currently on Saturdays - even one lesson in the day affects my mindset for the day. Make sure I get my seven hours of sleep

Holly Roeseler Adams: For me, what works best is organization. If I have my studio organized and ready for the day that gives me more time to accomplish other tasks and helps me to feel relaxed and ready for each student. I let my husband know - "I am working" in my studio and he knows that is not the time to sit on the couch and visit. If there is something important of course, I am available.

Michelle Robson:

1. Organization
2. MTNA meetings. Even if it is piano focused, the techniques transfer. A support system is the main focus.
3. Take time off to see that show, concert or event. It will inspire and recharge you. Splurge for the closest seat possible, even if that means going alone.
4. It is ok to tell prospective students and current students, "this isn't working out." Many times, some personalities just don't mesh, or there is a lack of respect. Don't suffer through that. It will completely drain you and make the other lessons suffer.

Dann Mitton: I hang out on social media, natch.

More self-care ideas? Email your comments to CynthiaVaughn@mac.com