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BY GILDA TAVENESE,
MSW



SONNY K.H. WONG,
M.ED., RP

PROCRASTINATION

BEING AT OUR BEST OR BEING TOO PERFECT –
THOUGHTS TO RE-EVALUATE YOUR PERSONAL
AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS.

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

Procrastination is a common habitual behaviour that can plague even the most highly successful people. This behaviour is quite common, but most often it is accompanied with worries. Individuals caught up in this vicious cycle find it difficult, but not impossible, to break. Especially during this time of uncertainty--you may find yourself engaging in procrastination more than usual. Rather than giving advice, let's explore what may be happening in our daily lives that is causing us to procrastinate.

Procrastination Appearance: Merriam-Webster defines procrastination as: "to put off intentionally the doing of something that should be done". Often, we know what must get done in our daily lives but there seems to be more distractions at our fingertips--our cell phones for example, walking to the refrigerator for a snack, YouTube videos, and so much more. However, from a psychological perspective--procrastination is a defense mechanism used to avoid engaging in something because the self does not want to complete the task and face being evaluated. Our society has somewhat defined procrastinators as lazy, but this is far from reality.

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TWO WORDS NOT FOR EMAILS, COVER LETTERS AND INTERVIEWS

BY LISA TRUDEL

Do you want to prepare yourself to sound professional at interviews, networking meetings and on the job? Did you know there are two powerful words you can change that will make you appear more confident and self-assured?

Our daily speech, emails, and cover letters can sometimes be full of disempowering language without realizing it. By using the technique of "word swapping" you can use simple words and phrases that can produce positive change and thus make you seem more professional. The two words to consider changing are:

1) But.

Instead of using the word "but" use the word "and". This can be when talking or writing an email. The word "but" has the power of changing a neutral statement into a negative one so try swapping this word the next time you find yourself using it.

For example, at a job interview instead of saying "I really want to work with your company but I am afraid of working remotely" state "I really want to work with your company and I know I can learn to become your best remote employee". The use of the word "but" closes off the conversation yet "and" opens it up.

2) Help.

The word "help" is often associated with "helplessness". This implies that someone is incapable of achieving something without someone else stepping in to do it for them. If you swap "help" for "assist", it can empower the reader or the listener.

For example, if you are asked at your next job interview why you want the job, instead of saying, "I want this job to help you organize your administrative projects", state "I want this job to assist in organizing your administrative projects." The word "assist" sets you up for the potential employer to know that you are capable and part of the solution.

Vocabulary is important. Take the lead in creating business vocabulary inclusion so everyone can achieve their full potential in the workplace. Keep yourself and others empowered by "word swapping". It might be your solution for interview success!

To find out more about employment preparation, contact your local Employment Ontario Career Centre and find out if you meet the criteria to use their free services.

Lisa Trudel, Career Specialist with Achev (formerly the Centre for Education and Training), wrote this article. You can contact Lisa at ltrudel@achev.ca



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157 Carlton Street, Suite 205 Toronto, ON M5A 2K2

Advertising call: 416.923.7872

e-mail: learningcurves@hotmail.com.

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FOGO: A NEW DEFINITION FOR JOB SEARCH

BY LISA TRUDEL

Last year when COVID started, I heard someone use the expression “FOGO”. I thought it was about Fogo Island in Newfoundland where the famous Fogo Island Inn is located. I soon discovered it meant “Fear of Going Outside”.

In our new world of facemasks, lockdowns and physical distancing, job searching has changed too. Networking is not as easy and we can all have fears after being at home in our isolated bubble. It is time to claim a new definition for the expression FOGO. Try “Focus on Gaining Optimism”.

Take a few minutes to explore what you have accomplished since March of 2020 when COVID changed all of our lives. For example, maybe you are now a Zoom expert or you completed an online course. Both of these show an optimistic attitude.

If you are in another slump and need a new dose of motivation, consider watching the video “Who Moved My Cheese?” Based on the bestselling book written in 1999 by Spencer Johnson, it is a motivational business fable is short, animated and entertaining. Despite the fact that it was written more than 20 years ago, the message is still very relevant.

You can watch the original video

on YouTube or an updated version by OnePercentBetter created in 2016.

No matter what year it is, the lesson that this fable explores is that we need to “be ready to change quickly”. Change has always been part of the workplace and knowing your capacity to adapt and respond to uncertainty is part of job search and career planning.

Try watching this video to seize hold of your optimism again. The story can still inspire you to improve resiliency and adjust to different workplace roles by from a long-standing example.

If you want to learn from a longer story, try watching 2012 movie “Life of Pi”. When Pi is in his lifeboat, he pushes forward. He has embraced the FOGO expression of focussing on gaining optimism.

