

SEVEN Bytes

SELF-MANAGING IN A TIME OF CRISIS PART 1: THE PERFORMANCE PARADOX

The Covid-19 pandemic requires us to face uncertainty of a magnitude we have never known before; trying to maintain a semblance of normality and continue “business as usual” is challenging for many of us.

As humans we are resilient; we will get through this. But as we are discovering, it will be a marathon not a sprint, so we need to steady ourselves for the road ahead.

In times of great challenge when we need them most, we are inclined to forget about the inherent resources we possess to help us adapt to change and uncertainty, and to invoke the human spirit. Instead of stepping back and reflecting, we can find ourselves leaning-in and upping the intensity. Yet paradoxically, despite our striving, the outcomes we want become harder to reach.

This is the **performance paradox** - the harder we try, the less we have to give, and the more likely we are to answer some or all of these questions affirmatively:

- Are you finding it difficult to focus?
- Is your thinking more scattered than usual?
- Are you finding it challenging to think ‘big picture’ and strategically?
- Are you getting moments of anxiety?
- Do you have moments of feeling stuck, numb and /or overwhelmed?
- Are you finding it difficult to disconnect from the news?
- Are you finding it difficult to sleep?

In this series of short pieces, we explore emerging wisdom about the roots of this phenomenon and look at how we can marshal our resources to overcome it.

For many leaders there is often a tension between trying to “give it their all” in response to a crisis and managing their own resources so that they can do their best work. They struggle to find their rhythm for sustainable productivity.

A FAMILIAR PICTURE?

Jill is a senior executive in technology company with responsibility for procurement and logistics. Working from home, she wakes up early after a fitful night’s sleep. There’s a lot to do – a Board report to finish on the strategic implications of the crisis, several conference calls with her remote-working teams, a long to-do list and today she wants to fit in her morning run, take her lunch break and get out for a walk – she was too busy to do any of this yesterday.

She decides to get a head start on her day and get the report done before her first conference call. Quick coffee, grab a piece of toast and get going.

But first, she sees that some emails have come in overnight from a critical overseas supplier: “I’ll deal with them to get them out of the way to get a free run at the report”. It’s more complicated than expected – should have left it to her deputy, but he’s overworked too. No time for the report before the conference call now.... ‘sure I can run at lunchtime’ she thinks.

The conference calls throws up some urgent issues – the team’s great, but they’re struggling. Nothing for it but to tackle the emerging issues – more emails, followed by an impromptu webcon and more calls.

Before you know it, it’s past lunchtime. How did that happen? She feels way behind.... Quick, grab a sandwich, go back to the desk/kitchen table and to try and get the report done..... The run will wait till later.

Jill feels everybody wants a bit of her - more emails and calls, getting nowhere fast and it’s now 6pm. She does an hour on the report but she is finding it really hard to focus now, tiredness is really setting in. Dinner, bedtime stories, chores, watch the news and suddenly it’s bedtime.

It’s been an unsatisfying, frustrating day – not a minute to spare, but hard to put her finger on any real progress. As she sets her alarm, she notices some social media messages popping in and she checks the news again before trying to get to sleep. Six hours until wake-up time. As she drifts off to sleep, she’s thinking ‘tomorrow I’ll get up early and have that run, take a lunch-break and get out for a walk and finish off that report’

Does this resonate with you?

What can you do differently?

How can we crack this “performance paradox”? In this series, we’ll look at some concepts and behaviours that enable us to face into our challenges and still hold on to the things that provide us with the resources to deliver our best and not compromise our health. These include:

- Finding your ‘wave’ and re-establishing your rhythm;
- Practising ‘self-compassion’ to cope with setbacks;
- Balancing the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements of our energy.

CLICK HERE TO READ PART 2:

<https://seven.ie/self-managing-in-a-time-of-crisis-part-2-riding-the-wave/>

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