

# Commit to a 'wellness streak' to help manage work stressors

January 12 2022, by Astrid H. Kendrick

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Credit: Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels

Now that we're well into 2022, how is your New Year's resolution going? Did your *new year, new me* goals make it past the first week of January?

If not, or if [pandemic stressors of the omicron wave have you feeling down](#) so you didn't consider resolutions, why not start a well-being streak?

["Streaking," recently popularized by some runners](#)—not because they're [running nude](#) but because they're aiming to run for as many consecutive days as possible—can inspire you to take action on your [wellness goals](#), even if prospective marathons aren't your thing.

With rates of burnout and [compassion fatigue](#) soaring this year in a number of professions, including in my own field of education, employers and organizational leaders have been more interested [in finding ways to support their staff's well-being goals](#).

## **Burnout is a workplace problem**

Burnout and [compassion fatigue](#) are [workplace mental and emotional health hazards](#) that can reduce employee productivity and increase absenteeism, so workplace solutions are needed.

But well-intentioned workplace well-being programs can fail [due to cost](#), lack of [employee interest and participation](#) or perceived lack [of feasibility by employers](#). Balancing personal and organizational goals requires respect for the dynamic relationship between the wellness needs of individuals and the mission and values of workplaces.

In my recent [research into compassion fatigue and burnout in educational workers](#), I learned that when study participants felt supported and heard by their school leadership and colleagues, they felt more capable of dealing with workplace stressors. But toxic school cultures exacerbated the symptoms burnout and compassion fatigue, and reduced workers' ability to manage their stress and seek appropriate help.

Further, my research team found that protecting the educational workers' "heartwork," or their fundamental commitment to the social and academic success of the children and youth in their care, needed to be a primary [goal](#) of educational employers.

A strong belief in the good work of education was a key protective factor for the participants in this study, but without organizational support and resources devoted to workplace well-being, [heartwork](#) could turn to heartbreak.

## **A self-care streak to relieve stress**

In addition to providing critical organizational support and resources, encouraging a voluntary workplace well-being streak is one small way employers can promote employee wellness.

Feeling hopeless and helpless in the face of all the stresses caused by the pandemic and [climate change](#) is a common reaction, but reaching positive daily goals can [build workplace](#) (or, [for students, academic](#)) buoyancy—the ability to bounce back from everyday stress.

In my own faculty, the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, my colleague [Theodora Kapoyannis](#) and I, who both work as field experience directors, have included a [#FieldSelfCareStreak](#) in the [student teacher practicum courses](#) to coincide with our student teachers starting their kindergarten to Grade 12 school practicum placements. The goal is to advance the [culture of well-being](#) both within our faculty and to encourage students and their partner teachers to take some time during the work day to attend to their well-being goals.

The streak challenge is to set aside 15–20 minutes of the work day to engage in a self-care activity for the duration of the field practicum course (normally about four to six weeks). Self-care could be anything

from taking breaks from work, eating mindfully at lunch time, taking a walk with a colleague, or arriving earlier to ensure lesson plans were ready to go. The stalker chooses an achievable activity, and as leaders, we support them through advocacy, mentorship and encouragement.



One of author Astrid Kendrick's walks, showing Mount Fernie and the Three Sisters (mountain) in Fernie, B.C. Credit: Astrid Kendrick, Author provided

## **Personal wellness streak**

You could also consider starting your own wellness streak. While

January is a common month to start a new goal, a streak can start at any time in the year and doesn't have to be linked to a formal group.

It can be as easy as choosing an activity you like and then doing that activity for as many consecutive days as you can. Miss a day, that's OK—start again the next morning.

Some tips to get streaking:

**Personalized goals.** Last winter, I joined my sister and her family in the [#FerneStreak](#). This yearly challenge for local residents (and visitors, like me) of Fernie, British Columbia, is to do an outside activity for 30 minutes each day throughout January to raise money for a local charity. I chose to walk every day for the month because I *like* walking, and I, like many others, was carrying [some extra pandemic pounds](#).

**Enjoyment.** Choosing a goal that is [enjoyable and motivates](#) you is crucial. After I successfully finished the Fernie streak, I kept going—walking every day for 365 days—even in the cold, the record heat, the wildfire smoke and the rain of 2021. As my Norwegian mother used to say, "[Det finnes ikke dårlig vær, bare dårlige klær.](#)" (There isn't bad weather, only bad clothes).

**Start small.** Answer for yourself: What do you want to do? Do you have what you need to begin? What amount of time can you set aside each day? Can you talk a work colleague, friend, partner or family member into doing your goal with you? I talked my husband into walking with me, and he did until I lost him to golf for the summer months.

**Accountability.** Keeping yourself on your streak can be as simple as making a check mark on your calendar, posting a picture in a social media group or tweeting your success every time you complete your activity. Or, if you prefer digital motivation, [many trackers](#) and [apps](#)

[designed](#) specifically to keep people motivated are available.

**Find like-minded people or persuade your co-workers to join you.** Knowing that other people are on a streak can [create a community](#) that encourages you to keep going.

## Overcoming obstacles

Just like [sports teams](#) don't quit playing if their winning streak is broken, missing a day of your streak doesn't mean you've failed. Reflect on why you missed your goal and start fresh tomorrow.

Is your time goal unattainable because of your work commitments and schedule? Reduce it to something attainable. I made my official goal 20 minutes of exercise because, some days, that was all I could manage. Have you lost interest in your activity? Try a different goal like "I will be active outside for 15 minutes," "I will turn off my email notifications at 6 p.m. each night" or "I will be creative by writing or drawing for 20 minutes."

The point of choosing your own streak goal is that you can change it at any time to match your own circumstances.

So, start your streak!

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