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Coffee with Molly

DROWNING? NEED AN NAPT LIFELINE?

A few weeks ago, I received a one-word email from one of our NAPT members! The email just had one word on it: Drowning. No exclamation point, no details...just one powerful word: Drowning.

The email arrived during my workday. I did not reply with an email or a text- I picked up the phone and called immediately. I recognized in that one word that there was a person struggling and they had trusted me enough to reach out. Reaching out directly was for me the right and professional thing to do.

The member answered on the first ring, and I could hear the relief in their voice. Their first words were..." thank you so much for calling me- I really need someone to hear me." Powerful words- thank you, and I really need someone to hear me. I could feel the weight of those words in their tone.

While I have no power or influence to change anything in their district or their unit- I do have the power to connect, to listen and if requested- offer feedback. I knew immediately that listening was going to be my first course of action!



Over the next fifteen minutes- this member shared with me their frustration, their fear and their situation. They told me that they had just come back from a two-week vacation and they came back to chaos. Drivers had resigned, their administrative assistant had taken on another job, their emails were overflowing and their call log was full. Their immediate supervisor had sent them an email wanting a meeting to discuss "unresolved issues in student transportation". On top of all that, their new electric bus had arrived, and they were dealing with their local utilities and district facilities. This seasoned professional had walked into a nightmare.

During the call, as I listened closely, I could feel the concern and worries from our member. They were proud of their work and their division. They had a good track record in the district and were acknowledged for their work by the superintendent and school board. The 2025-2026 school year had been grueling and the caller spoke about the needed vacation. They also quipped that maybe they would never take a vacation again!

I totally wish I could share with you magic words that I shared with this professional. Something so profound that it took away their fear and worry. I wish I could, but I cannot. My role in this call was to be a sounding board and a shoulder to lean on. When the member finished their dialog with me- the painful question was asked: What do I do now?



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This call came at a time when I had been on the road attending our affiliate summer conferences and meetings. My own email was a disaster and trying to do business while doing business on the road was daunting. I did not only sympathize with the caller- I was in some ways living in the same fear space. So much to do, so many challenges, so many issues to address- I understood his concerns down to my toes.

What do we do when we are drowning? I believe every professional at some point or other has experienced this. It feels as if nothing is going right and everything has gotten away from us! The to do list is more than daunting- it is overwhelming. Just looking at it, you know there is no quick fix or answer.

What do we do? We get started. We look over the emails and phone logs and start to triage our work. We make the most important calls or answer those emails first. First efforts are centered on the most pressing, timewise and politically, requests. Do not dawdle- start on it immediately. Getting started gives us a point of departure and the awareness of dealing with key issues first.

After the initial work, you can address the issues in many ways. For me, I do what I call brain dump. I take a sheet of paper or use my office white board and I make as comprehensive a list as possible of what needs to be done. I try to include major and minor projects, I include due dates if I know them and I endeavor to be as specific as possible. This process is going to help me get out of the "water" and away from the feeling of drowning.

Once the brain dump is completed, I start working on my to do list. I divide it up into areas: calls, emails, reports, activities, meetings, and do, go, get items. I use my calendar and proceed to clear time or to dedicate time to the projects I have identified. I also give them a priority code: A is urgent item, F is a when you get to it item. I then start working on my A's.

I also remind myself that I will not get it all done today. I have a plan, priorities, and a desire to get ahead. I speak kindly to myself and congratulate myself when I cross off and complete items. I remind myself frequently, that I can do this, I got this, it is going to be fine.

The worst mistake you can make when you are feeling overwhelmed or drowning is becoming paralyzed. You are not sure how to start and you are doubting your own abilities. I understand this, I have been there. The worst thing you can do is to do nothing and allow your emotions to be fragile.

As important as our work is- we are important as well. Knowing yourself and your worth is a part of your professional tool kit. You do not need to be ashamed for taking time off for setting boundaries. You do not need to feel as if you are drowning because of a call log or email list. You were hired to do a job and you are doing it. Give yourself grace. If a colleague reaches out to you- be the person who hears them as well!

At the end of this phone call, I basically told the gentlemen that they had this covered. They had a great plan to move forward and they were on target. I gave positive reinforcement and a heaping serving of encouragement. I thanked them for reaching out to me and asked them to continue. I did not have a silver bullet, I had a golden ear!

If you have ever experienced this sense of overwhelm and drowning- I pray you have a colleague with a golden ear! We all deserved to be heard and acknowledged! Remember, you know your job and you have the skills to address the challenges before you!