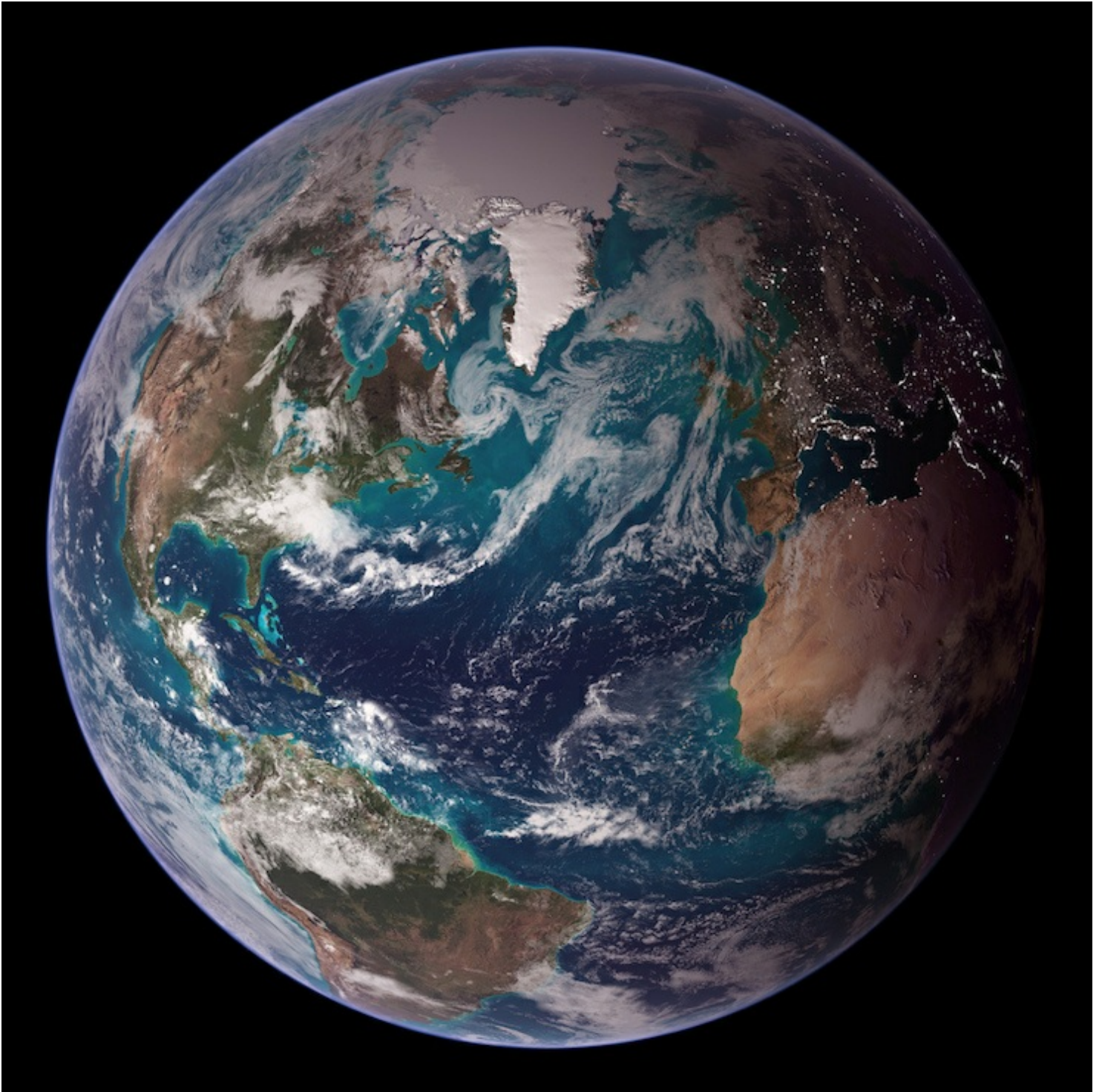


# The Art of Self-Care and Dynamic Global Leadership

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Jo Ann Ross

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“Are you still available to coach me? I need your support.”

Robert’s voice sounded different than usual. After a two-year hiatus, my long-term client was requesting another round of executive coaching. In the meantime, his career had skyrocketed. He had been promoted into a glitzy global position, with increasing responsibility in a major pharmaceutical company. He traveled a lot – mainly to

Paris, Tokyo, or Dubai – always in first-class and residing in five-star hotels. His company took good care of him, just as he cared for the 250 members of his global team dispersed throughout Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

In our conversation, Robert extolled the virtues of his employer, his purposeful job, and an exceptionally talented team. But when we met, his demeanor betrayed discouragement and disengagement. The spark I had always admired in him was not even faint; it was completely extinguished.

