

COACH WELLBEING

WHY COACH SELF-CARE IS ESSENTIAL FOR BETTER LEADERSHIP

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It's unlikely that the topic of coach self-care comes up in your formal reviews or daily training environment. But maybe it should.



Coaching in the high-performance arena is a demanding role. It requires a great deal of passion and dedication to withstand the pressures of competitive sport. In an industry that celebrates people for their physical and emotional toughness, coaches recognise the importance of self-care for their athletes – but is their own self-care overlooked?

'Toughness' is not something that is inherent in our personality; it's the resilience developed to function well under high workloads and challenging situations. Resilience is a capability within all of us, and it requires intentional development and investment.

The term 'self-care' tends to get a bad rap, conjuring images of candlelit bubble-baths and crystals. While that's nice for some, self-care is much more than that. Self-care is any deliberate action you take in order to support your mental, physical, and emotional health. It can be taking a walk outside to gain fresh perspective, calling a supportive friend after a rough day, or asking the assistant to take training one morning a week to spend time with your family.

Neurologically, there is an unbreakable link between self-care and performance. Engaging in self-care activities helps to turn off the stress hormones in the brain, adrenaline and cortisol, and engage the relaxation response, by releasing dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. These performance-enhancing neurochemicals improve the quality of your thinking, focus, and problem-solving. That all boosts your attitude, benefitting your coaching and the performance of your athletes.

Ironically, the toughest people among us are often those who know when to be gentle with themselves. Self-aware enough to listen to what they need, they invest in practices that nourish their mental health and wellbeing. The result is an ability to stay in the zone, and experience the energy, focus and enthusiasm that comes with being in a 'flow' state.

The Performance and Pressure Curve illustrates the empirical relationship between an individual's performance and their level of pressure. The bell-shaped graph indicates that when we have an optimum level of pressure we perform at our highest level, and conversely we experience boredom with minimal pressure, and stress and burnout at high levels of pressure.

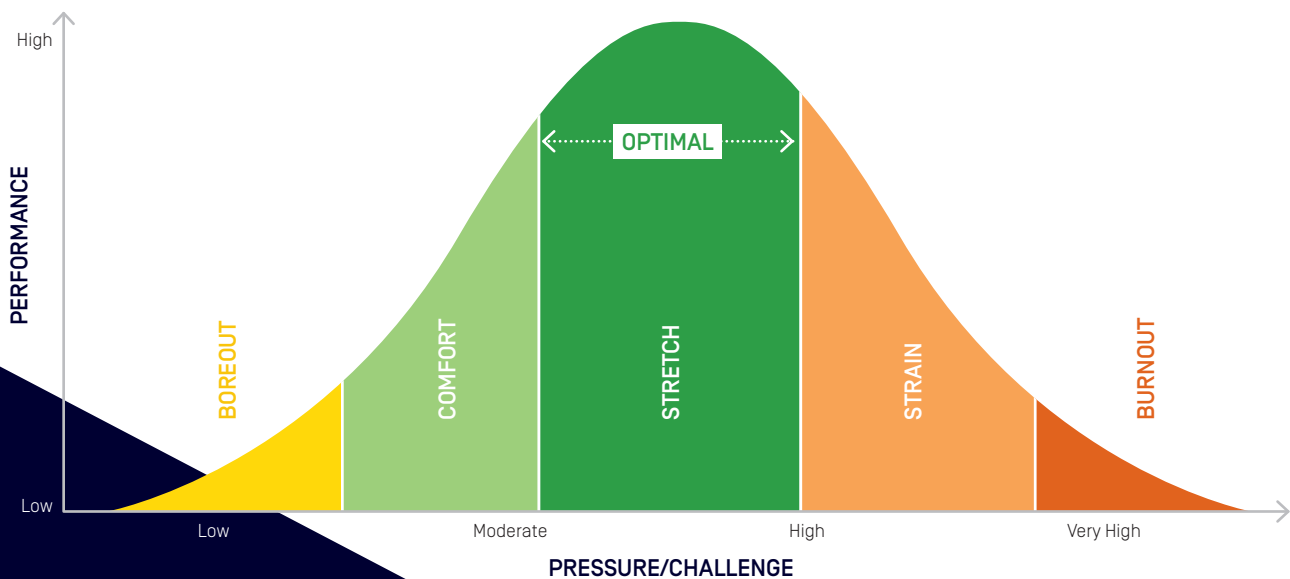
So how do we know what is the optimal amount of pressure? The fact is that it varies between different people. Not only that, but it will also vary for the same person over different days. As I'm sure you've experienced, some days we feel bulletproof, and other days we struggle to cope with the load we easily bore yesterday.

You see, what makes any amount of pressure optimal is our *perceived* ability to meet the challenges and demands we face. It all boils down to how resilient we are *feeling*. Looking after ourselves and practicing wellbeing-enhancing behaviours makes us feel more resilient. Therefore, self-care is literally the difference between pressure that breaks, and pressure that builds performance.

Here are three outdated mindsets to avoid, plus practices to strengthen your resilience as a coach:

- > Stop wearing burnout as a badge of honour. Instead, recognise your personal warning signs of stress and ensure you're getting the rest and recovery you need.
- > Stop pretending you're superhuman. Instead, acknowledge the toll work takes on your mental wellbeing, and seek support to help process the challenges you face.
- > Stop labelling self-care as 'soft'. Instead, make self-care a daily priority, keeping you in the optimal performance zone.

Performance and Pressure Curve



It can be hard to prioritise looking after ourselves when 'real work' feels more productive. Ultimately, we need to acknowledge that self-care is the real work – it makes us a better coach, a better leader, and ultimately, leads to bringing out the high performance in our teams and athletes.