

# Bliss not Bedlam: Time Management during Lockdown

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How to prioritise your time during lockdown to honour your family's demands, deliver your work goals and preserve your own wellbeing and mental health during this new normal.

Yep, time is a precious commodity. There won't ever be more than 24 hours in a day and an 8 day week remains a mythical dream. Suddenly though, today, right now, time is smacking us in our faces. Smacking us with a jovial, street kid's back at ya hand gesture. Time is apparently unexpectedly abundant. No more commutes, no school runs, no entertaining, no hair-dressers' appointments, no gym, nowhere to go. And yet 2 weeks into lockdown the patchwork of faces on my Zooms are looking more frazzled, weary and burnt out than ever. What's up with this new normal and why aren't we all reconnecting with our spiritual cores, rekindling our long-forgotten hobbies and fitting in quality time with the kids

as those idealistic bloggers suggest we should be?

My assessment is twofold. Firstly, in a fervent effort to demonstrate we are indeed working from home effectively, efficiently and that we can still contribute to our organisations with as much vigour and impact as ever, we are stepping into over-productivity. We are bouncing with ideas, suggestions and new work. Naturally, this in part stems from inner terror that global economic instability may jeopardise our career security and thus simultaneously our families' livelihoods, but the newfound additional busy-ness is adding a layer of stress to an already challenging situation for many.

Secondly, I perceive that we're in a flurry of inadvertently over-indexing on human connection through video. Think about the frenzy of emails, texts and instant messages inviting a video chat just to 'check in'. Don't get me wrong, the well-intended visual catch-ups are essential for anyone unnerved by office ostracization (always uniquely understandable and I absolutely empathise), but in my case, and seemingly the bulk of similar peers in my orbit, the endless streams of back to back screen conversations are chronically, newly time-depleting us in such a way that this in itself has become the dominant 'unprecedented'.

I am single with 4 children and 1 dog. Week 1 of remote working saw 8 to 9 hours of back to back video conference calls daily as I, by my own design, 'checked in' with teams, colleagues and clients. Week 2 when the schools closed saw this routine continuing but additionally with 3 meals to prepare each day, endless rounds of domesticity and grocery shopping stress to boot. Unsurprisingly, by the mid-point of week 2 I was down (with 'it' I suspect). My unstructured, cortisol-fuelled pace had depleted my immune system to non-functioning and I was then bed-ridden ill for 10 solid days. [Watch my Instagram Video about this.](#)

I'm back in flow again now, energised and grateful for vitality and the resilience to have recovered, but I am obsessively mindful now of how optimally to manage my time henceforth throughout this crisis. If you're remote working full time, and especially if you're a parent or carer, you must prioritise time management like never before. Even beyond

Covid-19 time management marks a significant life skill, so let's get on with mastering this behaviour whilst we should supposedly have increased capacity for personal growth and be able to think about these sorts of things anyway.

Here's my guide to successful lockdown time management, based on years of training myself and others to Flourish which I somehow lost sight of 2 weeks ago when the crisis fogged my better thinking.

1. Prioritise family. Feeding, nurturing and loving your children absolutely has to take priority and not one client or employer on the planet would disagree. You know they'll eat (properly) 3 times a day and what time meals need to be served so organise your diary with clear gaps for cooking, eating together and (oh I can't even type this without sighing) cleaning the kitchen. Today, on one group call, whilst on mute, I chopped some veg listening in, and yes I was paying attention and honest about what I was doing. People understand life has to keep flowing and of course, heart-warmingly, there was no negative judgement.
2. Chunk your work shifts around your family. I'm structuring my days to work 8am to 1pm when I know my children will be happy with self-poured cereal, self-spread Nutella crumpets and Fortnite time leaving me to concentrate. Beyond that, it's hard for me to focus on work so I'm making myself available for them devotedly and giving each child 1 on 1 time where they choose a treat of quality time together after school work has been completed (dreading the pogo stick session I've agreed to tomorrow!).
3. Set clear and open expectations around homeschooling. I held a family meeting and explained that the schoolwork is mandatory, not optional, the teens are obligated to (and surely mature enough to) complete at their behest, the little ones will get my undivided attention for 1 hour per day (they picked the hour of choice) and if there's one jot of resistance I will

walk away and not help. I pick my battles in life and right now getting to the end of another 10-year old's maths paper is not top of my agenda. (My youngest did announce after the meeting that he was on strike, leaving the family and moving to live on the trampoline. Funnily enough at 3.30am he came back into the house, with his damp, condensation ridden duvet soggily in hand. ☐)