To learn more about how to put optimism back into your job search, contact your local Employment Ontario Career Centre and find out if you meet the criteria to use their free career services.

Lisa Trudel, Career Specialist with Achev (formerly the Centre for Education and Training), wrote this article. You can contact Lisa at ltrudel@achev.ca

Poetry

Over the years of life
Over a changing time
The events of decades ago
Discovering the DNA of next memories
Memories shaping new memories
In an unknown moment of time
The DNA of memories re-shaped
The chromosomes of sadness
silently re-defined
In the lab of love
In the lab of sad realities
In the expanding universe
of human distances
Love is reshaping the journey of love
A world in home, re-discovering
a home in the world
In the world of millions without a home
In a world of hunger, where
some with billions in banks
Many children try to sleep without food
Where loving minds try to
sleep with open eyes
Many children who can not
write their names
With no pencil, no colors, no
paper to draw a dream
In the long distances of dreams
Who is making an echoing scream!
Many languages not known
to the world forum
The birds fly and cross the lands
Many birds, many songs keep
hiding in many lands

With new obstacles on the
roof of older barriers
Somewhere a heart is reaching their hearts
In a world with certainty of an
economic uncertainty
In a world where an unforeseen crisis
can come due to another crisis
Crisis multiplying crisis,
Growing economic flowers in
the silent lands of frictions
A silent global disaster getting ignition
My memories of memories are
drying my oceans of tears
Many environments of feelings
are changing with dryness
Many new environments are crying
to get protected of new fears
Can we protect our cognitive
environment and all environments!
Let's protect those hearts losing
hope for everything
How an unknown voice becomes
the voice of your heart
How hearts translate hearts
Empower all hearts to flourish all hearts
Happiness, togetherness, with
a feeling of nearness
The voice of a loving heart
can impact all hearts
The beauty of education for every heart

by Dr. Altaf Qadeer
<http://cognitivenet.wordpress.com>

LIFE'S CATAPULT LESSONS FROM AN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

BY MARIA MORALES

Sometimes in life, it feels like we are in a catapult where we are pulled back before we can go forward. It is often adversity that creates the tension needed to release the energy that thrusts us forward and lets us reach higher. This is a metaphor that Shahina Suleman, Program Manager at PTP Adult Learning and Employment Programs, loves to use when talking about what the Elevate program does for its participants. In the program that she leads, many students overcome difficult situations with resilience and adaptability. We all can use difficult experiences as the energy to project us forward. Let us analyze the physics of the catapult of life that many students in this employment program have experienced.

The tension generated by being pulled back is often caused by experiencing severe life changes. But, that is an excellent opportunity to discover your strengths.

For PTP participants like Chanukya Sathya, change has been the one constant during the last year. Like many newcomers, he left his home country, leaving behind culture, language, family and a well-paid position as a postdoctoral research associate. Arriving in Canada just before the onset of the pandemic amplified his challenges. However, with the Elevate program's mentoring, he gained confidence in the settling process. Chanukya has a great conviction that things will work for him.

“It feels like I've taken a step back in my professional career” says Chanukya. “But,

after completing the Elevate program, I'm sure it's just a matter of time until I get the Canadian experience, integrate fully into a Canadian workplace and build strong connections to land the right position.”

Shahina remembers many participants who arrived at PTP Adult Learning And Employment Programs after experiencing difficult situations, but they realized their inner strength with career counselling and job coaching. Life changes bring about an opportunity to grow, take time for self-knowledge and redefine your journey. When facing uncertainty, we discover who we really are and that sense propels us forward.

To get into a catapult, you have to trust in its efficiency and be sure it's in the right direction. The self-assurance comes from the encouragement and support of your network.

The role of the Elevate program is to provide participants with confidence and set the catapult in the desired course. Shahina helps students realize their potential and helps them believe in their capabilities. She shows them different pathways and self-management tools. She recognizes that most of her work is contained in building and enabling connections. Building your support community takes a lot of effort and you have to dedicate time to the task. But it always pays off, especially when facing adversity. It's easier to manage challenges with a community facing similar situations.

“Instructors at PTP like Shahina share a genuine intention to help us settle down with mentoring and guidance,” says Chanukya. “They reinforce the importance of networking and building a support community. Meeting other people like me at PTP encouraged me, it gave me emotional support in these challenging times.”

Once the projectile has been released from the catapult, the only force it is subjected to is its own weight, the person's inner greatness.

The height the person soars will depend on his mindset, values and beliefs. To rise above the challenges, you have to maintain a positive attitude and be open to opportunities. “Having a growth mindset combined with hard work and personal responsibility can take you right up the career ladder,” says Shahina. The values that propelled students forward are perseverance, resilience, gratitude, commitment and adaptability.

