

Above and Beyond's Employee Self-Care Program

Establishing and following a well-rounded program of self-care is mandatory at Above and Beyond. In addition to insisting on it's good design we devote a group hour every week to test the accountability of every employee's follow through. We compare the importance of this effective self-care routine to putting on an oxygen mask when an airplane cabin loses pressure. "Put your own mask on first before assisting others," the flight attendant warns us during the safety talk before departure. While it may seem selfish and counterintuitive for us to help ourselves before assisting others in an emergency, there is a simple truth contained in the order to don our own mask first:

We cannot help others to the best of our ability if we are stuck fighting for oxygen.

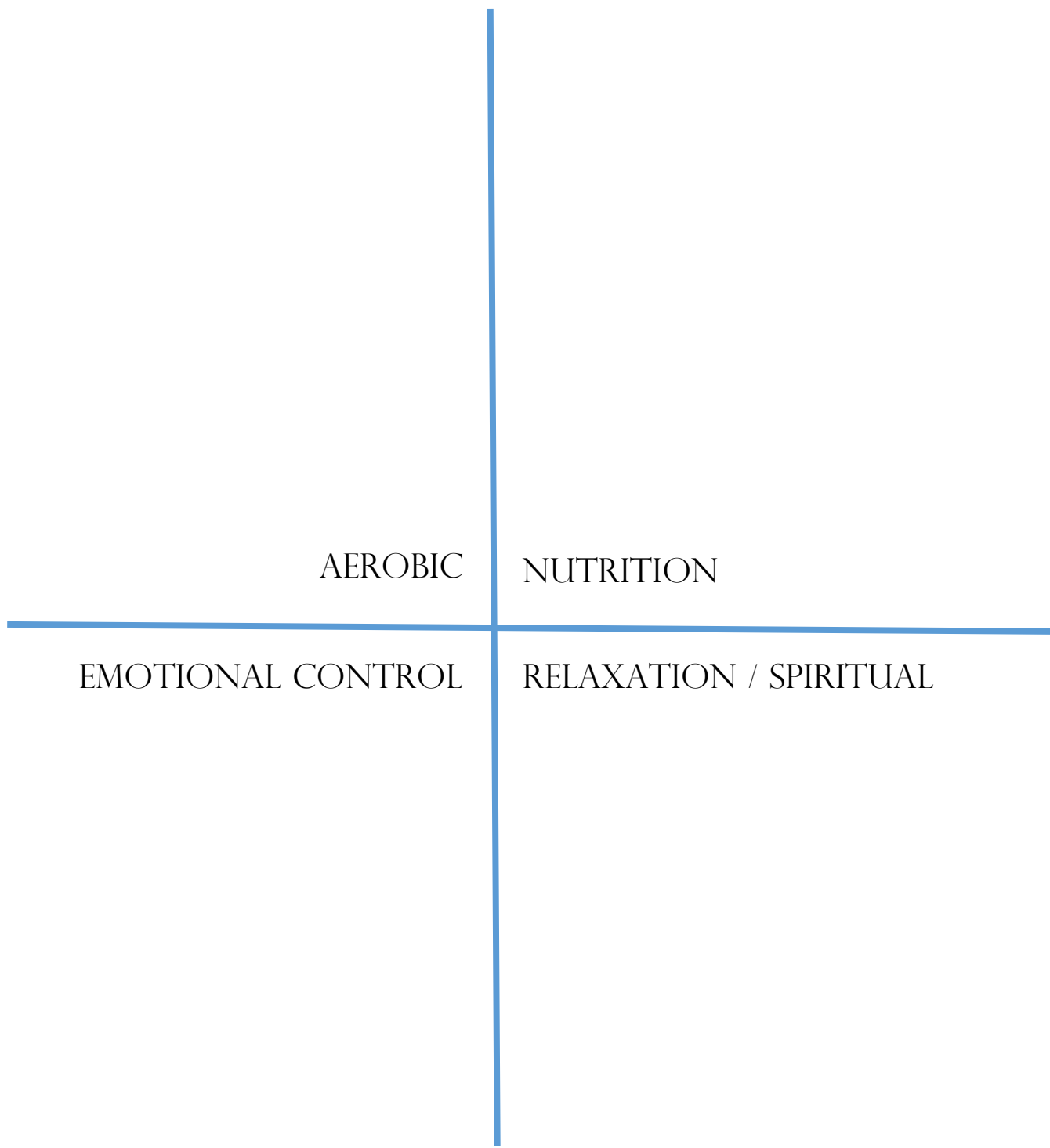
The same can be said of self-care. If we are not our best self, how can we provide the best support to those around us? At Above and Beyond we do not believe we can. We deem it essential not only to routinely monitor our own well-being for the obvious benefits that come of it, but one of the primary reasons to make sure it is well maintained is so that when an unexpected crisis occurs, as happens often in our industry, we can take care of ourselves and others when our help is really needed.

*The Self-Care Program at Above and Beyond is considered an immunization against the toxic effects of **compassion fatigue**, also known as second-hand shock and secondary stress reaction, which is a type of stress that results from helping or wanting to help those who are traumatized or under significant emotional duress, but unable to do so.*

Although compassion fatigue is sometimes mislabeled burnout, it quite a bit different. Unlike burnout, compassion fatigue is highly treatable although it is perhaps less predictable. The onset of compassion fatigue can be sudden, whereas burnout usually emerges over time. Additionally, severe cases of burnout sometimes require the person experiencing it to change jobs or occupations, but often measures can be taken to prevent or treat compassion fatigue before a change in work environment is required.

Compassion fatigue can be a precursor or a symptom of other stressors. Because counselors are trained to utilize compassion and empathy in order for therapy to be effective, they are particularly vulnerable to emotional stress and compassion fatigue if it's not accumulated and banked. For counselors, compassion fatigue can have ethical and legal implications if left untreated, especially if they are providing counseling services that are not benefiting those under their care.

In order for our employees to develop their own self-care routine, we suggest that they evaluate what we are calling the "**Quadrants of Wellness**" which are essential components of self-care in their lives: Aerobic Physical Self-Care, Nutritional Self-Care, Emotional Self-Care and Control, and Relaxation or Spiritual Self-Care. Substitutions can be made but a well-rounded program of self-care with demonstrable progress that can be peer evaluated is required. Length of the written program description is not as important as its execution but a narrative of substance and clarity of approximately 500 words is requested.



The Quadrants of Wellness

