

Activism Resources for Federal Workers

This document was originally created by a grassroots group, [Takoma Park Mobilization](#), for U.S. government employees who want to better know their rights inside and outside the workplace and to think about strategies for balancing their obligations as federal employees and their professional or personal values in 2017. It has been updated for 2020. Feel free to circulate widely. If you would like to organize an event, here is a [facilitators' guide](#) that can help guide you.

The document is organized into several sections and you can click through to the parts you are most interested in when viewing this document online. For agency-specific advice, please consult your own agency's [Inspector General](#) or ethics office and for legal advice, please consult a lawyer.

This document will be updated, so if you find information that is incorrect or want to suggest something to add, please contact: fedsfordemocracy@gmail.com. The electronic version of this document can be found at <http://tiny.cc/FederalEmployeeActivism>

Educate -- Organize -- Take Action



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As Federal civil servants, we take an oath of office by which we swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. The Constitution not only establishes our system of government, it actually defines the work role for Federal employees - "to establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty." - [Oath For Federal Employees](#)

What You Should Know Now

What's Happening 2020

“I’ve been complaining very strongly about the ballots, the ballots are a disaster... Get rid of the ballots and you’ll have a very peaceful — there won’t be a transfer, frankly. There will be a continuation.” – Donald Trump, September 23, 2020

“I am urging my people - I hope it’s going to be a fair election. If it’s a fair election... I am 100% on board, but if I see tens of thousands of ballots being manipulated, I can’t go along with that... And I’ll tell you what it means. It means you have a fraudulent election.” - Donald Trump, September 30, 2020

Unless Joe Biden wins the 2020 presidential election in a landslide through both mail-in and in-person voting, there a number of ways Donald Trump may refuse a peaceful transfer of power by contesting results he does not like and obfuscating true results by declaring ballots fraudulent and invalid. There are many potential - future scenarios that could lead to a situation where there is a disputed winner or where the majority of the population is supporting Biden as the declared accepted winner but incumbent Trump, and his supporters, have refused to concede.. This situation can be recognized as an [autogolpe](#) -- a ‘self inflicted coup.’ Coups can and have been stopped throughout history when those in opposition rise up and wield people power-- the power of ordinary people mobilized together to withdraw their consent, without resort to violence.

Additionally, many federal employees have been or are facing situations in their daily work where political appointees are intentionally impeding the work of the Agencies that have been tasked to lead, and where Executive Orders are problematic at best.

One of the main reasons that so many injustices persist is not that the powerful can simply do whatever they want with impunity, but that most people are ignorant of their power. If we understand that we, the people, are governed only by giving our consent to those that govern, we recognize that we can withdraw that consent (see [General strike](#)) and collectively wield power. Using the [Pillars of Power analysis](#), we can imagine our government as the roof of a building, held up by pillars such as the education system, the courts, the military, federal employees, media, and so on. Each institutional pillar that has the power to uphold or neglect counting votes is made up of real people. We can reach these people and get them to walk away from their role, weakening and possibly crumbling this pillar, thus delegitimizing an illegitimate authority. That’s why our role as federal employees is especially critical as a key pillar of support for the government.

As a federal employee or worker that upholds the United States’ democratic institutions, you have incredible power to establish, uphold, and promote democratic norms in the face of a coup, and to carry out the mission of our agencies. Doing this, though, requires being prepared and knowledgeable about our rights and effective tactics.

