

goodness.



HOME

PERSONAL ESSAYS

LIFESTYLE

FOOD

CULTURE

ABOUT

HOW QUARANTINE HAS RESHAPED MY APPROACH TO PRODUCTIVITY

PERSONAL ESSAYS X JULY 5, 2020



By Veena McCoolle

Since the beginning of lockdown, I'm not sure which has felt more pronounced: the resurgence of loungewear "co-ords", the sudden national appetite for home-baked goods, or the cult of social media embarking on many a new fitness journey. With even more time spent on screens as we while away hours of free time at home, our consumption of the latter is even harder to regulate. The pressure of online motivation to emerge from this lockdown as better versions of ourselves, disguised by positive forces of community and self-improvement, is never-ending.

On a recent episode of The High Low podcast, co-host Pandora Sykes describes the simple but often overlooked distinction between productivity and feeling good, and notes that productivity is a word we often use "to beat ourselves with". This strange time, and all the jarring ways it has reshaped our lives for better or for worse, demands a different way of thinking about the quality of our lives and the

importance of our happiness. Without easy ways to escape from our thoughts or distract ourselves, we're forced to re-think what is important to us and how to feel fulfilled on our own terms, in our own company.

At once, I've found that prioritising "feeling good" over "productive" is both astonishingly simple and frustratingly elusive.

Simple, because these pared-back rhythms of life expose the basic commonalities that we each need to survive. Without housemates to help out or our lovely cleaner who comes over once a month, I spend a good chunk of time methodically vacuuming bedrooms, mopping floors and disinfecting bathrooms and door handles. *If I'm going to be stuck inside for weeks, it's worth doing what I can to make it a pleasant sanctuary*, I think to myself. As I wring out rags and watch dirty water run clean, I feel ridiculous for relying on a cleaner to tend to my living space once a month. After I'm done, I sit down to rest with a mug of tea. A different kind of accomplishment, perhaps, than the buzzy fitness classes that once peppered my Saturday mornings. Yet the words of many a bootcamp instructor still ring true: "thank you for showing up for yourself today".

Yet the pursuit of feeling good is often not immediately clear because of how much it varies day by day. What is a perfect recipe for happiness one day can feel like an exhausting laundry list the next. Some days, it's going on a run to get my heart rate up and making a nourishing meal for myself afterwards. Other days it's having a big wobble, attempting to journal my feelings and ringing up those who know me best and can talk me out of any funk.

For all its monotony, uncertainty and boredom, quarantine has rehabilitated the restless part of me that refuses to have nothing to show for herself after a weekend, and who rejects the possibilities of stillness and vacancy as the minutes and hours tick on. It's led me to experience an astonishing sense of fulfillment and purpose in doing

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what needs to be done to get through the day, honouring whatever “feeling good” may look like on a given afternoon, and celebrating this: not with an addition to my to-do list, but a snuggle on the couch with the reassuring voices of far-away friends, their faces flickering on my laptop screen.



This piece was written by Venna McCoolle, a writer and reporter from Singapore who’s currently living in London. Click [here](#) to follow Venna on Instagram and check out her website [here](#).

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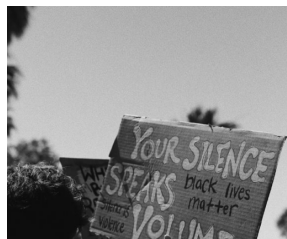
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