Don't forget to set aside time for yourself

A FORTNIGHT ago, I wrote about life’s priorities and how important it is to give more time to those who are close to us.

This was after I read about the six concentric circles of priorities, as told by Mr Eugene O’Kelly, the ex-CEO of KPMG, in his book Chasing Daylight.

The circles classify people we know in order of importance, so that we will be able to decide how much time to spend with those in each “ring”; the inner-most circle consists of those closest to us.

Those who read it found the article a wake-up call. But some have told me the “circles” are hyperbolic in red.

One of the most interesting comments I got from a close friend was that I left out a major person in the circles.

And that person should be given more attention than anyone else.

To be sure, this person should form the core of the concentric circles.

Wondering who it is?

That’s right. Me. Or you.

I was forced to think about what he had said.

Indeed, it is true that the person who deserves the most attention is that person himself (or herself).

Imagine that you are a high-performance race car.

You are going at breakneck speed, negotiating sharp bends and dodging other cars at the same time, and still emerge the winner.

What if there were no pit-stops?

You would be out of fuel in no time and the tyres would burn out before you know it.

That is really how it is with all of us caught up in the grind. Unless we nourish our body and mind, we will not be able to function optimally.

To say that we have no time to spend on ourselves is to say we are going for a long drive but have no time to stop and fill the tank.

I was also motivated by another book, The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari, by Robin Sharma.

It’s about how a hotshot lawyer detaches himself from the material world – and that includes selling his Ferrari – to go in search of the “true meaning of life” in the Himalayas.

The book suggests a number of things we can do to nourish ourselves. And one of them is – surprise, surprise – reading.

At least, I’m assured I am doing something right to “fuel” myself.

Another activity the book emphasises is personal reflection.

Reviewing our actions regularly and thinking hard about how we can improve ourselves and our behaviour is something we do not do enough.

At the end of the day, we all know what a hectic lifestyle Singaporeans have.

So it is perfectly all right to feel overwhelmed (or underwhelmed?) by such concepts like personal reflection, and spending time with yourself and close ones.

But I feel it’s still possible.

For example, it’s really not compulsory to have lunch with our colleagues every day. Why not meet up with old classmates or friends one or two times a week for lunch, when you are near their workplaces. They will appreciate it.

As for spending time with ourselves, waking up half an hour earlier and going to bed 30 minutes later than usual is not that big a deal.

It may be difficult at first, but once we get into the habit, we would wonder why we thought it was so hard in the first place.

The mornings could be spent reading, and the times before sleep in personal reflection.

No matter how many friends we have and how much time we spend with our families and at work, it is important never to ignore the one engine for survival – ourselves.

Me, myself and I is not such a selfish thought after all.

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