

A message from Dr. Janet Morrison



Self-Care

June 26, 2020

Students: it's hard to believe that we are almost at the mid-point of the summer term; Reading Week starts on Monday, June 29 and will afford you the opportunity to catch-up, invest in your physical and mental health, and hopefully enjoy the summer weather. Given the disruption, social isolation, and economic hardship that you've been navigating for months, it's a great time to think more consciously about self-care.

Over the course of my life and career, I've been an advocate for positive mental health and overall wellbeing. More recently, I've been thinking a lot about the path to [flourishing](#) -- versus floundering -- in the face of a crisis, like the one posed by COVID-19. I do not purport to have all the answers but I wanted to share a 2008 model called [Five Ways to Wellbeing](#), that I've found particularly helpful. In the hope that you might find it equally practical, I thought I'd outline its tenets: connect; be active; keep learning; give; and, take notice – and share some reflections on what they mean to me.

Connect

So much is tied to feeling connected. Students with stronger connections are more likely to be successful learners, engaged campus citizens and happy people. A student's sense of connectedness depends on the quality of their relationships and their feelings of identification or affiliation with their school. This is why the serious concerns raised by marginalized students are so troubling to me: feeling like you don't belong or aren't valued undermines connection, which in turn poses a significant threat to student success.

Physical distancing and the risk of transmission demands that each of us finds new ways to stay connected. Virtual dinners with students in residence and on-line 'coffee chats' with colleagues, for example, are serving to cement my sense of belonging as a member of the Sheridan community.

Be Active

I learned a long time ago that my mental and physical health are coupled. To that end, I've had to find new ways to maintain physical distancing without compromising my commitment to fitness. Specifically, my kids and I work out three times a week, my partner and I walk our dog (Cooper) twice a day, and I'm gardening like it's an endurance sport. I would encourage you to discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility. Simply: it makes you feel good.

Keep Learning

I've tried throughout my life to take on new things that involve a steep learning curve. Here's what I know based on that commitment: learning is hard. It isn't always fun. But... it keeps you fresh, and makes you feel alive.

In the age of COVID, there's no shortage of learning for any of us! To promote wellbeing, I've recommitted to reading more, spending time on self-reflection, and engaging in provocative discussions with smart people. I think learning new things makes us more confident and more agile.

Give

In my family, volunteering is non-negotiable. From a very early age, I was taught the concept of privilege and about my responsibility to give back. In that spirit, I'm trying to say yes to every person who asks me for help. I've taken multiple calls from students and parents; I've participated in panels and podcasts; and, I've renewed my commitments to support the sport organizations that matter to my kids.

More broadly (and consistent with Sheridan's identity), I'm working hard to be kind, express gratitude, and smile more. I'm convinced the little things will make a big difference.

Take Notice

This one is hard for me! My partner often speaks of the 'hamsters' that run rampant in my brain, rarely affording a moment of stillness. Over time, however, I think I've become more proficient at savoring the moment and being aware of the world around me. These are remarkable times; being conscious of what we're experiencing will, I think, make us more grateful for what matters most.

To be clear: this is my *personal* recipe for maintaining my health and wellbeing during the pandemic. I'm determined to keep striving for 'flourishing' in the face of the pandemic and hope you will too. Enjoy your well-earned Reading Week.

Warmly,

Janet Morrison
President and Vice Chancellor

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