



Prioritizing your own learning when you lead others is a tough task

“Calgon, take me away!” I remember watching commercials for Calgon bath products and thinking, sigh, yes, when I’m an adult, I’ll need a soothing bubble bath to escape the stresses of daily life.

While I don’t downplay the power of a hot soak, talk of “me time” these days seems as outdated and simplistic as the images in those commercials. Of course we must strive for balance in attending to family, friends, community, career, and self. But do we have to make our own needs so public?

When it comes to prioritizing our own learning needs as leaders, it turns out that yes, we do need to make “me time” public. Education leaders, whether they are instructional coaches, superintendents, technical assistance providers, principals, or math department chairs, need as much opportunity for standards-based learning as the people they support.

When they are vocal and visible about the kinds of learning critical to their own success in supporting educators and students, leaders model the importance of continuous improvement for all. They also emphasize their part in assuming collective responsibility for the results of all learners, just as they would ask

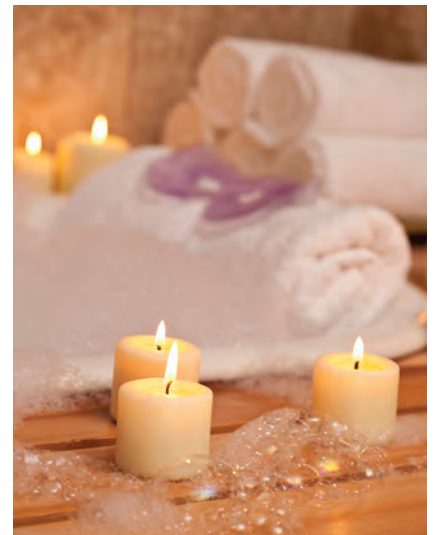
•
Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) is director of communications for Learning Forward.

teachers in their schools and systems to do. Advocating for effective professional learning helps everyone in the system.

When principals can talk about what they gain from the cross-school learning communities in which they participate, they show the teachers in their buildings how much they value effective collaboration. When mentors demonstrate their willingness to videotape their own classroom lessons and reflect in discussion about the results, novice teachers understand that even accomplished educators struggle and find new ways to meet student needs. And when leaders learn side-by-side with those in other roles, they emphasize their shared vision and goals.

For emerging leaders, this idea is particularly important. Shifting into new positions doesn’t mean that leaders grow out of the need for learning just because they are expected to have higher levels of expertise. Rather, they need to be supported to grow into their new roles and to understand what shifting expectations will require of them. While this may seem obvious, the temptation to sacrifice one’s own learning so that others have more opportunities becomes stronger as leaders climb the career ladder, even when those leaders know the importance of continuous learning.

Schools and systems are beginning to recognize that the effective implementation of college- and career-ready standards requires high-quality professional learning for teachers. Just



as important, however, will be the same opportunities for learning at every level of the system. New demands on teachers change demands on principals, new demands on principals change demands on those in central office positions, and on and on.

In this issue of *JSD*, we explore the role of emerging leaders, the part they play in advancing effective professional learning, and the support they need to succeed. As you read the issue, ask yourself: How will you indulge yourself as a learner? You need the professional learning attention as much as anyone. If you don’t make time for your own learning, why would you expect others to do the same? Soaking in days of learning isn’t shutting out the stresses of your daily life. It’s making sure you have the capacity to handle them. ■