

From the President of RUSA

Ready. Reset. Rejuvenate

Prioritizing Wellness for a Successful Semester

Shannon D. Jones

I am honored to serve as the 2025–26 President of the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA). As we begin this new academic semester, I am reminded that August and September carry a natural energy of renewal. Whether you work in an academic, public, special, or other information setting, this is a time to set intentions for the months ahead. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged many of us to reconsider our relationship with work and the sacrifices we are willing to make for our jobs. For me, it raised a critical question: What sacrifices am I willing to make for my job, and at what cost?

After self-reflection, I realized I am not willing to risk it all for the job. I am not willing to sacrifice my life, breath, or being for work. I began listening to my body more, taking small steps toward balance, and embracing the truth that wellness and well-being look different for each of us. Most importantly, I recognized that I have the agency to shape a wellness approach that supports my needs, allowing me to bring the best version of myself to my work and to those I serve.

Why Wellness Matters for Library Professionals

We are living in stressful and troubling times. Libraries continue to face challenges such as book bans, legislative attacks, budget shortfalls, reductions in force or layoffs, and reorganizations. These pressures compound the already demanding work of serving the communities in which our libraries are situated. Taken together, these challenges can lead to burnout. In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) redefined burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed and is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- reduced professional efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019, para. 4)

Research in our own field supports the idea that many library workers face emotional labor, compassion fatigue, and stress (Kendrick 2017; Kendrick 2019; Kendrick 2023). Kendrick's studies on low morale among academic and public librarians highlight the lasting adverse effects of toxic workplace cultures on employee well-being. In "Academic Librarian Burnout: Causes and Responses," editors Christina Holm, Ana Guimaraes, and Nashieli Marcano (2022) share insights addressing the unique challenges of burnout within the academic library environment and

provide preventative interventions and mitigation strategies. Moreover, Ettarh's (2018) concept of "vocational awe" examines how idealized narratives of librarianship can normalize burnout and undermine personal boundaries.

Without intentional strategies to refresh and rejuvenate ourselves, the demands of the profession can take a toll on both our well-being and professional effectiveness.

Four Strategies to Help You Ready, Reset, and Rejuvenate

There are numerous actions you can take to prioritize your well-being, many of which can be integrated into your workday. While it's important to focus on wellness outside of work, the strategies I'm highlighting here are simple, intentional actions you can practice during your day. These are not grand or time-consuming activities; instead, they are small efforts that can help refresh you, allowing you to maintain your focus, energy, and composure, even when the pace is fast and the demands are high. You do not have to wait until you get home or go on vacation to reset; you can do it in real time, right in your workspace.

1. Center Yourself in Everything You Do

When challenges arise, such as a frustrated patron, a last-minute request, or a tense meeting, pause before reacting. Pausing gives you space to be thoughtful in your response rather than reactionary. This brief moment of mindfulness is not avoidance but preparation, helping you manage your emotions and choose your words or actions with intention. Mindfulness practices, even in short bursts, have been shown to interrupt stress responses and promote clearer thinking and emotional regulation (Druley 2024).

2. Build Micro-Moments into Your Day

You do not need an hour to reset. Sometimes 60 seconds will do. Incorporate short, deliberate breaks into your routine to sustain your energy. A micro-moment might be just what you need to re-center yourself at any given time during a busy day. This could be as simple as getting up from my desk and walking around the library or stepping outside to walk around campus. The latter is an excellent way to get some daily vitamin D and refresh my perspective.

Cooke (2025) offers example micro-moments that can help you protect your mental health at work, including saying thank you out loud and often, recognizing effort and not just outcomes, and giving permission to step away. These brief yet intentional actions can create meaningful shifts in your day and help you stay grounded even when demands are high.

3. Create Your Wellness Toolkit

Keep tools, such as a calming playlist, mindfulness app, or refillable water bottle, close at hand so you can use them when you need them most. Your wellness toolkit can be both physical and digital, and it should be customized to fit your needs and lifestyle. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) notes that

"... each person's 'healthiest self' is different. We have different bodies, minds, living situations, and people influencing our lives. Each area can impact your overall health. This means we each have a unique set of health needs. Use our wellness toolkits to find ways to improve your well-being in any area you would like" (National Institutes of Health, n.d., para. 1).

This perspective reinforces that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to wellness and that your toolkit should reflect the strategies, resources, and supports that help you thrive.

My fifth-grade teacher taught me a phrase that has stayed with me: "Proper planning prevents poor preparation." This means having a plan that outlines your wellness activities for the week. That plan might include walking 5,000 steps per day, drinking more water, going to bed earlier, scheduling an appointment with a healthcare provider, or having lunch with a colleague or friend. Whatever your activities are, you must be intentional about doing them and schedule them into your day in the same way you would schedule a consultation with a library patron.

4. Set Boundaries and Honor Them

Boundaries are guardrails that protect your well-being. This might mean being intentional about taking breaks from your desk, not responding to emails after hours or on the weekends, and using vacation days to reset or sick leave when you are not feeling well. For example, I do not like meetings during the noon hour. One way I keep this time free is by blocking it on my calendar so that I can eat lunch, which is especially important for me as someone living with type II diabetes. As Cooke (2025) notes, people cannot protect their mental health if they are afraid to protect their time. Leaders play a vital role in modeling and normalizing healthy boundaries by encouraging time off, avoiding after-hours emails, and praising smart prioritization over constant availability.

As we step into this new semester, I hope that you will carry these strategies with you as tools for sustaining your well-being. The work you do matters, and the people you serve are better for the care, expertise, and commitment you bring to your work every day. I wish each of you the very best for the months ahead. May this be a semester where you feel both productive and balanced, challenged yet supported, and inspired in the work that lies before you.

Please do not hesitate to connect with me this year. I welcome your ideas, your feedback, and your stories about the ways you are finding balance and building resilience in your professional life. Together we can continue to make RUSA a place where members feel both professionally enriched and personally supported. Thank you for your continued service, dedication, and leadership within RUSA. I am grateful for all that you do, and I look forward to working alongside you to make this a year of growth, wellness, and purpose.

References

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