“There have been many beautiful stories PTP has allowed me to be part of”, she says. “I've realized that most of my participants land in amazing jobs. It's just a matter of time and making the right choices.”

Life often brings us situations where we have to recognize that it's okay to take some steps backward in order to later jump farther. It's totally fine to take a moment to pause the race to be sure we are in the right path and it's a sign of strength and wisdom to ask for help. Life begins beyond your comfort zone.

“Mentoring from instructors at PTP was key to my settling process in Canada. I found encouragement through meeting people like myself during these challenging times.”



Chanukya Sathya, PTP Student

EXECUTIVE SUITE: HOW ACCOMMODATIONS CAN HELP WORKERS WITH EXECUTIVE FUNCTION ISSUES THRIVE AT WORK



**BY CARTER
HAMMETT**

I have a friend from whom I love to borrow quotes. She speaks and thinks in great sound bites and I try to borrow from her as often as possible. One of the statements she frequently repeats is, “saying ‘focus’ to a person with ADHD is like saying, ‘oh, just cheer up’ to a person with depression.” If only it were that easy.

Focusing is an “executive function,” described by psychologist Hadley Koltun in an interview with the author as “the ability to initiate, plan, conduct and monitor the progress of complex tasks,” as well as regulate one’s emotional state while performing those tasks. While executive function (EF) issues are often discussed in the context of ADHD – up to 90% of all kids with ADHD struggle with this – health-care professionals are increasingly recognizing the presence of EF behaviours in a variety of invisible conditions,

including epilepsy, learning disabilities, mental health and dementia, among others. Two decades ago EF was virtually unheard of. Psychologists diagnosing a worker with learning disabilities in specific areas of information processing, for example, may have missed the mark by failing to acknowledge the presence of ADHD or EF behaviours. As diagnostic theories and tools have evolved, psychologists are now able to earlier identify symptoms and behaviours in clients that may indicate the presence of EF deficits. While supporting employees struggling on the job, employment professionals should consider the possibility of EF as being a possible variable in a client’s poor work performance, especially if the worker has been previously diagnosed with a learning disability or another cognitive disorder. Employees struggling with planning or organization issues may benefit from accommodations suggested by the employment professional.

What is it like to deal with EF issues in school and at work? Executive functions are the logic and problem-solving centres of the brain. Time, stress and emotional management, priority-

setting, organizing, multitasking, personal censorship, working memory and just plain getting started are commonly affected areas for those with EF challenges. People living with Executive Function Disorder (EFD) or EF issues related to other conditions may struggle to “analyze, plan, organize and complete tasks with or without deadline,” writes Janice Rodden on additudemag.com. “Children and adults with executive functioning problems struggle to organize materials and set schedules. They misplace papers, reports and other school materials.” These are lifelong issues that people like my client Kathy, who lives with epilepsy and borderline personality disorder, have to deal with. Kathy, 33, notes that prioritizing, memory and organization have always been significant challenges for her. For instance, when she worked for an office manager for a gold-mining company, part of her job was recruiting volunteers from post-secondary campuses for an annual fundraising run. “I had to give a speech and was terrified. I have problems with verbal working memory and forgot everything,” she says. Another problem area for her is trying to stay organized on the job: “I try really hard to keep my space organized, but it’s a challenge. My brain feels like spaghetti.”

Workplace accommodations

In her *Additude* Mag article, Rodden identifies seven types of self-regulation:

- Self-awareness
- Self-restraint
- Non-verbal working memory
- Verbal working memory
- Emotional
- Self-motivation
- Planning and problem solving

Organizing principles like this can help employees start to identify accommodations for themselves. The good news is that these solutions are usually relatively inexpensive items that are used every day. For instance, Kathy uses Post-It notes as memory prompts and to help her prioritize. She has also learned to recognize the types of roles in which she works best. “I’m actually okay with boring jobs that have lots of repetition. It’s great for my brain,” she says. It’s important for workers to give themselves time and encouragement to adapt to accommodations they are trying to implement. Some accommodations may not be successful the first time. In other cases, job descriptions may change so the accommodation needed to successfully complete a task may change with it. Job coaches and mentors can play valuable roles in supporting workers with EFD by helping them identify and integrate various strategies to contribute to workplace success.

Here are some suggested accommodations for people with different executive function challenges:

Reducing distractibility

- Removing distractions
- Providing quiet workspaces (or ear plugs, white noise machines)
- Taking frequent breaks

Sustaining attention

- Gauge attention span – how long can you maintain focused on a particular task before getting distracted/tired?
- Identify the time of day you function best and plan the most important tasks for that period
- Try to block access to “short term temptations” like social media which distract from task completion
- Allowing “distraction time” half-way through a large task or at the end of a smaller one in a series of tasks

Organization

- Many people with EFD suffer from “overwhelm” by accumulating unnecessary files, papers and other assorted clutter in their workspace. To combat this, try developing a sorting system
- Only focus on the most important things – Anything not critical should be discarded
 - Determine:
 - a location
 - categories and subcategories including a colour coding system to identify levels of task priority and ease of access
 - time frame for sorting
 - “rules for sorting” (What not to keep/keep); think Marie Kondo... if it doesn’t bring you joy, dump it!

