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The author says that the changing reality of the coronavirus pandemic makes it clear that we will be in this "new normal" for a while. One of the ways to help stay motivated, she says, is to make a short list of manageable tasks to get through every day. Maybe it is cleaning up your work emails that have been responded to. Maybe it is submitting your resume to a new company. Or maybe it is finishing the first draft of a paper. In some cases, it might be to just do t
METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Heather Boulger: Don't be afraid to belly-flop

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By Heather Boulger

PITTSFIELD — Let's face it: The past five months have been stressful.

There has been fear about a new virus, and anxiety about the unknown. People are afraid to go to work or school, feel isolated and lonely, and are unsure about the future.

Nearly 7 in 10 employees have indicated that this pandemic has been the most stressful time of their entire professional career.

That's not to mention those who are out of work and have other work/life balance stressors happening, have lost loved ones, or who are extremely isolated and afraid.

Instead of providing more sobering workforce statistics this month, the focus is how to stay motivated during these uncertain times and to try and enjoy the last few months of summer.

The changing reality of this pandemic makes it clear that we will be in this "new normal" for a while. Here are some ways that we are staying motivated during this challenging time.

Put your toes in the water and set small daily goals. It's important to recognize that these are not normal times, and your productivity is likely not at its peak. That's OK. Setting daily goals can help organize your thoughts and keep you on a positive track, but be realistic with the goals you set.

Make a short list of manageable tasks to get through every day. Maybe it is cleaning up your work emails that have been responded to. Maybe it is submitting your resume to a new company. Or maybe it is finishing the first draft of a paper. In some cases, it might be to just do the laundry.

Swim laps. Maintain a schedule, but make time for work and play.

If you are most productive in the morning, tackle the hardest jobs of the day early. If you work best at night, then spend time relaxing in the morning before jumping into work later on.

The most important thing is to dedicate a chunk of your day to work, job hunting or class, and then keep your work out of your relaxation time. Adhering to a consistent schedule will help you get through the day.

Don't be afraid to belly-flop and prioritize your mental health. Staying motivated can be near impossible when your mind is filled with anxieties. Take care of the basics by moving a bit each day with a walk around the block, jumping in a lake or by taking an online yoga class.

Take time to eat balanced meals, and try not to work through lunch by stepping away from your computer and taking a break. Maintain a normal sleep schedule and aim for seven to eight hours of sleep. Turn off the news and try reading a book or schedule a virtual get-together with friends.

Please remember that if you are struggling and need to talk to someone, there are resources available.

If you are like me, some days you may not have much ability to focus at all, and that is to be expected. Nobody's life is normal right now. You may find that you have good days, where you are highly motivated, and bad days, where your motivation is nowhere to be found.

When things seem impossible, prioritize what must get done that day — what has a deadline tomorrow, what emails need to be sent, etc., and get through those tasks.

Don't beat yourself up for not getting through your entire to-do list. It's OK.

As this new normal sets in, everyone is learning how to best adjust to working from home, and being isolated from friends and family. Staying motivated can be tricky, but you can help make it a bit easier for yourself by setting realistic schedules and taking time to care for yourself.

Taking time away from the stresses of work and daily life can improve a person's health, motivation, relationships, job performance and perspective. Though this pandemic can feel like it will be endless, it eventually will pass. Staying motivated can help refocus our attention away from these stressful changes and toward a more hopeful future.

Summer heat is upon us, but the holidays still abound. Be Kind to HumanKind Week is Aug. 25-31. It seems that, with all of the stressors that we are facing this summer, we can all benefit from being kinder to one another.

Finally, "Look for the helpers." That's what Mr. Rogers of PBS fame said his mother told him to do during a crisis. In the spirit of Mr. Rogers, we went looking for the helpers during this pandemic, and do you know what we found? There's kindness, helpers and good deeds happening everywhere!

Now more than ever, the public workforce system can deliver critical support to job-seekers and businesses across the Berkshires. Although the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board and Career Center are working remotely, they continue to assist hundreds of job-seekers and companies weekly with their employment needs. Visit [MassHireBerkshireCC.com](https://www.masshireberkshirecc.com) or call 413-499-2220 to learn about the myriad opportunities to help find your next job and to find your next employee. All of their services are free, and they are only a call or click away to help. Let us help you get back to work.

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