



Embrace your own pace

School started today. Again.

But the sad thing is that starting this last push doesn't come after a relaxing holiday. On the contrary.

By this time you are feeling like an ultra-marathon runner heaving against a strong headwind and the finish line is a million miles away. No, 2020 has certainly not been a breeze, much more like a southeaster – fast, fierce and unrelenting.

This is the point in the race, we will be cheered on to give it a last push, to lean in, to 'byt vas', we are in the home straight.

But in fact, now is the time to make responsible and tactical choices. This is not a short or even medium distance race. We are in it for the long haul and as any long-distance athlete will tell you, the secret lies in pacing yourself and finding your own rhythm. Approaching a marathon like sprint will lead to burnout and worse.

How do we pace ourselves?

It is a fact, we are having to run the rest of the 2020 race faster than the first. In running parlance this is called running a "negative split" and if you do it right, you can maintain or even increase the same pace with less effort.

SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

Reduce the pace. Run slower to run longer, in other words expend less energy and last the distance. Rushing and chasing deadlines is like speeding from one set of robots to the next in your car – you get there, yes, but the fuel consumption is high and the wear and tear on the vehicle will shorten its life span. Instead of constantly trying to make up time, rather follow the African way of making time and prioritise time based on what we perceive “to be most important at that time”. That doesn’t mean we should disrespect time and ignore deadlines. It is just a reminder to be where your body is and don’t let your mind rush ahead and miss this moment.

Have a race plan. Know where you are going and how you will get there. Now is the time to be clear about your goals and not get side-tracked by daily tasks that sap your energy, divide your attention and detract from your purpose.

Know the difference between what is urgent and what is important: Make a clear distinction between what is significant and what is pressing. Not all tasks that are considered urgent are essential for achieving the goal. While we use our thinking brains to identify the steps vital to accomplish our objectives, something labelled urgent is often no more than my or someone else’s perception of the value of an activity. Or worse, it has become pressing as a result of my own or others’ inefficiency or disorganisation. I am sure you have noticed that urgent appeals for your time, are seldom about life and death issues. We are not first-responders.

Self-manager. It is true, we don’t always have complete control over how we organise our days but take control over the things you can, like using your breaks to truly relax and recharge. Pushing hard all day or using breaks to catch up on other work will, in the long run, not serve you. On the contrary.

Spread your efforts and find your rhythm. You know when during the day your energy levels surge and when you are not firing on all cylinders. As best you can, spread your tasks accordingly. This prevents fatigue and improves productivity and enhances your mood.

The best way to test whether your pace is right to see you through to the end of the race is to establish whether you can have a conversation while running. If you can chat while running, your breathing is spot on.

Relating this lesson to the 2020 race we find ourselves in, remember that life is more than just breathing in and out. It is the relationships with yourself, your colleagues, your family and your community that makes it worthwhile. Don't let a lack of rhythm and oxygen make you fall silent.

So on this first day of the rest of your year, take care and enjoy the journey.

Keep well
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