



# *A Note from Executive Director, Vicki Hickman*

## **Self-Care? What's That? A Real-Life Balancing Act**

There's a reason airlines tell you to "put your oxygen mask on first." But let's be honest—by the time I find mine, it's usually under a pile of laundry, a board report, a baby sock, and half a granola bar.

As an Executive Director in a senior living community, my days are filled with strategic planning, hallway hugs, family phone calls, resident celebrations, regulatory checklists, and the occasional impromptu maintenance consult (yes, I do know where the breaker box is). It's a role I love deeply—equal parts purpose, passion, and pressure.

But when I leave the office, I don't head home to a bubble bath and a quiet house. I head into the joyous chaos of multigenerational living—a beautiful and sometimes bananas arrangement I now share with my husband, a giggling toddler, a crying infant, a son-in-law who moonlights as a professional gamer, and a daughter who is currently binge-watching an old series, *Sex in the City*—from start to finish.

On top of that, I am also a proud and involved daughter. My mother lives in an Independent Living apartment in Lebanon, and I'm grateful to be close enough to support her as she ages with dignity. But being "on call" for both work and family—from toddler tantrums to tech support for Mom's streaming device—means self-care often gets bumped to the bottom of the to-do list (right between "replace expired mascara" and "drink more water").

The truth is, I'm living what so many of us are: a chapter of life filled with purpose, people, and sometimes exhaustion. I am heading into what I like to call "My Next Third"—this window from age 60 to 90 where we try to make the most of what matters, even as our responsibilities multiply.

So, when people ask me if I practice self-care, I laugh... then cry... then laugh again (while hiding in my lower level with a Lemon Drop Martini). But over time, I've come to realize self-care isn't a luxury. It's survival. And more than that—it's smart. Because if I want to keep doing all the things that matter, I've got to stop treating myself like the last item on my own to-do list.

What I'm learning—sometimes the hard way—is that self-care doesn't have to be a spa day or a week off in the mountains (though if you have one of those lined up, please take me with you). It can be small, intentional choices: breathing deeply before a tough meeting, stepping outside for five minutes of sunshine, laughing at the chaos instead of crying about it, and letting people help when they offer.

The older I get, the more I understand that self-care isn't selfish, it's foundational. It's not reserved for people with open calendars and yoga memberships. It's a life-preserving practice, especially when you're caring for others—professionally or personally. Because when we invest in ourselves, we're better equipped to show up fully for others—at home, at work, and in our community. And if that investment supports the Way of Wellness, which guides much of how we help our residents thrive. It turns out, it applies to us too.

In September, at Life Enriching Communities, the focus is on vocational wellness. Loving what I do doesn't mean it's always easy. But finding purpose, supporting a team that lifts each other up, and staying grounded in my "why"—our mission, our people, our purpose—keeps me energized. Balance doesn't mean equal hours; it means aligned priorities. And sometimes, it means being okay with Cheerios on the floor and shutting my laptop off at 6 pm.

To those of you in similar shoes—wearing multiple hats, juggling roles, and putting others first—I see you. And to my fellow team members working tirelessly to create meaningful moments, peace of mind, and purpose for our residents and one another—thank you. You inspire me daily. You are living proof that wellness isn't a checklist—it's a way of life (and sometimes a leap of faith).

As we all continue navigating our next chapter in life, let's keep showing up for ourselves as much as we show up for others. Refill your cup. Reconnect with your "why." Reclaim your peace. Even if it's only five minutes at a time in the car, in the laundry room, or in line at Kroger. Small steps count—especially when they keep us steady for the marathon ahead.

Because whether you're rocking a baby, serving on a team, helping a parent, or all of the above—you matter! So, here's to grace, grit, Cheerios, Lemon Drop Martinis, and the occasional full night's sleep. May we all get at least one of those this week! – **Vicki**