Links to more detailed resources on this topic:

The 2020 Context:

- [Preventing a Disrupted Election and Transition](#) - Transition Integrity Protect
- [What's the Plan if Trump Tweets That He's Won Re-election?](#) - New York Times
- [The Rules for a Peaceful Transition of Power Between Presidents](#) - NPR
- [What if Trump Refuses to Concede?](#) - The Atlantic
- [Election Meltdown: Dirty Tricks, Distrust, and the Threat to American Democracy](#) - Richard L. Hasen
- [Trump's Refusal to Commit to a Peaceful Transition Is a Wake Up Call for Civil Servants](#) - Government Executive

Defending Against A Coup:

- [The Count: A practical guide to defending the Constitution in a contested 2020 election](#) - Zack Malitz, Brandon Evans, & Becky Bond
- [Stopping the Coup: The 2020 Guide](#)
- [Protect the Results Guide](#) - Field Team 6
- [How We Should Defend Against the Impending Trump Coup](#) - Common Dreams
- [Here is a proven formula for protecting the vote while keeping the peace](#) Waging Nonviolence
- [Unf*ck the vote! 3 ways creative action can win the election](#) WagingNonviolence
- [What's the game plan if Trump really does try to steal the election? 7 tactics to stop a coup](#) WagingNonviolence

American Exceptionalism will not save us

You may believe that a coup is not possible in the USA. However, the key to being able to stop a coup or or autogolpe is to be ready in case it happens-- and there is every reason to believe POTUS Trump when he says he will not honor the results of the election if he doesn't win. [The Wilmington Insurrection of 1898](#) represents a coup in U.S. history, driven by white supremacists violently overthrowing a state government. Analyses of the election suggest there were elements of voter fraud, voter intimidation and suppression, and armed mobs of white supremacists that stormed the capitol to drive the elected government out of the city. The coup resulted in the overthrowing of North Carolina's statewide elected officials and installing new leadership, including organizer Charles Aycock as governor of North Carolina, whose statue still stands [in the](#) U.S. Capitol grounds.

There are many examples of coups being stopped globally over the years, including in Germany, Argentina, Burkina Faso, and elsewhere. From historical examples, stopping a coup generally happens within a short 3 - 5 day window. It involves coordinated mass response with involvement of many sectors of society able to stop business as usual. Therefore, preparation is key.

Regardless of whether or not a coup is attempted, or we are facing another term of assaults on rule of law, environmental protections, human rights and more, as federal employees it

behooves us to know , what our options are and the spectrum of action we can take to protect ourselves and democracy.

Your Rights

Freedom of Speech. Federal employees have the same constitutional rights as other U.S. citizens. Federal employee rights *are* limited by the Hatch Act, but this pertains only to partisan political speech. Other kinds of political speech (such as signing petitions and attending rallies) are protected as long they are on your own time, for example on your lunch break on your own phone or on your home computer outside of work hours. [The Office of Special Counsel](#) has a [pamphlet](#) explaining these rights, but keep in mind that foreign service employees, among others, are subject to [additional restrictions](#). If you are concerned about retaliation against you for a speech act, [learn what recourse is available to you](#). The [Merit Systems Protection Board](#) has more information on your rights as a federal government employee. Rules of thumb:

- Protecting democracy is not partisan political speech.
- If you aren't sure if the Hatch Act applies to certain speech, ask a trusted colleague.
- If you are a fellow, lab staff, or contractor and aren't sure if the Hatch Act applies to you, reach out to the General Counsel of the agency you support. In many cases, the Act may not apply, but it depends.
- You still have freedom of speech and freedom of assembly as a federal employee.

Solidarity. Networking outside of the workplace with co-workers and friends from other divisions or agencies is one of the best tactics for sharing information and strategizing about collective responses to troubling situations at work. Start a weekly lunch or happy hour away from work where you can game out your options given various scenarios - and start a support network before you need it. You can also build solidarity with your agency's partners and constituents, helping them to help you advocate for good policy.

"Federal workers can seek out like-minded colleagues in other agencies (particularly important when internal efforts have been unsuccessful) to coordinate responses. They can bring a legal matter to the national security interagency lawyers' group to receive joint opinions on the legality or illegality of a particular action or policy. Particularly when two or more agencies are in dispute, high-level officials have the option of requesting an opinion from the Office of Legal Counsel at the Department of Justice. Even without a formal complaint, self-organizing with colleagues from within the same bureau and across government agencies can help build trust and confidence as federal workers navigate difficult terrain together."

