

Every cloud...

Despite the lockdown's very real and immediate impact on our working lives, my wife and I very soon discussed and agreed on how we would reorganise and balance our work schedules and home life and care for our 4-year old daughter who up until then had attended creche fulltime.

Given our daughter's love of company it was immediately clear that neither of us would be able to work the usual number of hours in a given day. My wife, who works full-time as an environmental scientist, and I equally respect each other's careers and work commitments. We agreed on a simple method of tag-teaming between work and childcare, typically in 2-hour intervals but with some necessary variations to accommodate online meetings. In this way we divided our time equally.

We both by nature like the relative stability and predictability of routines and so we were able to make the new routine work well for the most part. We purchased a small desk and office chair for our bedroom and were able to work in relative peace and quiet.

Although as a general rule we each worked fewer hours than a 'normal' day, we attempted to work efficiently and diligently in the allocated time we had although it is certainly true to say that some days were more productive than others. At times I felt some degree of stress and pressure at the reality of not getting as much work done as I expected. And when needs and deadlines arose, it was not uncommon to have to work longer days and into the evenings in order to complete certain tasks. And if I'm being honest then I would say that for the most part this did not bother me at all but on some occasions I did resent it to some degree as I perceived work's intrusion into home life and what would ordinarily have been family and personal time. There was a degree of anxiety linked to the impact of COVID-19 on my work-related productivity the longer the lockdown went on as by the end of the summer my 'to-do' list was becoming longer and the satisfying strike-throughs fewer.

The solid silver lining is that I will forever cherish the extra time I was able to spend with my daughter in the six months before she started school. Almost every day we were able to enjoy the great weather and go to one of our local parks where we explored, played, picnicked, tussled, and invented games. There were challenges of course. There is only so much art a 4-year old will do, only so many games of Hungry Hippo one can play and there is only so long screens can remain switched off. There were competing pressures to work, parent and entertain and to do all to the usual standards. The outcome of my first wife-administered COVID-haircut was undoubtedly the source of some additional tension; the price of vanity! But in spite of these challenges I know that I am very fortunate in being able to look back at this as, what was in many ways, a less complicated time, filled with simple pleasures.

Unlike so many others we were spared the stresses and strains of loneliness, job insecurity, financial worries, ill health and the demands of caring for multiple children or elderly relatives. Restricted access to family and friends was sad, no doubt, but can barely be considered a hardship given the suffering endured by others. I have not forgotten a photograph published in one newspaper of an elderly man, standing outside on a bench, saying his goodbyes to his terminally ill brother through the window of a room at a hospice.

Things could have been worse. Much worse.

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