Prioritizing

- Evaluate tasks to determine which are high priority and schedule them into a calendar accordingly
- Graded task assignment is useful here:
 - Break down tasks into manageable chunks
 - Create “cheat sheets” to prioritize activities
 - Overestimate time needed to complete them
 - Record estimated vs actual time to improve prediction

You can see that the majority of these accommodations are inexpensive to implement. Workers with EF issues should also take some time to think about disclosing at least some of their challenges to employers if they feel aspects of their disability will prevent them from performing essential duties of the job. Community agencies like Epilepsy Toronto and other disability employment programs also offer services like coaching that can help employees perform effectively on the job while also educating employers about their employee’s disability.

As awareness grows about the role executive functions play in determining workplace success, employment counsellors can facilitate positive outcomes for their clients by taking a strengths-based approach that capitalizes on pre-existing skills. They can also make substantial contributions to their clients’ self-awareness and growth by helping them understand that the deficits they perceive in themselves are in fact gifts and unique ways of contributing to a world that’s slowly but surely embracing neurodiversity.

Carter Hammett is the employment services manager at Epilepsy Toronto. He can be reached at carter@epilepsytoronto.org



Kathleen Wynne
Member of Provincial Parliament
Don Valley West

Happy Spring.
Please do your
best to stay safe.



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416-425-6777
www.kathleenwynne.onmpp.ca


PROCRASTINATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Productive Procrastination: It is silly to say that procrastination can be productive. However, before self-identifying as lazy--take a moment to reflect on the ambiguous stage of "productive procrastination". Are you pausing to reflect, strategize and to cautiously proceed? The best course of action to take is to begin with how a behaviour is viewed, namely our internal dialogue. If your internal dialogue is helping you choose the best course of action, then rest assured you are not lazy or procrastinating--you are striving to be at your best. For example: You may be a job seeker trying to find employment. It will take time for you to construct a resume, cover letter, and analyze your thoughts about what is meaningful work. All these steps involve cautious planning. You only have one chance to make a good impression on your employer. Cautious, deliberate, and well thought out actions is a form of productive procrastination because it increases your chances of goal actualization, even if you failed. You will be able to go back to retrace your steps, to strategize and be at your best for next time. However, if your internal dialogue is telling you that your resume is not good enough--and you are seeking the opinions of your friends, peers, former colleagues, and engaging in edits after edits without applying for a single job, then you may be avoiding the action of getting an interview where being evaluated by others may be frightening. Worse than being frightened -- you will never know if your resume is effective or not because you never sent it out to be evaluated for employment. Therefore, what is your goal? It may be time for you to consult a career counsellor to address procrastination rather than job search skills.

Counter-Productive Procrastination:

Let's explore procrastination that is counter productive to your desired goals. It is often accompanied with negative self talk, guilt, and extreme worries. Perhaps it is because you are striving for absolute perfection rather than to be at your best. Focusing on perfection is not productive. This focus can hinder your hopes, wishes and dreams. For example -- when seeking a career or employment success -- your internal dialogue may say to you 'just one more Netflix episode and then I will get to it'. With counter-productive procrastination, it is initially disguised as enjoyable and entertaining. We now have more distractions than ever before through social media and the internet. With job searches generating professional connections, all done on the world wide web, we can easily go down the internet rabbit hole, which can consume an alarming amount of our time. Procrastination can be our new habit in this new normal since we are relying on technology for our personal and professional interactions.

The simple act of recognizing that if we are striving for perfection or thriving to be at our best can shine light on procrastinating behaviours. Letting go, even to a small degree, the desire to complete a task perfectly can shift from thriving to be your best to achieving your goal. You may not achieve your goal this time but thriving to be the best will ensure there is a next time. Whereas wanting to be perfect may just keep you at that unknown, frightened-to-be-evaluated stage with little outcomes. We can change our own behaviours with gentle encouragement and self exoneration. It can be a struggle, but with continued effort procrastination can be kept at a minimum, giving room to more productive times ahead! 



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A YEAR OF LIVING WITH COVID:

Angie Cheng: home together 24 hours a day.

My name is Angie. I live in Flemingdon Park with my husband and three children.

My husband, Steve is an IT trainer. My children are Sammy, 12, Lilli, 9, and Billy, 5.

COVID has been stressful because it's now a whole year for all of us to be at home, together, 24 hours a day.