- "[Staying true to yourself in the age of Trump: A how-to guide for federal employees](#)"

By Maria Stephan, *The Washington Post*, Feb. 10, 2017

Information security. Keep in mind that any communications over government equipment, including email, are not private. Forwarding email from your government account to your private account makes your home computer subject to scrutiny, as well. Try to keep a bright line between your work devices and your personal devices. On the other hand, FOIA and Inspectors

General can be your friend when the legal or ethical climate is getting murky, so creating a paper trail (electronic AND printed) using government email can be helpful when orders on shaky ethical ground or are coming to you verbally. If you and your coworkers want to discuss questionable orders, political harassment, or other potentially sensitive issues that you do *not* want to be discoverable in a legal process, it is best to start a group chat on your personal device using an encrypted service such as Signal which allows messages to disappear from your device after a set number of hours or days.

Whistleblowing. [The Project on Government Oversight \(POGO\)](#) should be your first stop to get informed about whistleblower protections for federal government employees. Founded in 1981, POGO is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. See their [Survivor's Guide to Being a Successful Whistleblower in the Federal Government](#). Also, check out the [Government Accountability Project](#) and their [Democracy Protection Initiative](#) focused on protecting the integrity of the 2020 election.

Leaking information. Leaking to the press seems to be a feature of the early Trump administration, but keep in mind that leaking can shut down communication within your office, making it harder to document future actions. Leaking can also result in negative consequences for entire groups of people who have access to the information, so someone who is considering leaking information should be very strategic and make sure that the issue is high-stakes enough to take these risks.

"In the riskier category of dissent options, federal workers can leak information about pending or actual policies with journalists, activists and influential people on the outside. A senior official at the Bureau of Land Management in the Clinton administration described the leaking of internal documents to interest groups as a particularly effective strategy.

Leaking should be used judiciously, and only on truly significant matters. Most disclosures outside of formal, internal whistleblowing frameworks are, at minimum, a violation of contractual duty and may put leakers at significant legal risk. If the information is classified, then the employee can be fired or criminally prosecuted.

Leaks are among the riskiest of strategies. Once they happen, they can shut down the internal sharing of government documents. Colleagues will face heavy scrutiny, and individuals (besides the leaker) can be penalized. This happened recently when an unknown official leaked the transcript of Trump's telephone call with the Australian prime minister, resulting in a near-total ban on sharing presidential call transcripts."

-["An inside-outside strategy for defending the US Republic."](#)

Sharing knowledge with and supporting others. Share this document! If you would like to organize a workshop for federal government employees to learn more about their rights and strategies to build solidarity in the workplace, please feel free to use and adapt this [facilitators' guide](#) developed by Takoma Park Mobilization.

Information on the Rights and Obligations of Federal Employees

“The new administration is entitled to use the official channels of government – whether they be press briefings or websites or social media accounts – to put out its own messages, and it can decide what federal employees are allowed to communicate when they are on the job. But the First Amendment still protects those employees’ ability to speak in their private capacities, on their own time, about matters that concern the public.”

- [Government Employees Get to Have Opinions, Too](#)

U.S. Government Internal Resources

- [US Merit Systems Protection Board](#)
- The Office of Special Counsel is a federal watchdog that has published a [pamphlet](#) describing the rights of federal employees.
- [Most agencies have their own Inspector General Office](#)

“Although the president can fire Cabinet officials, such as the attorney general, for almost any reason, most government employees aren’t so easy to get rid of. Civil servants—that is, the rank-and-file members who make up the vast majority of the federal government—also take an oath to uphold the Constitution, some version of which has been used since the first Congress. Moreover, federal law (5 U.S.C. §2302(b)(9)(D), if you’re curious) makes it illegal to remove a civil servant “for refusing to obey an order that would require the individual to violate a law.””

