

Self-management: A key skill during a lockdown

by

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Self-management is a key skill in any work environment, but even more so during a lockdown. It is an essential skill for both essential and non-essential workers. For essential workers looking after your own health and safety and indeed that of others starts with self-management. You need to protect yourself by practising good hygiene, social distancing and washing your hands, in addition to the regular use of hand sanitisers. The more interaction you have with other people, the more you should wash your hands. For non-essential or permitted workers, the same principle of self-management applies.

It is important to realise that we are living in uncertain and abnormal times. It is not normal to avoid other people, not to visit your friends and family and to isolate yourself from the rest of the world. We are required to be disciplined and focused during this time. Most of us still have things to do such as completing work and study assignments, hence we are expected to continue living a “normal” live in “abnormal” circumstances. This requires extreme levels of discipline and focus, hence the need for good self-management skills.

As individuals we are all different. Some people are natural self-managers, while others require reminders and more support from others to help them with self-management. Yet, we are all normal human beings who still make mistakes, who get tired and who will get frustrated and distracted during the Covid-19 crisis. That is an unavoidable reality. In fact, I even want to go as far as suggesting that if you continue with your life as if nothing has changed, then you are removed from reality. We are facing a new and different reality, and we need to manage it as individuals, families and the greater collective as a people with one goal and that is to curb the spread of the virus.

In the light of the above, I am sharing some self-management tips with you today:

- Reflect on your life and make notes of your priorities and all the things that are important to you.
- Maintain a positive disposition throughout the lockdown. The more positive you are, the more you will achieve and the easier it will be for you to persevere during the lockdown.
- If you do get negative, and it is normal to feel like that during a pandemic and such uncertain times, get encouragement and support from others.
- Commit to be self-disciplined, to concentrate and to focus on your work.
- Be disciplined in terms of good hygiene and all the other lockdown regulations.
- Prepare for all your online meetings or scheduled teleconferences.
- Set clear goals in terms of what you want to achieve over a period of a month, week and day.
- Plan your day. Make a “things to do” list every day and work systematically through this list.
- Ensure that your computer filing system is adequate to retrieve documents quickly.
- For complicated tasks spanning over a longer period, develop clear project plans.

- Create back-up files for important documents such as work reports or university assignments.
- Set boundaries for your family members so that they know when you are working, but be flexible and adaptable where necessary.
- Interruptions will occur, and manage them accordingly. Accept that you will be interrupted.
- Take regular breaks so that you can also get the necessary rest you need.
- Ensure that your life is still balanced in terms of your priorities: Work, friends, family, health, exercise, religion, television, social media, reading, gardening and hobbies.
- Keep an eye on the latest news and regulations, e.g. that you can only exercise (jogging, walking and cycling) between 6:00 and 9:00 in the mornings during level 4 of the lockdown.
- Maintain good relationships with your family members and ensure that you also contribute to chores and other aspects of family and personal life.
- Schedule specific times for particular tasks to be accomplished but adapt them when necessary.
- Make notes of things you need to think about later on.
- Arrange at least one hour a day for creative thinking and make notes of these bright ideas for further follow-up at a later stage.
- Be organised in your work space. The more organised you are, the more you will achieve.
- Balance thinking and doing. We need both to be successful and to manage yourself.
- Ensure that you get enough sleep so that you feel ready and rejuvenated for the next day.
- Identify and eliminate time-wasters where possible.
- If you fall behind on certain tasks, and you start to feel overwhelmed, ask for help from others.
- Reward yourself for major achievements such as the completion of a difficult task or report.
- Reflect on your performance after every day and tick-off all tasks you have completed. If you could not complete all of them, shift them to another day. Give yourself a score out of 10 for self-management after every day and decide how you can do better the next day.

The value of self-management as a personal and work skill is that it makes you a more effective person in making things happen at work and at home. It is a key skill for all professional, office and support employees. Self-management is also important for managers. You cannot manage other people if you cannot manage yourself. Thus, all of us need to practise self-management, and the lockdown presents you with an opportunity of practising it every day.

Working from home depends on self-management. Also remember that your manager may request feedback on your progress. Fortunately, many companies have arranged executive coaches for their managers and these coaches are guiding managers to be more sympathetic towards employees during this time. But this is also a time for you to impress your manager with your outputs, and any exceptional accomplishments should be recognised, even more so during these times when it is difficult for most people to concentrate on their work at their normal levels of productivity and performance. Be that as it may, practise self-management and be the best version of yourself during the lockdown. You are building your personal brand and credibility in the process, and self-management will become an even more important skill in a world in which most professional work will be done remotely in future. I wish you a good day with exceptional self-management. You can do it, you are your own manager!

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