Before COVID, I was a support worker for the visually impaired. I was also transferring from bridging courses to a Gerontology certificate. I decided to take a leave of absence from work to care for my family, beginning April 2020.

A year ago, Billy was in junior kindergarten, but he hasn't attended school regularly because his school opted for home learning a few times.

Since March 2020, both Sammy and Lilli have gone to school, stopped because of lockdowns, and then gone back last fall. Since Christmas, I have kept them home because their schools have had outbreaks and closures.

Before COVID, Lilli complained that our apartment was too small. With no idea of lockdowns soon, I said, "My dear, we already have one of the biggest units in the building. You have your own room. Your brothers have to share one."

Now that our home is Steve's office plus classrooms for three kids and for me, Lilli is partly right that we are squished together.

For everyone to be on computers, we have added two laptops, but the rules are that the living room is Steve's office. The boys' room is Sammy's Grade 7 classroom; Lily's room is her Grade 4 classroom. Billy stays with me in our bedroom and that's his kindergarten classroom.

I have Billy all morning, but I can go to Sammy and Lilli if they need help with their lessons.

Steve works in the living room, but because it's connected to the kitchen, the rest of us tiptoe around using impromptu sign language!

For the kids, school finishes around noon. Steve will take a break if he can, and all of us will have lunch in the kitchen.

When my studies switched to online learning in April 2020, I only had another month that semester. With all final exams cancelled, I basically just finished up major assignments.

Since then, I have taken all courses online because that's my only option.

However, I am reduced to Zoom lectures and endless downloads. I feel I have sacrificed a real-life education on campus, like use the library, volunteer at school, join seminars, and interact with people. I am doing assignments alone, and talking with no one. Instead of two-way discussions with professors and peers, we now have shorter classes using one-way lectures.

I am basically prepared to continue with my education online, but I wonder when we can be real students again in real classrooms.

Meanwhile, while our three kids will be in virtual classrooms until further notice, Steve may be going back to his office soon. Fingers crossed.



Photo by Edwin Hooper on Unsplash

Jeff Martin: goodbye to so much we took for granted.

I am Jeff, and I live on my own in St. James Town.

I am in the final semester of an Accounting diploma, and hope to graduate in two months.

Before COVID, I worked as a ticket agent for arts and culture, including concerts and theatre performances. I was laid off almost immediately during the first lockdown.

That day, I thought I would be off work for just a few weeks.

Neighbors in my Ontario Housing building circulated "Keep Your Rent" petitions, but I didn't sign because our housing was already subsidized. I would honor my rent until I couldn't do so anymore.

Starting April, I got 12 weeks of CERB before looking for work again.

In March and April, all my classes either went online or became "independent study". Suddenly, direct contact with

professors and school administrators became difficult. From then on, I have been staring at computers by myself all day long.

Out of four courses, I had only two final exams. The other two classes finished abruptly with pro-rated final grades.

I had the option of attending summer school to graduate sooner, but knowing there were only online courses, I took a breather.

I signed up for school in the fall, and this winter is my final semester if I get a decent GPA. It's been monotonous with online classes and background static; I also miss daily walks through Allan Gardens to and from school.

In short, school's been dull, but online learning has been our lifeline.

Before COVID, I hung out with buddies every week, and their parents would have me over for Sunday dinners. During self-isolation, we only texted each other sadly:

"So long to eating out."

"Bye-bye to buffets, coffee shops, diners"

"Goodbye to our favorite sushi joint"

"No more hanging out, no more Cineplex"

"No more gym, ball games, Sunday dinners"

But I decided to beat COVID by at least eating right. I learned to make simple meals, and I can cook very well for myself now.

Last August, I applied for accounting jobs without much success. Then came a job taking retail orders by working nine-hour shifts from home.

It's weird that I can actually work as much as I like – around the clock if I want to.

However, I hardly do anything without staring at computer screens. COVID has made them indispensable, and in turn, they control my life, just as they rule my classes, professors, assignments and exams – if I still want an education.

At this point, I want nothing more than shoot the breeze with buddies, eat with their parents, and just hang out. It's been twelve months of self-isolation with only computers as companions.

That's my experience with COVID so far.

Will we beat the virus and be healthy again? I hope so.

FOUR TORONTO STORIES TOLD TO MINA WONG IN MARCH 2021



Kaitlyn Peartree: shock waves in slow motion.

My name is Kate, a lawyer's assistant in Scarborough's Agincourt.

I live close to my office, and take evening classes just a few bus stops away.

COVID has shaken me up like shock waves in slow motion, with a new tremor each day since the first infections in Toronto.

A year later, I don't know what the next jolt may bring, but I know when COVID is over -- if that will ever happen -- I may be a mess because I am getting frayed, one rip at a time.