4. Block out time in your diary for exercise and ensure no-one steals this sacrosanct time. On a normal day commuting to London I work out immediately upon waking at 6am but in this new world I'm treating myself to more sleep and a 7am session which makes me feel fortunate and grateful from the moment I open my eyes and see a 7, not a 6!
5. Stick to a regular structure. It's tempting to endlessly drift from weekday to weekend, to stay up late watching box sets and sleep on past the alarm, but this is no good for our mental health. We each have unique circadian rhythms which we usually respect and organise our lives around and now marks the time to very consciously maintain and honour these.
6. Get into nature, even with your laptop. As I write I'm sitting under a blossom tree in my garden wrapped up in winter coat and Uggs but the wifi works, the video calls will keep flowing and I know this fresh air is doing good stuff for my soul. Again, I'm open about where I am doing my calls/videos and no one judges, conversely, people are inspired to follow suit. See how many meetings you can host with birdsong as the background melody.
7. Cut out the non-essential meetings. If ever there was a time to become hyper mindful of committing only to the most useful of meetings, it's now. Your time is short as your kids need you, so cull anything superfluous. In *Essentialism* Greg McKeown teaches the art of achieving more whilst working less and he adopts the mindset of a consultant tasked to solve core business challenges quickly and effectively. Ask yourself when you

look at your calendar for the next week which of the meetings contribute to your core KPIs? Interrogate agendas, attendees, request or build RACIs and be tight on cutting hour-long meetings down to 30 minutes where possible.

8. Plan fastidiously but loosely. What I mean here is get organised with your diary to create free time. If you want time to learn a new skill or mediate or knit, plan when. If you've scheduled your day with home-schooling chunks, domestic chunks, essential meeting chunks, then evenings can be your learning time. That time won't appear unless you've organised for it. So, yes plan fastidiously but only to enable the free-flowing looseness of time for yourself once the prerequisites are dealt with.
9. Define what 'Me Time' means to you and enable it by following the above. When you do see that diary gap twinkling away at you have fun filling it with whatever rejuvenates your spirit. Take a nap, or clear the loft, read fiction, sit with your dog, just be... Seize the time as your very own in the very best way you desire.
10. Embrace human connections that matter and do so in fun and efficient ways. Do you need individual Whatsapps with each of your old school friends or could you do a Saturday night House Party app gathering en masse? Do you need 30 mins with your team every other day or could you do quick daily 10 min morning video hellos as my team are doing? Respect friends or family who are actually enjoying solitary time. My mother excused herself from our endlessly streaming family group chat explaining she wanted to switch off from us for a few days, all power to her. Similarly, I'm gently telling my friends I'm still healing from my virus so spacing social video calls to just a handful a week. I'd rather go to bed early than feel obliged to squeeze in another Zoom with a dear pal. Of course, they all understand. There is only compassion and support flowing from all quarters right now.

This new normal is hopefully ephemeral so it's up to you to make the most of it. Fast forward to how you'll look back on this time in years to come. Was it the period you savoured sleepy morning cuddles in bed with your little ones, the era of confidently wearing no make-up, of blitzing through every home chore striking it off that decade-long list, the time you finally learned French (and made new online friends), the time you learned to cook with butternut squash and quinoa or the time you finally journaled and identified what would give your life most meaning? As ever, life happiness centres around your choices and consequences. How about making a consequence of this bizarre, unsettling new now beautiful inner restoration and an end to self-destructive burnout? All through the simple choice of effective, easy to embrace time management.

*For more content from Bianca, you can visit her LinkedIn [here](#).*

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