To the mentees of the MBA Mentorship program:

A note from someone who has no business writing to you about self-care but has the experience of making mistakes so very many times. They say brevity is the soul of wit and after you read this, you'll realize that I'm witless.

Imagine if that day you took to stay at home, vegging out in front of the tv would make up for days upon days of staying up too late, drinking too much coffee, and sitting behind a laptop sending emails well beyond to what is beyond healthy hour of the evening (but the delayed send for 8:00AM totally makes it ok…). IF ONLY a day at the spa would undo the knots in your back and neck from weeks upon weeks of conducting too hard, because your band is playing too slow (you have benefits, go get that massage).

People often think that having a wellness day or a day of self-care is something of a single task where you check a box and then call it a day - akin to the same frequency of having your brakes changed. Self-care and mental wellness is something that requires constant attention and something that is often pushed to the bottom of the list or neglected. Whether its report cards or concerts, staff functions or coaching, family demands or spousal needs, there are so many things pulling you in so many directions.

It's a lot and, after 14 years around the sun doing this, things get easier, but they don't go away. You'll still have report cards (and be hounding kids for missing tests when those reports are due), parent-teacher, etc. but with each year, what becomes familiar, and routine becomes easier to navigate.

When we start out, we have ideas of what kind of teacher we'll grow to be, or want to be. What that looks like, is different for everyone but its hard sometimes when you want to be "great" and you're tripping on the fingering for b-natural vs b-flat. But over time, much like water wears down a stone, you will mold into the teacher you want to become and more importantly, you will learn, change and hone what that means to you.

Many people in our profession think that to be one of the greats that we look up to when we start, we have to sacrifice everything to learn and shape our craft. Never taking a sick day, performances never being good enough, extra rehearsals the week of the concert, etc. I have been guilty of these things myself. I still struggle with them (especially the 2nd one). But I promise you that within reason, (and some of my colleagues may disagree with what "reason" is)

- Take that sick day (and try not to use it as a mental health day to catch up on school work – another guilty habit of yours truly)
- Celebrate your concerts with your students. You all worked hard, what better way to enjoy the hard work. I have yet to attend or put on a perfect concert, and hope I never do. There is so much fun in the places that we can grow.

- Turn off email/school messaging/etc – I promise you the parents won't email your admin if you take 24h to respond. If they do, that says more about them than it does about you
- If you're fundraising or travelling, there is no harm in asking for help with doing the easiest sellers (email me if you want them) or farming out the trip planning to a tour company. Yes, your trip will cost a little more but after driving all the way to Sault Ste Marie on your way to Toronto and forgetting ALL the cheques (and not realizing until at the hotel) sometimes its just better for your sanity to outsource some things so you can focus on the kids.

It took until I had my own children to realize that this job will ask everything of you and when you're drained, you'll volunteer for more because "it's the right thing to do" or you feel "a sense of duty". If you find yourself making these decisions at the expense of your health (physical, mental or both), don't worry – you're not the first, the last or the only. You're amongst good company. But the important thing is we try to help ourselves too. Our students need us. Sometimes though, health is like the oxygen on an airplane. You have to put your mask on before you can help someone else.

If you've made it this far through what I thought would be a short note, I hope this helped. I do find reading text is sometimes less…fulfilling. If you ever need a chat – even to talk about the things outside of the music, your mentor is ready and willing (and clearly I'm not shy either).

I've had the good fortune to follow what I considered giants of teaching music in this province. Teaching music in MB puts you into a network of people who care and are willing to lend an ear (or in my case, when you forget your baton for festival in Banff…or Chicago…or…well, you get the idea). I consider many of these giants' mentors (whether they know it or not), friends, and colleagues now. On one occasion in Banff at the Rocky Mountain festival, I was given advice once that I'm fairly certain was not intended to imprint in my brain like a baby bird to its mother. Something said so flippantly, but eventually became my own mantra as I continue progressing through my career. But once, while trying to figure out how to do and be everything I wanted to be, I was told "its important to remember that we're human beings, not human doings".

So, to that end, **go be excellent** (perfection is the enemy of greatness), **go make memories**, and most importantly, **go have fun with your students and take care of yourselves!**

Best wishes during this busy season,

Derek Fraser

PS: Sometimes, its inescapable. This was written at 8:30PM the night before my first concert of the season ¯_(ツ)_/¯