I never thought of myself that way. I was always calm and happy. I had a good job. I did well in college.

But my life needs order. COVID has been total disorder. As more infections got confirmed, I was shocked each time with new back pain and headaches. I started to worry about dying from COVID. I couldn't

sleep. I became irritable and depressed.

Back tracking to last March, I was taking advanced Litigation and Family Law. I was also planning to study for LSAT. Toronto had a brand new law school that I really wanted to get into.

My plan was to attend summer LSAT preparation at one of our law schools. But because of COVID, all tutorials, including private ones, went online.

When I tried to register, only private schools were available, but their training was less comprehensive and also more expensive than law schools' programs.

Such a miserable disappointment, but my options were limited.

I tried calling my family doctor about insomnia, but only got voicemail to leave a message, or go to emergency for urgent matters.

Meanwhile, COVID dispersed like silent, uncontrollable fractures, one crack at a time.

My boss decided in May that we would work with clients only by phone,

email and deliveries, but we would keep office hours. After all, even a small law firm still had to function no matter what.

Telling my parents in December that I couldn't be in Cape Breton for the holidays, I sounded sluggish and listless. 2020 was to be my first Christmas ever without family.

December was a month of more restrictions, but we heard that vaccines were on their way.

This is three months after Christmas. Vaccines have started, but also in slow motion. For people under 30 like me, we may need to wait for half a year.

I am still working full-time, but I never started LSAT preparation.

Luckily, my boss has been a great source of inspiration. She gives me new responsibilities, introduces me to her colleagues, and encourages me to try LSAT again soon.

But she doesn't know about my backaches, headaches, insomnia, or anxiety.

I haven't told anyone that

COVID is my *bête noire*.

Everyone's life has been turned upside down.

I wonder if life will ever go back to normal.

Cecil Sattari: a "remote" existence.

My name is Cecil. I live with my family in Parkdale.

I am a new immigrant from a part of India called Margao.

I came to Toronto in April 2019 with my wife, Mara, and our son Joseph was born in February 2020, just a few weeks before the first COVID lockdown.

In January 2020, I started a college certificate in Marketing, but I was taking only one course because I wanted time at home with Mara and the baby.

My classes were great, and totally different from business courses in India. Our professor treated us like professionals using working teams and team leaders. I had school one evening a week, and lots of time to study and look after my family.

One day when getting ready for class in March, I got an email from school that all classes would switch to online because of COVID. Soon, I got ready for "remote" classes. After that, everything we did was online, but we could leave phone messages for professors.

In the online classroom, things always looked so small and far away. Some classmates had trouble joining because of computer problems, and one class in April was cancelled because the professor had technical issues.

I got exhausted quickly in the online classroom. Our professor seemed anxious to just finish a lecture, and not interested in discussions. Each class was also cut down to half the time so we could work on assignments.


For me, the worst class was the final exam with online multiple-choice questions. We were watched for ninety minutes by the professor, and no talking was allowed.

During my exam, Joseph was crying so Mara took him outside our apartment for a little walk. But they came back soon because it was the baby's bath time.

After the exam, I just fell asleep on the couch until midnight or so. Mara and the baby were already sleeping. Then I realized, "Oh, I haven't had dinner yet".

We finished that semester the last week of April, but I was more frustrated each day doing everything "remote". Our school announced that all summer and fall classes would also be online.

I dropped out because learning online was much less than the real classroom, but it cost the same. Besides, Mara and I have a small place, with a lot of distraction for her and me. If I had a class in the kitchen/living room, Mara would stay in the bedroom. To not disturb my class, she and Joseph could not make a sound, not even when he played or had a bath.

COVID has created a frustrating beginning for my education, but I really want to go back to the classroom for more courses. Meanwhile, Mara and I will probably find jobs. If we work different shifts, one of us will always be home with Joseph. Right now, his health is the most important thing to both of us. 



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Spring Term Has Double the Start Dates

The Spring Term start dates run in April May but also run into June July. So you could fit in two classes, one in the Spring and one in the Summer. But with so many start dates it is tiresome drilling down to find good ones for you.

Try calling the academic department whose courses you are interested in, often they have a list by start date you can then scan.

LEARNINGCURVES

CAN'T FIND THE WINTER ISSUE OF LEARNING CURVES? GO ONLINE.

Learning Curves along with many of its partners in education and community services, are affected by COVID-19. Our Winter issue was affected by closures and we could not effectively cover our usual distribution of the paper: over 16,000 print run and over 650 sites in Toronto and the GTA.

We would be happy to send you hard copies or drop them off, of the Winter issue if you contact us with your address at learningcurves@hotmail.com.

We thank all our readers, who have doubled online and our advertisers without whose support Learning Curves would not exist for over the past 20 plus years—first issue January 1999. Many of our back issues are on line at www.learningcurves.org

Look for us in all the usual places as the province opens up.

