



Expanding the frontiers of WORK

Home and work have been two separate realms ever since we stopped doing homework assigned from school. Since then, work is work, and home is for unpaid work!

The very concept of working from home has, at times, been confounding—a part of a culture alien to many, an otherworldly experience, but something not at all new. To some, it would not even constitute the definition of “work,” per se. Work, for generations, has meant having a fixed mode, place and structure—clockwork regularity in offices full of tables and later computers, and of course colleagues, alongside the exchanges of smiles, fist-bumps, hi-fives, and all the hustling-bustling-grinding which goes in-between. But still, it is a tried and tested concept, in many parts of the world, especially in the creative fields.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, which has quickly engulfed the entire world, the idea of working from home has suddenly become a necessity. It has forced many companies to rethink their policies and become more flexible.

DIGITISING THE WORKPLACE

With the recent public health crisis, numerous companies in the country, and around the world, have shifted their day-to-day operations and activities to the confines of the homes of their employees. This has enabled them to create an entire digitised platform of getting messages across and delivering the services within the set period.

Abdullah Bakr, CEO of Jarvis Digital, a digital marketing and advertising agency, says, “Working from home comes with a set of challenges and perks at the same time, as we engage in automated delivery of the services and work in groups.” A cohesive digitised workplace is set up with the use of the air table, a spreadsheet-database cloud-based app, which tracks the progress of the work designated to the members, alongside the regular check-in, instant notifications, and checkouts.

“We start the day with the daily video

conferencing using Google Hangouts to get people in the mood for work, helping to enable a virtual connectivity, through which, employees will feel like they are working in unison,” remarked Abdullah, who took a couple of test trials of remote working with certain segments of the office when the initial news broke about the virus.

What is more fascinating, is the multitude of apps that have become accessible to the wider public in light of the recent events, making it easier to actually execute a home-working environment digitally conjoined to the office space. Google and Microsoft have extended their support by granting free access of Hangouts Meet, and Microsoft Teams as the coverage and scope of the meetings increase. Slack, Flock, Zoom, and Toggle are tools employed for collaborative purposes, with messaging, video conferencing, basic time tracking, and chat options available.

With the basics of a proper Wi-Fi connections set in place, and a functioning PC or laptop, one can easily set up their workstation.

EXPANDING THE SCOPE

Working from home is no longer relegated to the freelancers and has encompassed a multitude of professionals, allowing the shifting of duties and shuffling of working strategies.

Md Saiful Islam, a lecturer of Computer Science and Engineering from BRAC University, says that doing classes from home is a challenge for teachers and students alike.

“This is a completely new experience for me, with live sessions taken over the Internet with discussion forums, videos, tutorials, and assignments, all of which take place with clockwork precision in line with pre-set class schedules,” he remarked.

Universities have employed a wide variety of options to bring teaching into an online space with the help of specific learning management systems, opening up windows for online discussions as well as options to submit assignments, quizzes, and exams.

Shahriyer Shuvo, the head product designer at Gaze, an artificial intelligence start-up, says that working from home allows a balanced approach to work, as remote guidelines can be set in consultation with the management team paving the way for better time management and resource allocation from his part. Being a student, it also helps him to arrange flexible working hours and make space for both his studies and the job.

Working from home can be chaotic and blissful at the same time. In the office, where there is constant physical monitoring, there is more space for both employers and employees to expand their scope of work by allowing different strategies of work and restructure the stratification of the work processes. Tools like Trello, and Tomates for iDevices allow for the navigation of the restructuring of role and duties with a focus-based approach on the overall management of the firm, with breaks and alarms set in between.

NOT ALWAYS A BED OF ROSES

A recent graduate working as an operations analyst in an energy company finds the concept of working from home a daunting task, as there is the problem of communication permeating during times of decision making. The lack of hands-on approach at times makes it difficult to understand the workload. Real life meetings allow confidentiality and does not allow the overlapping of personal and professional worlds.