- [“The Nervous Civil Servant’s Guide to Defying an Illegal Order.”](#)

Non-government Legal Resources

- [“Retaliation -- Public Employees and First Amendment Rights”](#)
- The progressive lawyers at Just Security have produced [this guide](#) to dissenting from within – as well as an invitation to offer suggestions from [Program on Government Oversight \(POGO\)](#) has a list of law firms. [The Art of Anonymous Activism](#) is a guide published by three national nonprofits (The Government Accountability Project, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, and the Project On Government Oversight) as a how-to manual for public employees considering blowing the whistle on waste, fraud, or abuse.

Union Resources

- The American Federation of Government Employees ([AFGE](#)) is the largest federal employee union representing 700,000 federal and D.C. government workers nationwide and overseas.
- The National Federation of Federal Employees ([NFFE](#)) is a national union representing approximately 110,000 blue and white collar government workers across the United States.
- [Council 26](#) of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) is a coalition of 18 local unions at the following federal agencies: the Library of Congress, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Peace Corps, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, the Voice of America and the Architect of the Capitol. It is affiliated with the 1.4 million-member, [AFSCME International Union](#) and the [AFL-CIO](#).
- The National Treasury Employees Union ([NTEU](#)) is a national union representing over 150,000 federal employees in 33 departments and agencies. NTEU members are present within parts of the following Departments and Agencies: Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Energy, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, Department of the Interior, Department of Treasury, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Communications Commission, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Federal Election Commission, National Credit Union Administration, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and Securities and Exchange Commission.

Other Resources

- [Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility](#) (PEER) is an organization that works nation-wide with government scientists, land managers, environmental law enforcement agents, field specialists and other resource professionals committed to responsible management of America's public resources. PEER supports those who are courageous and idealistic enough to seek a higher standard of environmental ethics and scientific integrity within their agency.
- [Norms Watch by Just Security](#): a weekly email from *Just Security* tracking how and when the Trump administration's policies and actions break from custom, practice, and precedent in politics and law. We'll also be on the lookout for when norms are violated as a response to Trump.
- [Summary of weekly news articles](#) related to fed workers
- A Discussion guide on [What is the role of the federal civil service in a vibrant democracy?](#) to help fed workers identify their values and ethics, using recent news articles as fodder for the discussion questions

Digital Security: Protecting Your Data and Communications

Content provided by Blue Pine Strategies, LLC | Contact: info@bluepinestrategies.com

These recommendations and resources are forward looking and anticipatory of challenges federal employees may face.

- Privacy and secrecy are not the same -- these tools and tips are to give you the choice for privacy related to your activism. You may not be made vulnerable by your activism, but others in your networks may be. Privacy is a powerful tool that benefits you and everyone standing with you.
- Strongly consider keeping your communications related to your activism on personal accounts you do not access at work. This applies to cell phones that you use for communication and may connect to workplace wifi.
- Encryption is a tool that can enhance the privacy of your email, data storage, text based messaging, and phone calls related to your activism. Consider using encryption wherever possible.
- There are no absolutes in digital or cyber security, we can only make it harder for someone to access our data and communications.

More guidance and suggestions for tools to use based on your personal threat/risk assessment here:

- [EFF's Surveillance Self-Defense Guide](#)
- [Digital First-Aid](#)
- [Other Resources](#)

5 Steps to a Safer Digital Life

Step 1

Change your passwords. Start with your email, social media, and any other accounts you are using to organize. Choose 16 character passwords using upper/lower case letters, numbers, symbols. Use a different password for each account. Write them down, keep them safe, and/or use a password manager. Do not store on your computer or phone. As a first step do this for Facebook and email this weekend--come back to the others when you can.

Make sure you have a passcode or password on your phone and computer.

Step 2

Turn on 2-factor authentication for your [Gmail](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts.

Step 3

Call your phone provider, ask them to add an additional security code to your account. **This ensures your 2-factor authentication can't be hacked.**

Step 4

Lock-down privacy settings on your digital life. [Enable the privacy settings](#) on Facebook and/or remove any content that could be used to target you or find you (birthday, address, phone number, workplace, etc.). Think about family members you may want to ask to do the same.