What was Robert's problem?

### *Global Burn-Out*

Given his global responsibilities, Robert was open for business pretty much 24/7. Rising early to fully caffeinate before talking to his team in Paris, he would finish late in the evening with his reports in Japan, as they were having their morning tea. In an effort to be sensitive to his team's schedule, he would hold meetings in the middle of the night or at break of day. He bent over backwards to be available and responsive, and that unnatural, forced backbend was costing him a lot both professionally and at home. His two daughters called him the "Hi/Bye Dad" because they never saw him long enough to catch up.

Thinking he could muscle through the stress of his new position, he had avoided the necessary rejuvenation that global leaders need. His new responsibilities had led him to believe that he had to make sacrifices of himself to justify this high-power role. As a result, he was not practicing self-care.

### *Sleep Deprivation*

Those of us who work around the globe know that a 9-to-5 schedule doesn't apply. How can we manage our global team members if we don't work their hours? How can we know what the markets or local politicians are doing if we don't stay on top of events in the hot spots that feed our work? So, like Robert, we start our day before the sun meets us, and end it long after the moon has risen. In between, we are usually electronically available because that's what effective leaders do – they are on call regardless of the continents and time zones dividing them from their teams.

This creates havoc for our bodies *and* our spirits. For starters, the sheer barrage of our electronic screen's EMF (electromagnetic field) radiation will keep us awake at best, and is thought to cause other health problems at worst. Productivity cannot be sustained without adequate rest. Research tells us that poor sleep can impact our moods, our morale, and our perspective. No wonder Robert was so dispirited; he was never fully unplugged. But that was only half of it.

Robert was constantly jet-lagged. Yes, even in first-class. He wasn't able to recover from one trip before boarding a flight for another continent. Once at his destination, he never took time to rest before jumping into several rounds of meetings, late dinners, and midnight phone calls to keep in touch with folks back home. He wasn't allowing himself the needed time to catch up on sleep or even adequately settle into new surroundings.

Travel consumes our time in ways we do not anticipate. We forget that we have to hail a taxi, get to our hotel, check in, unpack our bags, find food – and that's a normal day. When we have a toothache or need a dose of Benadryl, it will take us longer to solve the problem than it would at home. Our bodies are struggling to digest exotic food while we are called to navigate alien territory with foreign languages and customs. We conduct these superhero feats while being productive, efficient, and oh-so-pleasant, so our team (and boss) will applaud us. Our biological clock is strangely off, but we global warriors don't listen to its call to slow down and recalibrate.

### *Self-Care Guidelines*

What can you give if you are depleted? Global leaders must serve as exemplary role models. As a manager, would you want a tired, burned out team that is disengaged? Yet, if we don't take care of ourselves, who will? A leader

who cares for herself contributes to the successful performance of the team.

So, what did Robert do to reignite his spark? I started by asking him how, in an ideal world, he would live every day so that he was feeling vital and rejuvenated. We then worked together to craft a set of Self-Care Guidelines, a living document that may change with his circumstances.

Some of his ideas I've recommended to other clients, such as committing to a daily quiet session. This can be time devoted to meditation or spiritual renewal, a short power nap, pleasure reading (no business literature, please), or even games. Whatever takes you away from the daily grind and rejuvenates you.

Robert also committed to shutting down electronics after a certain hour to unwind before sleep. When he explained to his far-flung team the reasons for not being on call all night long, they applauded his decision and worked around his schedule. No business was lost, the sun still came up, and the world continued to turn.

He carefully scheduled himself to allow more time with his family, and made them a priority. He also started a regular exercise regimen; it was not overly ambitious, and that helped him stick to it. We all know that regular exercise improves overall well-being, including boosting our immune system. Global leaders need that resilience and strength given their responsibilities, stress-levels, and frequent travel assignments.

Robert's list of self-care guidelines contained about 15 points, but yours can be 30 or 10. What matters is that you are recognizing, as a global leader, that you may be carrying more weight than you used to in a domestic position, and that our new "constantly plugged in" culture may not be the best way to perform your global service. You aspire to be a vibrant, dynamic global leader? Start with taking care of yourself.

