Alumni

How to Beat Work-from-Home Burnout

By
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Liz Wilkes ’13BUS is the founder and CEO of Exubrancy, a startup that offers virtual and in-person wellness programs to more than six hundred corporate clients worldwide.

What led you to start Exubrancy?

I founded my first company, a Christmas-light design and installation business, when I was twenty-two. It was an amazing experience, but I ran myself ragged. I put aside good nutrition. I was energetically depleted. I couldn't sleep well. I didn't feel like my best self. When I started business school, I realized that I wasn't alone. Many of my classmates had also come from work environments that weren't supportive of their well-being. I started Exubrancy in 2013 to help companies encourage their employees to lead healthy lives by offering ongoing wellness programming like fitness and yoga classes, meditation sessions, and, until the pandemic, chair massages.

Has the pandemic changed your work in other ways?

Before, there was a lot of focus on how wellness can increase employee productivity. Now the focus has really shifted to reducing stress and building resiliency, community, and empathy. Those are some of the most important tools for getting through this time.

As Exubrancy has moved most of our offerings online, we've been encouraging people to leave their cameras on during live fitness classes. It's a way for them to visually connect with their coworkers in an informal way and strengthen social bonds at a time when it's hard to do so.

What advice do you have for people feeling pent-up and restless?

For me, taking a moment to roll back my shoulders and breathe deeply makes a world of difference. There has been so much research supporting the benefits of meditation and yoga. For example, one study from Aetna and Duke University found that Aetna employees reduced stress levels by a third after the company introduced weekly yoga classes.

Plan your time strategically. Those natural gaps in our workday — the commute, lunch break, etc. — have kind of evaporated, so establish new breaks that allow you to regroup. It might be helpful to move some video calls to phone calls to give your eyes a rest. If possible, take walks during phone meetings to get some fresh air. Strive to have moments of casual conversation with your colleagues throughout the day. It might be less natural to chitchat over Zoom than next to the coffee machine, but it's still important to maintain some level of connection.

Do you have advice for parents?

Know your limitations. Have clear communication with your manager about the constraints you're facing during work. Noise-canceling headphones can be a godsend if you need to work near a child. My general advice for everyone working at home, both parents and non-parents, is to realize that other people are also struggling. We need to give each other flexibility and be kind to ourselves and everyone else.

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