Pictures of kids? Think about making them visible only to you or taking them down.

Step 5

Google yourself---make a list of every website with pieces of information you want to take down. See the guide to personal information removal attached.

Actions and Strategies

- Uphold the most exacting standards of personal and professional integrity.
- Showcase the loyal bipartisan service of your colleagues and call out attempts to impose partisan litmus tests.
- Extensively document decisions and their ramifications that are the result of word-of-mouth directives.
- Don't leak, but do blow the whistle.
- Push back against loyalty tests, fostering frank internal debate and transparency with outside stakeholders whenever possible.
- Draw bright red lines of principle and policy that can guide decision-making in future times of chaos and crisis.
 - Adapted from "[How to work for a president who loathes the civil service](#)" By Nancy McEldowney, *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2018.

Federal employees have choices about how to do their work, and making that choice strategically is always better than making it impulsively! But everyone has a different relationship to their managers, different energy levels, and different tolerance for risk, so make the strategic choices that are right *for you*.

Types of Tactics and Implications

Action	General Description	Potential Retaliation & For Your Consideration
Nonviolent Direct Action Protests / Rallies	Can participate outside of work hours freely in person or during work hours if taking annual leave.	Be sure participation, online or in person, is not occurring within work hours unless you are on leave. Do not wear any federal insignias or identification when participating.
Discuss Ethical Ramifications of Laws/Policies with Colleagues	Discuss impacts, potentials, and unintended consequences with colleagues in strategy meetings or happy hours. Evaluate current events and impacts on work activities in terms of serving the Constitution.	Be sure to not force views on other colleagues, particularly if you are a supervisor. Foster spaces of communication and inquiry.
Demand Direction in Writing to Implement	Oftentimes, administrative officials will not want to admit their direction in a manner that could be forwarded, taken out of context, or leaked. Even just asking for direction in writing can weaken the intensity of the action being asked.	Supervisors/colleagues may perceive you as difficult.
Go Public With Critiques	Share information on social media about issues, incompetence, or unethical behavior.	If non-confidential information is shared after hours on social media, speech is generally protected. Safest to use anonymous or “alt” federal profiles to protect professional status.
Slowdown / Intentional Incompetence	Reduce the pace of carrying out unethical activities (e.g., do fewer things).	Consider limitations of efforts that could cause work to be rerouted for efficiency.
Additional Workload	Continue activities after hours or beyond written work scope to support the mission (e.g., do what they tell you to do, and also other things). Could be particularly important if capacity on your work has been reduced.	Consider work/life balance limitations and self care needs. Argue for the need to increase capacity.
Refuse and/or whistle blow illegal orders	Pursue legal counsel to argue against carrying out activities in opposition to Congressional authorization or direction.	Could freeze other work efforts and result in FOIA requests. Ensure all information, including spoken requests of you, are fully documented.
Fed Flu	Coordinate sick days across workforces.	Could be found to be misusing allotted sick days.

Strategic Tactics Depending On Your Role

Many Tools in the Toolbox			
Type of Role	General Description	Actions for Everyone	Actions for Some if Strategic
Policy Enforcement	Roles in environmental management, regulatory commissions, customs, and border patrol. Little wiggle room to interpret rules or orders, but can apply enforcement based on personal expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine your own lines in the sand • Explain what it means for democracy to be under attack to family, friends, colleagues • Use strong cyber-hygiene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuse orders • Strike in coalition • Slow-walk enforcement, gum up bureaucratic processes • Question legal authority for action • Stage a sick out
Research, Development & Program Management	Roles in researching, developing, validating, managing, and evaluating government tools, resources, programs. Functions more open to interpretation within mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share opinions on social media outside of work hours • Talk to your colleagues about what is happening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebrand work but continue thrust of efforts • Publicly refuse orders • Strike in coalition • Continue work in volunteer capacity
Administrative Management & Logistics	Roles in budget management, human resources, and general operations. Have clear directives but often complex bureaucratic policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to your union leaders about actions, statements (if applicable) • Attend rallies / protests after work, on weekends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly refuse orders • Strike in coalition • Strategically slow-walk certain activities • Stage a sick out
Armed Service	Roles in Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy, & Space Force. Over 1M in armed service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take leave to attend protests during work • Demand all administrative direction in writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuse orders • Strike in coalition • Strategically resign • Question legal authority for action
Political Appointee	Oversee implementation of administrative priorities. Also subject to Hatch Act and other laws from Congress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategize with non-federal organizers, unions, religious groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly denounce attacks on democracy • Leak information • Publicly resign

