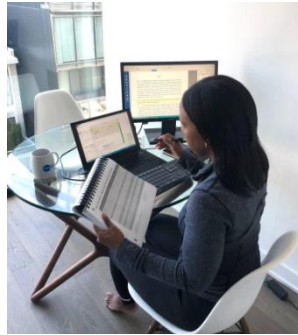


Tips for Staying Focused During COVID-19

By Suzanne Clarke



As we come to the end of week 7 in quarantine, I have noticed that some of my colleagues and clients are becoming restless with our new norm. This has resulted in a decrease in the ability to focus and remain motivated to complete daily tasks. I thought I would share some tips for staying focused during this quarantine.

Maintaining a Routine

One of the biggest things that assisted my transition into this new norm has been maintaining as much of my pre-COVID-19 routine as possible. That means, waking up, starting work and eating lunch and dinner at the same times as I did before COVID-19. This has helped to keep the structure in my day which I found to be very important in having a productive day. I must admit that maintaining my pre-COVID work routine was largely facilitated by my firm which was ahead of the curve and had the technology in place for many years to allow for remote work. This has meant that being placed in a quarantine did not result in a disruption in my ability to work.

In an effort to keep old habits alive, if you are someone who enjoyed your morning Starbucks run, like myself, consider purchasing the coffee beans from Starbucks and making your favorite blend in the morning. While it may not always taste the same as the one made by your favorite barista, it can help you retain some sense of normalcy in this pandemic. It surely does help me get my usual kick-start for the day.

In speaking with colleagues who have young children at home, it seems that maintaining structure has been integral to creating a balance between working from home and entertaining kids. Some colleagues have found that starting the day off with a walk helps young kids get into the right frame of mind to start their day with their various educational activities. Establishing a schedule for educational activities, play time and television has also helped with maintaining structure and with allowing parents some time to step away and attend to their work matters.

While working at home, it can be tempting for all of us to watch our favorite Netflix Show during lunch or take a break during the day to watch a movie. My experience has been that doing so just means I lose all motivation to return to my desk to work. I recommend keeping all Netflix-ing and movie time, until



after work hours. My colleagues with kids have also noticed that limiting screen time with kids can help reduce some restlessness during the day.

Work Space

Thanks to my firm, I was provided with two computer screens, a keyboard and mouse to help mimic my office set up at home. Once I set this up at home, I found that the location of my desk became very important. When I work in an area with ample sunlight I seem to feel more energized from the get go and experience less bouts of lethargy. If your desk is in a room with not much natural sunlight, consideration could be given to purchasing white light bulbs to help brighten your room. Some of my colleagues have also found that working in increments of 52 minutes while avoiding distractions from social media during those minutes, helps them stay focused on their tasks.

During this quarantine, there is a tendency to feel “stuck in the same spot”. I have found that having my lunch away from my desk helps to break the monotony in my work routine. As the weather gets warmer, having lunch on your patio or porch can surely help you feel as though you have “stepped away for lunch” just like you would have done pre-COVID. Since we are now spending more time than usual inside, taking a break for an afternoon walk can be very energizing and fun (of course doing so while being safe and practicing social distancing).

Continuation of Work Culture

Lately, many of my colleagues and clients have expressed how much they miss their various social interactions. Even those people who once boasted of feeling comfortable being alone, have now expressed their desire to interact with their colleagues.

Just because we are in a quarantine, does not mean we cannot socialize with our workmates. Taking a note from my firm, mid-day stretch sessions can be organized on your video conference application of choice. Thursday drinks do not need to be a thing of the past, as some of us still meet with our virtual crew for drinks. My firm also recently hosted two virtual Trivia Nights, which were huge successes. These are ideas we all can continue to incorporate into our quarantine lives.

If you have found yourself in a situation where your work schedule is less hectic than usual, consider using this time to catch up with other workmates, friends, family members or clients who you have not connected with recently. With the shift to video conferencing for meetings, most people are eager to jump onto a video call. Some ideas for virtual social events can include virtual coffee dates with your favorite mentor.

Feeling Bored

For those who have been furloughed because of the pandemic, there are still some things that can be done to help stay focused and motivated on a daily basis. In an effort to stay connected with your practice, one can continue to read the various legal blogs and articles online. Now that most people are remote and travel time is no longer a daily consideration, I have noticed an increase in online legal articles even on sites such as LinkedIn. Starting your day reading some articles will help you stay



connected with your practice and will keep you informed of any changes that will impact your practice once you resume working.

For those who have not been furloughed but have more time on their hands than usual, can consider leading an internal virtual seminar on a legal topic of interest. My firm has been doing this before the quarantine days and it is a proficient way to keep associates up to date on the law, give lawyers practice with public speaking all while giving everyone who attends CPD credits.

We all need to keep updated on the changes in our field but also get comfortable using video conferencing as even the courts have embraced this format for motions and Pre-Trials. Getting up to speed on the various applications for video conferencing can help you and your firm decide your applications of preference and will also help you service your clients better as you can show off your knowledge and proficiency with video conferencing. This will be important for the future as many suspect that video conferencing will continue to be embraced by the courts and by lawyers throughout the litigation process including Examinations for Discovery and Mediations.

If you still have more time to spare, this can also be a time to connect with colleagues and clients who you have not connected with in a while. This is also a time to read those books you always wanted to read but just got too busy to do; or even to try a new online fitness class or new recipes.

Last Thoughts

The one thing no one will deny is that everyone has been impacted by this pandemic in one way or another. While waking up in the quarantine is not always easy, our hope is that by implementing some of these tips, you will find it easier to get through each day. Lastly, we must all remember that we are living through a pandemic- be kind to yourself and be ok with the fact that not every day will be great. With some patience and safe keeping, our hope is that this quarantine will be more bearable than we expect.

About the Author:

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Suzanne's main areas of practice are tort, accident benefits, general liability and property damage claims. She takes pride in obtaining excellent results for clients in a cost-effective manner. Suzanne has appeared before the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, Small Claims Court and the Financial Services Commission of Ontario. She has trial experience at the Ontario Superior Court of Justice. Suzanne is co-chair of the Simplified Procedure practice group and a founding member of the firm's Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

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