PRODUCTIVE PATHWAYS

FINDING BALANCE DURING REMOTE GRADUATE STUDY

A Webinar for Michigan State University
Friday, March 27, 2020
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AGENDA

• Welcome to (Remote) Reality
• Getting Settled
• Building Productive Habits
• Maintaining Progress
• Finding Balance
• Resources
WELCOME TO (REMOTE) REALITY
WHOA...WHAT JUST HAPPENED?

- None of us signed up for this
  - We are stressed, frustrated, grieving, fearful
  - Our family, friends, and colleagues are also struggling

- This is a significant challenge
  - The rules are changing quickly
  - There are so many emails, calls and video meetings
  - We have competing needs as teachers, students and researchers

- Emotions are running high
ADJUSTING OUR PERSPECTIVE

- None of us signed up for this
  - We are in this together
    - We can share our concerns
    - We can collaborate on solutions
    - We can care for each other

- This is a significant challenge
  - We can meet this challenge
    - We can focus on today
    - We can seek reliable information
    - We can act with grace and kindness

- Emotions are running high
  - We can prioritize our mental and physical health
GETTING SETTLED

https://thenestboutique.com/blog/the-neat-boutique/2017/10/6/5-professional-organizing-secrets-to-getting-settled-in-your-new-home
FIRST, FOCUS ON WHAT’S MOST IMPORTANT

• What are the immediate needs of your household?
  • Yourself, your partner, children, roommates, pets
  • Food, shelter, healthcare, childcare
  • What do you need today? This week? Next week?

• Can I assist others with their immediate needs?
  • Parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives
  • Friends, classmates, colleagues
NEXT, CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Support the social/emotional needs of your household
  - Yourself, your partner, children, roommates, pets
  - Prioritize activities that deepen connection
  - Create a calm, safe and secure environment

- Establish nourishing routines
  - Be gentle and kind to yourself – this isn’t the time to start a strict diet or new list of chores
  - Make time to eat and to drink water
  - Make time to move and to rest
  - Limit media/news and prioritize relaxing entertainment
“a goal without a plan is just a wish”
- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
HABIT 1: “GO” TO WORK

• Establish a (dedicated) workspace
  • Adequate lighting, seating, power, etc. – pay attention to ergonomics, as feasible
  • Use headphones or earplugs to help create quiet or focus
  • Think creatively: closets, corners, balconies, TV/card tables, dressers

• Create a physical routine to signify the shift to work time
  • Shower, change clothes
  • Consider “dressing up” or wearing a work sweater, shoes, etc.
  • Move to your workspace to work, leave when you are done
HABIT 2: DEVELOP A ROUTINE

• Assess your working style and preferences
  • What time of day are you most focused?
  • How long do you typically work/focus at a time?
  • What kind of breaks refresh you?

• Create a daily routine
  • Blocks of high/low focus work
  • Breaks
  • Time to care for household responsibilities
## EXAMPLE ROUTINE (KATY)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9am</td>
<td>Kids</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Kids</td>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2pm</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Creative Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>4pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Admin Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Email</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:00pm</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Done!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HABIT 3: COMMUNICATE OFTEN AND WELL

• Update your advisor/supervisor by email at least weekly
  • “3x3” Email – Accomplishments, Questions, Plans  (https://www.egr.msu.edu/graduate/mentoring)
  • Don’t wait for them to reach out to you

• Create daily communication habits with your colleagues
  • Consider “co-working” spaces (zoom, slack, etc.)
  • Schedule phone or video calls to check in on projects, progress
  • Builds community and creates low-risk accountability
BE FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE

• Track what works, and what needs to be adjusted

• Consider time shifting
  • Working at non-traditional times
  • Allows flexibility to accommodate other members of your household

• Practice new routines with your household
  • Establish physical/visual barriers to remind others when you’re working
  • Make time to care for the needs of partners, children and pets
  • Plan for managing household tasks
MAINTAINING PROGRESS
REMOTE RESEARCH

- Develop a timeline of what you’ve accomplished, and what remains to be done
- Work with data you’ve already collected
  - Complete analysis
  - Make graphs / images
  - Prepare key figures and summaries for publication
- Develop new research skills
  - Learn to program
  - Figure out how to use citation management software and build a reference library
  - Complete tutorials to learn new tools or to increase your expertise
REMOTE WRITING

• Draft plans for future experiments
  • Write SOPs, supply lists, experimental designs, draft methods sections
  • Write hypotheses and expected results, which can be edited later
• Conduct a thorough literature review and write a summary paper / chapter
• Work on your dissertation / thesis
  • Figure out the formatting requirements and start (or reformat) your document
  • Create a detailed outline
  • “Plug in” writing, data, figures that you’ve already created (with appropriate citations)
  • Write!
REMOTE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

• Complete safety, IRB, or RCR training (remotely)
• Sign up for online professional development workshops through the Grad School
• Look for webinars or trainings from your professional society
• Figure out how to create a strong resume/cv and cover letter
• Sign up for handshake (MSU job search engine) and start looking at opportunities
• Reach out to journals, conferences or societies for volunteer roles
• Explore leadership, certificate, fellowship and award opportunities
FINDING BALANCE

MANAGING STRESS

- Connect with family, friends or colleagues every day
  - Set up zoom and videoconference with a colleague, instead of emailing
  - Schedule virtual “coffee breaks” or shared meals via videoconference

- Look for the positive and joyful moments
  - Take a photo or keep a diary
  - Follow uplifting social media or news

- Be kind to yourself
  - Let go of rigid expectations and unreasonable deadlines
  - Focus on one thing at a time
  - Schedule small, frequent rewards
MAINTAIN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

• Take care of your body
  • Walk or move daily
  • Get enough rest and drink plenty of water
  • Eat nourishing and comforting meals

• Take care of your mind
  • Meditation / Mindfulness / Gratitude
  • Breathing exercises
  • Make time for hobbies and entertainment

• Connect with physicians and counselors early and often, as needed
RESOURCES

https://pixabay.com/illustrations/links-link-background-orange-red-2762389/
WEBSITES

• Engineering:  https://egr.msu.edu/ or  https://www.egr.msu.edu/coronavirus

• Graduate School:  https://grad.msu.edu/ or  https://grad.msu.edu/cv19

• Remote Work, Learning, Teaching, Research:  https://remote.msu.edu

• MSU Health Services (Olin, CAPS):  https://olin.msu.edu/

• MSU COVID-19 Response:  https://msu.edu/coronavirus/

• Additional / Community Resources:  https://msu.edu/coronavirus/resources/
PEOPLE

- Graduate Program Directors and Graduate Secretaries: https://www.egr.msu.edu/graduate/contacts
- Katy Colbry: colbryka@msu.edu or http://bookkaty.colbry.com
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