LEARNINGCURVES



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Learning Curves has changed. We've been hard at work behind the scenes creating an even better website experience for our readers!

The learningcurves.org site has been UPDATED, so you can find recent articles as well as older ones under subject headings. Not only will you be able to enjoy Learning Curves in print and online, you'll have even more ways to enjoy it on the go as the new site is more mobile friendly.

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HOW VIRGINIA ROBOS BECAME A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

A SHORT STORY BY MINA WONG

Virginia Robos studied bartending soon after coming to Canada from San Antonio, Chile. “Skinny Ginny” (as friends called her) wanted something quick and job-ready to support her family. A short hospitality certificate seemed perfect at the time.

When I first met Ginny, she and her child, Gabriel were refugees fleeing Augusto Pinochet’s dictatorship. Her entire family had worked for Santa Maria Catholic Church near San Antonio, where all members of the small parish were blacklisted for learning English and French.

In 1976, Ginny’s husband, Ricardo who was Santa Maria’s language teacher, was arrested, followed by his brother, Roberto, a history student. While appealing for their release, Ginny worked with human rights groups in hopes of securing protection in any country that would accept Chileans like herself. She was connected with a church community near Edmonton that would try to bring four people in her family to Alberta. Ginny and Gabriel would arrive first, with more complex documents to process for Ricardo and Roberto, who would be in jail for sometime.

Arriving in Edmonton late 1977, Ginny remembered Ricardo’s friend by the name Lucas Diaz who could also be in northern Alberta. It did not take long for church networks to locate Lucas who was indeed, in Edmonton.

Completing film studies left unfinished back home, Lucas encouraged Ginny to learn new skills while job hunting. On his advice, Ginny became a volunteer for the settlement agency where I worked part-time after school. Everyone liked Ginny’s kind optimism, although we all thought she was so slender that even a breeze could lift her off the ground. But our “Skinny Ginny” loved working with young people who also met Gabriel, now in Grade two French immersion, and adapting nicely to Edmonton’s long prairie winter.

With a B+ in bartending that “wasn’t too hard”, Ginny worked at wedding banquets, business conventions, and any venues that paid her to mix drinks. Proud of Ginny’s independence, her sponsors suggested further studies for a long-term career.

But choosing a college or university program was challenging:

“What do I want to do in Canada with so many opportunities? What is the best choice for me, an art major? What about making enough money when Ricardo will be looking for work?”

Many uncertainties tested her decisions, and before she knew it, Ricardo would be arriving in Edmonton after almost three years of being apart from Ginny and Gabriel.

Like Ginny, Ricardo was very thin, but cheerful with strong hopes of having Roberto in Edmonton soon. Mindful of her responsibilities to support the family, Ginny decided to become a technical high school teacher, fully knowing that with no Canadian credits on her university transcripts, her degree might take longer to complete.

To Ginny’s surprise, all her art courses from Santiago were accepted toward a teaching degree in Alberta. Now she only needed to demonstrate competencies in English, commercial art, photography, and drafting before starting the degree program.

With Ricardo and Gabriel by her side, Ginny was halfway through the teaching degree when I saw her again in 1980. They were furnishing a room for Roberto, another remnant of a Chilean family in exile, to start his new life soon in Canada.

The next time I saw Ginny was 2003 while visiting Edmonton. Under a sunny arctic sky near Whyte Avenue, I saw Ginny’s unmistakable smile and quick gait; with her was a tall young man. I shouted, “Ginny! Gabriel!”

I hugged two robust people with radiant complexion. “My goodness, Gabriel, you are so tall!”

The lad shook my hand: “I’m Frank, Gabriel’s brother.”

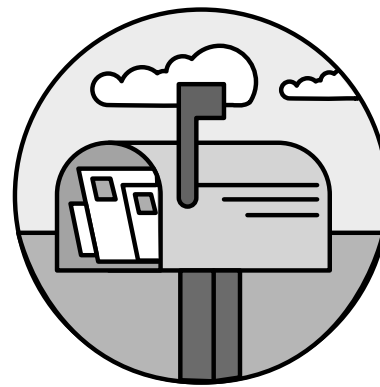
“Gabriel’s thirty-three and married with kids”, Ginny beamed. “We had Francis when Gabriel was twelve. We were already thirty-four; can you believe this miracle baby?”

From Ginny, I learned that Gabriel had a general law practice, Francis would be a mechanical engineer in two years, and Ricardo was a counselor at an inner city parish. Ginny herself was teaching high school, and for over twenty years, she had been preparing students for apprenticeships and trades.

I was also curious about Ricardo’s brother: “And Roberto?” After living with them for a long time, he finished a history degree, and went to work for booksellers in St. John’s, Newfoundland, before setting up home in Saint-Pierre et Miquelon.