Action Planning Support

- [Pre-During-Post Action Checklist](#)
- [Assertive Intervention/De-escalation Tips Handout](#)
- [Action Street Smarts & Personal Prep](#)
- Large collection of [Movement Resources](#)

July 2017: AGENCY SPECIFIC, but with cross-over application: [Save EPA](#) and their [Practical Guide For Resisting The Trump De-Regulatory Agenda](#). Written by former EPA staff, this is an EPA-specific version of the [Indivisible Guide](#).

"Civil servants can sue the agency when more subtle approaches fail. This can generate outside support and pressure, particularly when the individual(s) have strong connections to advocacy groups and grassroots organizations on the outside. Border agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, who objected to President Obama's directives regarding undocumented immigrants, saying they required them to violate federal law, took this route."

-["Staying true to yourself in the age of Trump: A how-to guide for federal employees"](#)

By Maria Stephan, *The Washington Post*, Feb. 10, 2017

Nonviolent Action: History, Strategy and Resources

- ["Violence will only hurt the Trump resistance"](#) By Erica Chenoweth, *The New Republic*, February 7, 2017
- [WRL Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns](#): a resource on nonviolent campaigning for grassroots groups in lots of different contexts.
- [BeautifulTrouble.org](#) is a book, web toolbox and international network of artist-activist trainers whose mission is to make grassroots movements more creative and more effective.
- [A Force More Powerful](#), PBS video and book that explores one of the 20th century's most important but least understood stories: how nonviolent power has overcome oppression and authoritarian rule all over the world. Nashville Segment [HERE](#)
- [International Center On Nonviolent Conflict](#) focuses on how ordinary people wage nonviolent conflict to win rights, freedom and justice
- [WagingNonviolence.org](#) is a source for original news and analysis about struggles for justice and peace around the globe.
- ["How to build a resilient culture of resistance in hard times"](#) by Daniel Hunter, February 10, 2017

Further Reading

“The 2.7 million nonpartisan civil servants who run the US government from day to day have tremendous power and constitute a key pillar of support for any administration. Civil servants have unparalleled familiarity with the bureaucratic process. They know how to speed things up, and they know how to slow them down. They have access to critical information about policies being considered and implemented. They can participate in internal decision-making. They can provide (or deny) knowledge and expertise to those at the top of the bureaucratic totem pole.”

- “[An inside-outside strategy for defending the US Republic](#),” Maria Stephan, 27 January 2017

- [How to Be A Hero When the Coup Comes](#)
- [“Dear Bureaucrat. My Job Wants Me to Lie”](#)
- [“How to work for a president who loathes the civil service”](#)
- [To Dissent or Not to Dissent? Principles of Ethical Resistance for US Federal Servants](#)
- [Government Employees Get to Have Opinions, Too](#)
- [“The Nervous Civil Servant’s Guide to Defying an Illegal Order.”](#)
- [Bobbleheads, yes. Official tweets, no. Federal workers wonder where the lines are in the Trump era](#)
- [10 ways movements can encourage and support whistleblowers](#)
- [Save EPA](#) and their [Practical Guide For Resisting The Trump De-Regulatory Agenda](#), written by former EPA staff, this is an EPA-specific version of the [Indivisible Guide](#).
- [If You’re a Conscientious Civil Servant, Trump’s Newest Executive Order Could Be a Disaster for You](#)