For a sizeable number of people, working from home brings a great number of challenges when it comes to proper and efficient networking due to fluctuations in Internet connectivity, alongside adjusting to the technological prowess of apps and devices. In such cases, having daily video calls becomes a hassle.

To create a more streamlined flow of work, certain firms have kept alternate days of work, allowing certain employees to work within the premises in a given timeslot, balancing the rate of the progress while at the same time, helping employees to relax into their positions. The system of responsibility sharing alternates between the employees.

The mental set-up of working from home without the presence of colleagues remains critical to carving a proper mental state, and thus many firms begin the day with an online meeting. The physical and mental preparation of working from home needs to be taken into stride to make sure the homely feel of a vacation does not become overwhelming and boundaries are set to deter any kind of discrepancies and disturbances when working.

Communication becomes a hassle, particularly when engagement of groups come into question, with more intensive and extensive networking and planning needed to be put in place, perhaps even beforehand, given there is little to no chance of a physical face to face contact.

What was considered to an obscure rarity is now developing and pushing the frontier of work, enabling greater modes of thinking and engagement amongst employees and employers alike. It has also become a necessity for now.

By Israr Hasan
Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

KUNDALINI RISING

BY SHAZIA OMAR
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Ujjayi Breath to Boost your Immunity During Covid-19

Ujjayi breath — breath of fire — helps us burn away toxins in our system. Prana is the life force, also known as chi, ki, and the Force in various cultures. We inhale ‘prana,’ and to expand our capacity to draw in more life force we practice ‘pranayama,’ or perform breathing techniques designed to increase the flow of prana.

Pranayama is the fourth limb of yoga. We need prana to battle the darkness of the ego and illuminate our conscience for ‘samadhi,’ an eternal state of bliss.

There are numerous pranayama exercises to expand one’s prana. One breath that can be performed to improve prana is called the ‘ujjayi breath,’ meaning the breath of fire, or of victory. The ujjayi breath sounds like the breathing of Darth Vader from Star Wars, or like ocean waves, and is brought about by constricting the back of the throat to make a sound, both during inhaling and exhaling.

To practice the ujjayi breath, try fogging a mirror or glass in your hand. Try to recreate the sound that comes out with your mouth closed but your tongue down, so your mouth cavity is hollow. Practice inhaling and exhaling to a count of four each, with the mouth closed, inside hollow, making the sound. The inhale should be smooth and unhurried. The exhale should be deep and long. This is the ujjayi breath!

Using the ujjayi breath during yoga asanas helps us regulate exercise in terms of length and vigour for each asana, as we want to achieve a rhythm that matches the four-count-breath. The sound helps us stay aware of the movement of the breath so it also serves in strengthening our concentration on the meditative practice of breathing.

Ujjayi breath is both energising and relaxing. Two mindful ujjayi breaths are all it takes to draw you away from the stress of an obsessive thought to the respite of your own space.

The breath should be both ‘dirga’ (long) and ‘suksma’ (smooth), according to the yoga sutras of Patanjali. Remember to enjoy the sensation of the inhale and enjoy the sensation of the exhale, thus creating joy with each breath.

Shazia Omar is a yogini, an activist and an author. www.shaziaomar.com

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed



THE FEARLESS OLIVE

BY REEMA ISLAM



Food in the time of COVID-19 from around the world

As the world reels under the panic of a pandemic and our homebound lives, interjected with house work, looking after our children and working, turn haywire, it is very important to keep our spirits up in any way we can.



Teo Asparagus with eggs! Spring comfort food!

Food of course, is the best way to bring us together, and the joy of eating a well-cooked meal is still one of life’s best pleasures. So, I once again rallied around my friends, and this time, I got a very positive response given that everyone was looking for an option to brighten up their meal times.

I hope our contributions of staying home go a long way in fighting this pandemic. Best wishes and stay safe, everyone!

MOROCCO

My friend Wafaa Afkir from Morocco sent me some lovely images, but she has been taking these pictures of her food in any case to prove to her mother, in another city, that she is indeed eating well!

