

NEGLECTING OUR WELL-BEING IS NO WAY TO HELP OUR CLIENTS—AND IT DOESN'T HELP US, EITHER. THESE WELLNESS TIPS CAN KEEP US AT THE TOP OF OUR GAME.

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

Our fitness careers demand an almost nonstop service-oriented approach to work. Unfortunately, constantly empowering other people's wellness can leave us feeling empty, which is why I often tell people I mentor, "We can't serve tea from an empty teapot." We have to learn to care for ourselves without harming our fitness careers. Including some nontraditional, yet effective, self-care options in our regime can help us keep our teapots full while also broadening our career paths. Let's look at a few ways to make that happen.

Get Social

Several online support groups let fitness instructors mingle virtually, ask questions and share proven answers to common issues, such as feeling too sore to teach or having to work at facilities that lack microphones. One example is the Facebook group Ageless Movers International, run by Bernadette C. O'Brien, MEd, one of the most chronologically certified group fitness professionals and personal trainers in the industry. Her

social media group encourages instructors and trainers of both wet and dry modalities to interact, weigh in on concerns regarding aging, get references to self-care resources and apply research-based approaches to working with people over 60. Also, many fitness pros offer YouTube videos packed with tips on breathing, self-massage and meditation strategies.

Regularly scheduling limited amounts of time for social media groups and video

playlists can enable us to stay on top of our careers by helping us to take care of ourselves. Self-care includes steps like protecting our voices before we develop symptoms of overuse.

Janie Watkins, RYT, is a self-care public speaker, continuing education provider and yoga chiropractic therapist based in Alabama. She uses the acronym GPS to illustrate the benefits of self-care for fitness pros: "Self-care boosts our generosity, productivity and self-esteem," she says. "When we learn to dedicate some weekly time to our self-care, we take care of our four-part body inside: sensorial, spiritual, social and emotional."

Tight Muscles

Many people recognize that consistently applying self-myofascial release to hydrated muscles is an important part of overall

Well Enough to Serve



wellness. But we rarely invest time, energy, effort and money in regular massages to keep our muscles in optimum health.

“At the very least, learning how to roll out our feet and back muscles on a Friday night after a long week of teaching—and again on a Sunday night before a week of teaching—can help us stay energized and help our muscles’ health and wellness so they can keep taking care of us,” says Zoraida Sepúlveda, a wellness and health coach based in Puerto Rico. “We are at an age of such evolved instructor roles today that self-care is not a luxury. It’s a necessity.”

Start a Mini-Convention

Attending a fitness convention can work wonders for keeping us motivated. But we can’t always commit the resources it takes to attend a convention. Nor can we necessarily afford to lose several days of revenue.

Try this inspiring alternative: Stage a mini-conference by taking a new group-movement class from a different person each month. At worst, taking someone else’s class can reassure us that we provide a superior product. More often, however, another instructor’s class gives us the proverbial “shot in our arm” because we glean new ideas for cues, musical approaches, types of interaction, group dynamics and more.

“I have a practice of taking at least one new class per month, and I get at least three new things to do, say and think from each new instructor,” says Claire Powell, who leads laughter yoga for land and water and is based in San Jose, California. “It’s like a convention, but I’m only taking a single class, so my return on investment for just 1 hour is huge.”

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—Janie Watkins

Take a Teaching Vacation

A working holiday is an excellent way to recharge our fitness batteries. After all, it can be impractical to call a “timeout” when we feel burned out, because we don’t want to lose work and revenue. But traveling to a vacation destination to teach can give