Media on Federal Employee Resistance 2017-2020

- [Post Carrier Union Endorses Biden for Its Survival](#)
- [Washington State Postal Service Reinstates Sorting Machines](#)
- [The State Department’s Entire Senior Management Team Just Resigned](#)
- [Trump Fires Acting Attorney General over Immigration Memo](#)
- [The Sudden Widespread Resistance of Alt NPS Twitter](#)
- [Washington Bureaucrats Are Chipping Away at Trump’s Agenda](#)
- [Federal Twitter Accounts Multiply](#)
- [The Resistance Begins](#)

5 Steps to Better Self-Care for Activists

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When you take care of yourself, you make better, sounder decisions. Put your own oxygen mask on first.

Your digital self, your work self, and your personal self are not mutually exclusive. They are closely intertwined, especially when it comes to work that is so near to your core values. Our personal needs, our mental health, and how we navigate the world during high-stress situations is often a back-burner topic. During these next few months, as you navigate through the stress of this work, I encourage each of you to place self-care on your task list DAILY. The following 5 steps will assist you in making your mental health a priority.

Step 1

Take 5 minutes to write down your WHY. Why are you doing this work? What makes it so important for you and for our nation? What is your motivation? Why does this matter? Keep that paper in an easily accessible place. When you are in a high-stress moment (i.e. receiving negative feedback, setbacks that seem insurmountable, etc...) re-read your why. Those 3 minutes of negativity do not defeat your higher purpose. Your work matters. It is important.

Step 2

Take one actionable step each day to take care of your mental health needs. Examples include but are not limited to: decompressing by venting to a friend, enjoying a glass of wine and a holiday movie, taking a bath with lavender and candles, watching pointless but hilarious YouTube videos, treating yourself to a favorite food, etc.

Step 3

Determine your 'absolutely nots' and your 'triggers'? What words/threats/messages/actions cause you to be less productive or not productive at all as it pertains to this project and this work? Determining your line in the sand is an ongoing process and may become more apparent as you continue with your work.

Communicate these with those that you are working with. Allow yourself to take a step back when your line is crossed and give that task to someone else. No guilt here. They have their lines drawn and will need you too. *For example:* A troll is continuously threatening your well-being through sexual violence. As a sexual assault warrior you are triggered by these threats. Communicate that to other staff and allow them to handle the trolling situation.

Step 4

Determine what tasks are URGENT versus what tasks are IMPORTANT.

URGENT: Your life or someone's else's life is in IMMEDIATE danger. There is an immediate deadline (i.e. due in two hours).

IMPORTANT: This is for you to determine. I find it helpful when work loads begin to pile up, as they will these next few months, to look at each email, each item on my to-do list and rank them in terms of importance. What can wait and what absolutely cannot.

During times of high-stress everything feels urgent. IT ISN'T. Don't let your brain lie to you. *If everything is feeling urgent, I recommend the following:*

Take a few deep breaths. Place your hand on your stomach and feel your stomach as it rises and falls. Look around the room and start to call out items in your space (my feet are on the carpeted floor, I see a clock in front of me, there is a table and a laptop), start noticing the sounds, the smells, and what your hands are touching. This process allows you to become grounded in your space and begin to gain a true sense of reality and present time. Now, take another look at that email, those tasks that are yet to be done, and make an honest assessment of what can wait. Just because you wait until tomorrow to complete the task doesn't mean it's not important, it is, but it's not urgent.

Step 5

Give yourself grace and allow others to do the same.

It's okay to take a break. It's okay to sleep. It's okay to eat. It's okay to go to the bathroom. It's okay to refill your water bottle. It's okay to take a step out into the world and away from your laptop. In fact, it's recommended. Our brains do not function in a timely, accurate, or appropriate manner when we are under stress. Doing this work right is important, so allow yourself the ability to delight in self-care, your body, your co-workers, and your cause will thank you for it.