Moroccan authorities imposed a nationwide lockdown on 20 March, and citizens are only allowed to get their most urgent jobs done like getting medicines and grocery. However, they are required to carry identification and proof of residence and authorisation from their employer and Moroccan authorities in order to attend work. However, people were already quite aware of the situation and many opted to go into voluntary isolation before the authorities announced the lockdown.

CANADA

I got two enthusiastic friends from Canada, Nusrat Matin and Tahmid



Monir bitter gourd

Huq to share their time in quarantine, but by the looks of it, they seem to be having daily feasts!

Canada’s response has been appreciated by many, not only because Trudeau reached out to his nation on a daily basis, but because they seemed to take it as seriously as was needed. However, on a private note, I see a bright future as amateur chefs for both my friends Tahmid and Nusrat!

INDIA

Closer to home, Albert Barton from Mumbai sent me these tantalising images of simple, yet gourmet worthy food. An avid foodie, Albert seems to be taking the sudden nationwide curfew well, and is trying to bring some life into his meals by making them as colourful as possible.

AUSTRALIA

Monir Hossain from Australia is a dear friend who is an avid photographer turned promoter of holistic wellbeing and healthy food. He took the bitter gourd or korola from his sister’s vegetable patch a week back and is properly using his time to hone his biriyani-making skills.

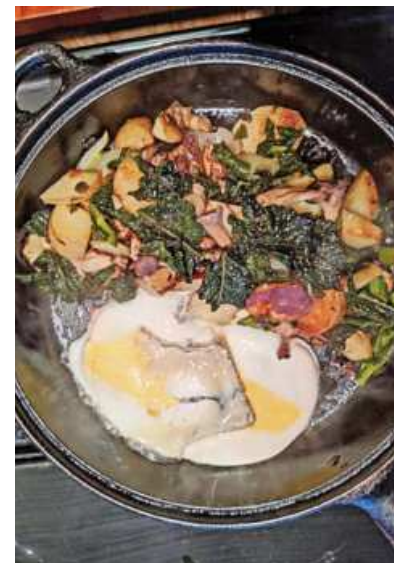
“I am already fed up after a week’s self-isolation. Initially, my office was expecting me at work but I had reminded them the need for me to stay back, but now, I hope my gardening, the orchids in my kitchen, and my cooking can keep me positive.”

GREECE

My friends Theodosia and Jasmine sent pictures of their meal from Greece, and a mixture of nostalgia and happiness surged through me, not just because the images reminded me of Greek food, but because Greece is doing a wonderful job of handling this pandemic. The situation is well under control, with people being allowed to walk their dogs or go running or doing

groceries. However, they need to send a message before leaving their homes about where they are going. The Citizens’ Services Centre has delegated peopl held on balconies around Italy.

“We’re all home safe and trying to stay informed and using this time to realise how our isolation helps to save other’s lives, the more fragile ones specifically. It is also a great time to meditate, spend time with your loved ones and hope for a better future,” she said.



Andy Oyster mushrooms, fresh garlic, a little onion, and some kind of kale

USA

Tanjina Islam is a Bangladeshi singer and a woman of many other talents from the US, among which are her culinary skills, of which I was not aware! She shared a healthy recipe for her vegan koftas, amidst USA’s initial lukewarm response for a lockdown.

Ingredients

- 2 cans chickpea
- ½ can corn
- 2 baked potatoes
- 2 packs firm tofu
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 packs firm tofu
- 1 tsp cumin power
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- ½ tsp Kashmiri chilli powder, or cayenne pepper
- 2 tsp soya sauce
- 2 tsp corn flour
- 3 tsp Italian bread crumbs
- 3 tsp olive oil salt, to taste

Method

Simply mix them all, shape them out into balls and in an oiled baking dish, bake them until they seem cooked. Andy Gladish on the other hand took this opportunity to cook himself up a spectacular meal! “I just made a simple, hearty breakfast and everything is from local farmers, people that I know and trade with, except the goat cheese brie on top of the eggs,” he said.

Photo courtesy: Reema Islam