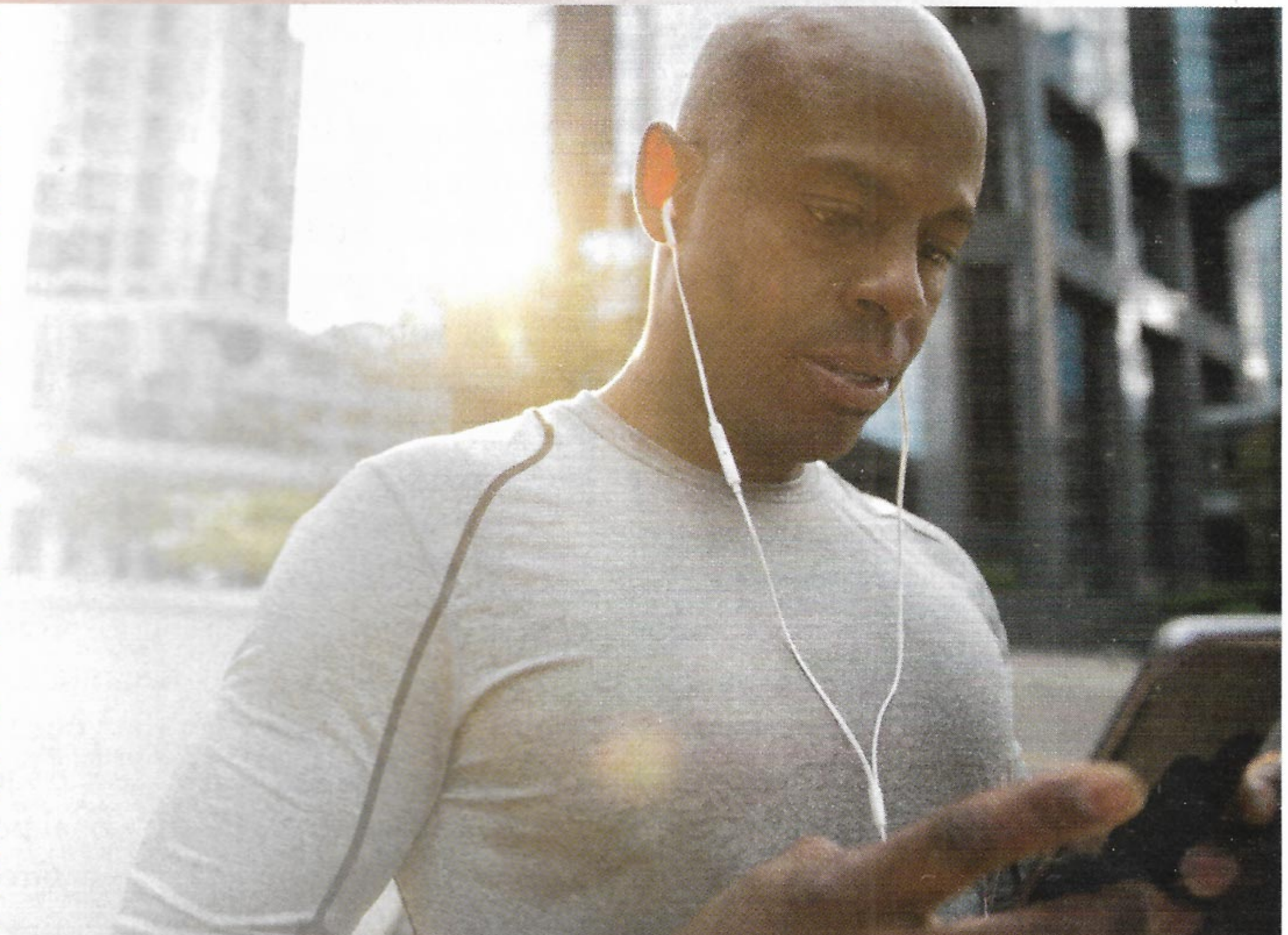
us the experience of a holiday during off-hours, while the sessions we lead showcase our expertise in places like beachfronts, waterfront gazebos and unique pool settings.