This is the story of Virginia Robos, a.k.a. Ginny, her friends’ Skinny Ginny. A refugee from Latin America, she sought shelter in our country, kept her faith, raised a family, launched a teaching career, and devoted her success to Canada where we should celebrate magnificent brocades of discovery, diversity, and everyday milestones that build our nation.

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.



Dear Elcee

Dear Elcee is a feature in every issue of Learning Curves.
Send your questions about education, training, careers, jobs to:

Elcee – The WEA of Canada
157 Carlton Street, Suite 205
Toronto, On M5A 2K2

Dear Elcee:

I am sure you are hearing this from a lot of people but 2020 has been the worst year of my life. Financially, it hasn't been too bad because I am retired and living on a pension but emotionally I am at my wits end. Prior to the pandemic, even though I lived alone, I have managed to keep myself stimulated by taking local community classes, volunteering with a couple of non profits and visiting family and friends. I now feel as though all three have been taken away from me. Ive watched everything on Netflix, baked every recipe on youtube and watched every dance on TikTok. Every day feels like groundhog day! Somedays I just don't feel like getting out of bed. I am not depressed, I am bored. How do I keep myself mentally stimulated in this new normal?

Unstimulated in Uxbridge

Dear Unstimulated:

I hear you. It may not make you feel any better but you are not alone. The effects of social isolation on mental health can be damaging. Many studies are being done during this time and although there is no one answer, there are many articles on Google with advice and tips. After looking through a number of them I can only come to one conclusion...there is no one answer. I will however provide some tips and hints garnered from both academic sources and my own humble experience.

1. KEEP TO A SCHEDULE! I cannot stress how important that is when we are going through a time when the days meld into each other. Some ways you can do this is to set an alarm and get up at the same time every day. Eat your meals at the same time. Schedule exercise into this. Rather than turn on the tv to a news channel and leave it there, be very specific about when you watch. Keeping to a schedule helps keep a semblance of “normal”. One thing I started was doing a Sunday dinner for the elderly couple in my bubble. It encourages me to come up with a new menu, clean my house and have a start and stop to the week.

2. SLEEP! AND SLEEP WELL! I went through a period of insomnia and having bizarre COVID dreams. Having never suffered through insomnia before I thought I had just become another statistic. I then started doing a little analysis. Without my usual activity I was napping a lot during the day. I also wasn't keeping to a schedule and at night was doing a lot of snacking. I realised that I was actually sleeping more but not sleeping better. I decided to up my exercise, focus on regular healthy meals and making sure my bed was made every morning and my sleeping area was free of social media. I actually even gave away the tv in my bedroom. I will admit, I still go to bed every night with a good book.

3. EXERCISE! Yes, I have to admit that although as much as I hate exercise there is a mind body connection. In fact, many experts will say that exercise is as important or maybe more important than mental stimulation. So even though it is a challenge to me I have gone for a daily walk at least 95% of the past three months. It is now a habit. I walk every day with my bubble buddy friend. We also walk at the same time every day. When you are living alone it is vitally important to have that one person you see every day. I also am able to arrange my day to a before and after. (Chores before, laughter after!) In the evenings I do free yoga on youtube. There is something for everyone from calming yoga to all out aerobic workouts.

4. GOALS! If there was anything you wanted to learn...now is the time. I have never had a green thumb but last year I decided to start my own plants. It was a disaster. I am not giving up. I have a whole new batch of seedlings set out to die a slow death this year...but I am getting better. Do you want to learn a new language? Paint something? Clear out your closet? Bake? Other stimulating activities I have seen recommended include learning to write with your “other” hand, doing jigsaw puzzles, dancing, journaling, writing your life history. Everytime you venture into a new project, learn a new skill, try a new activity you are building brain muscle. I know its been said before (ad nauseum) but we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel. Stay strong, stay safe and as much as possible, keep your spirits up. I am sending you (virtual) hugs.

*Dear ELCEE is written by Deborah Noel,
deborahjnoel@gmail.com
Send her your questions.*

We value your opinion. Please let us know what you think about this column. Send comments to learningcurves@hotmail.com.



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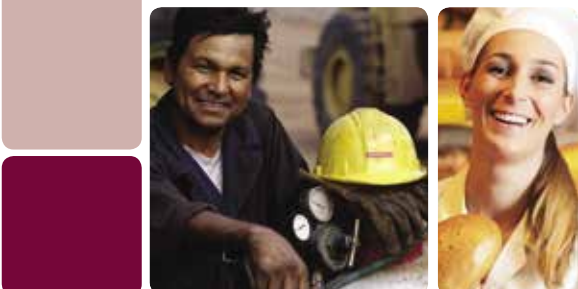


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