Suzelle Snowden, president of Fit Bodies Inc., places fitness professionals at luxury all-inclusive beachfront resorts in exotic destinations. Such a change of pace gives fitness coaches a chance to be “dazzled by the stunning resort settings, luxury all-inclusive accommodations

7 Flavors of Self-Care

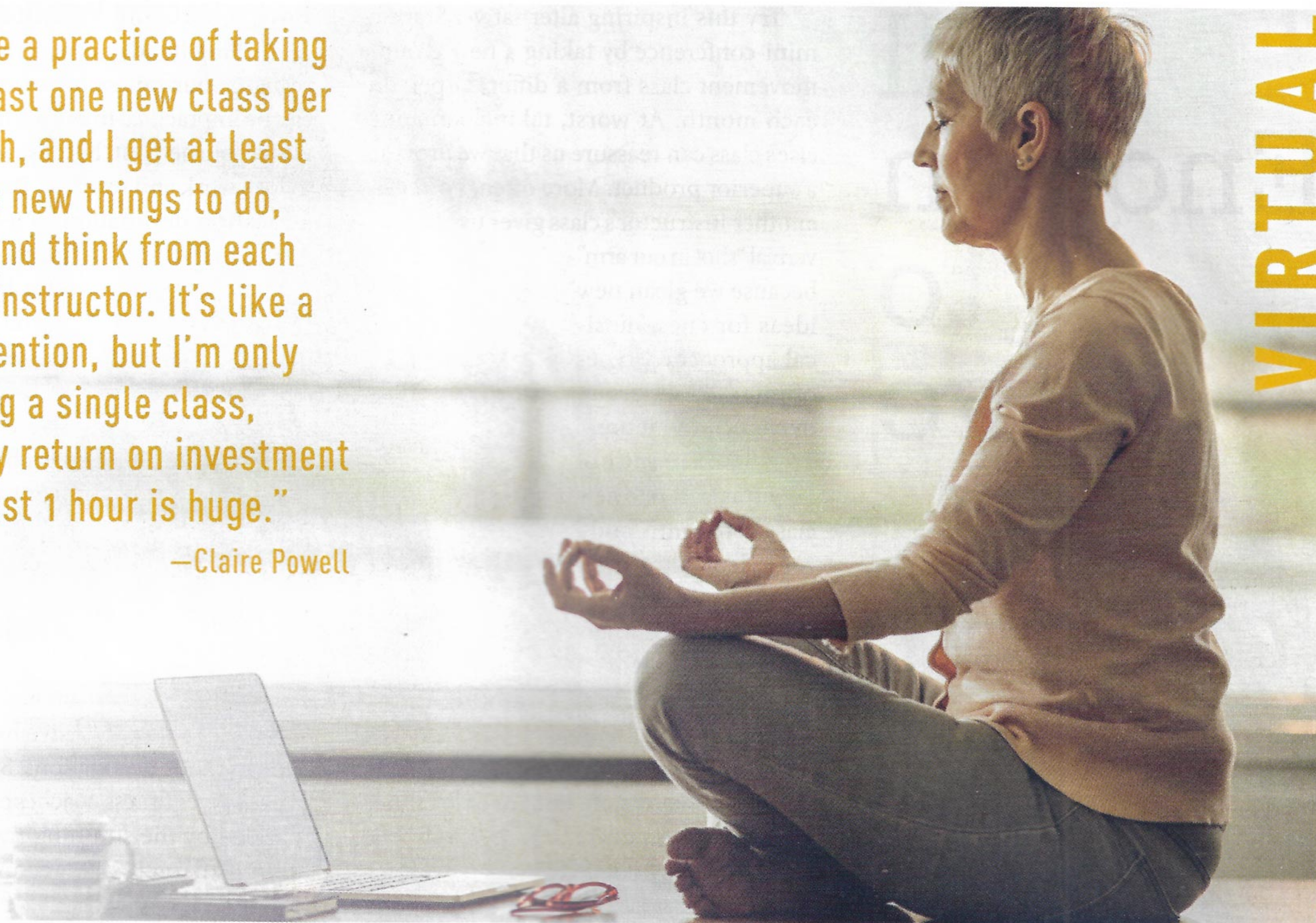
1. **Social:** Join a Facebook group for fitness pros.
2. **Virtual:** Watch YouTube videos focusing on meditation and mindfulness.
3. **Physical:** Use self-myofascial release to massage deep muscle tissue.
4. **Educational:** Attend a different instructor’s class every month.
5. **Recreational:** Go on a working vacation to a high-end spa.
6. **Relaxational:** Create a soothing herbal tea blend.
7. **Inspirational:** Listen to a thoughtful podcast or TED Talk.

INSPIRATIONAL



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and limitless gourmet fare,” she says. Her hiring contracts often allow for one adult companion and up to two children at family resorts. The fitness community’s response has been so positive that Snowden has two websites (fitbodiesinc.com and fitnessprotravel.com) where instructors can register and secure placements in the Caribbean, Mexico, Central America and the United States.

Brew Tea for a Quiet Break

Taking a complete break from all things fitness can give us a physical and emotional reprieve from work. Consider sipping a special blend of loose tea you make only for its rejuvenating properties (I created a caffeine-free blend of oregano, mint, rose petals and fresh ginger pieces just for such occasions). Boiling water, preparing the blend and steeping it become a ritual that helps us slow down and focus on something other than fitness.

Suzanne Hosley, MA, CEO of FIT® Thailand and organizer of the Asia Fitness Conference in Bangkok, stocks her work and home kitchens with ample tea selections. “Stopping for a few moments to brew a fragrant herbal tea is a great break from

the everyday stresses of work,” she says. “I try to do nontraditional work things when I prepare and drink tea, like chatting with friends or playing with our growing collection of stray rescue cats. After work I walk 5 kilometers home every day. It is a great opportunity to disconnect—leaving the stresses behind me—and to reconnect to life. I deliberately stop any thoughts that are related to work stress, and I focus on family, friends . . . and stray cats!”

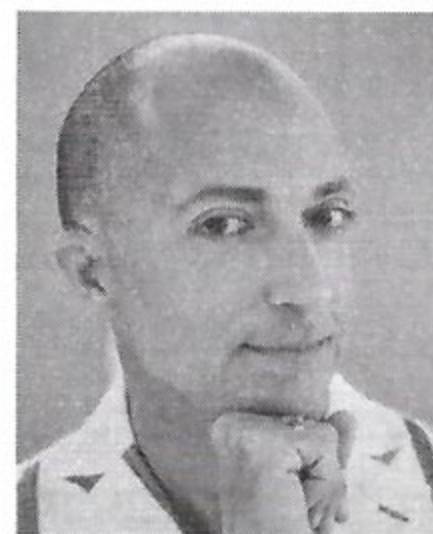
If you stay indoors for your tea break, consider adding relaxing background music to create an instant respite from the world. Add a candle with a scent that encourages you to breathe deeply. If you relax your eyes and gaze at the flame, your parasympathetic response is likely to kick into gear, which may help your body rid itself of accumulated cortisol, a stress hormone.

If you absolutely must do something else while sipping your tea, consider listening to a podcast or TED Talk that motivates you on a grand scale, rather than one that, for example, prescribes new ways to squat and lunge. My favorite inspirational podcasts include Petra Kolber and Ben Greenfield Fitness. When we’re not listening to oth-

ers, taking a few moments to journal our thoughts can help us feel better (Breines & Chen 2012).

Caring Applies to Us, Too

Fitness is such an intensely demanding career that we must take time to figure out the many dimensions of self-care. Whether we’re getting a massage, attending a new class, taking a working vacation or relaxing with herbal tea, practicing self-care can help us stay connected to our craft and shake off the effects of its many stresses.



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He has worked with celebrity clients for decades and regularly mentors fitness professionals in many capacities. His website is findLawrence.com.

REFERENCE

Breines, J.G., & Chen, S. 2012. Self-compassion increases self-improvement motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38 (9), 1133–43.