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SPEAKERS

Meredith Adinolfi, Sara Grimme

M

Meredith Adinolfi 00:06

Hi, and welcome to a special episode of SSP's Early Career Podcast. I'm Meredith Adinolfi recording from my home in Boston, and I'm joined by my co-host Sara Grimme recording from her home in London. In general, this podcast serves early career professionals in all facets of the scholarly publishing industry. It aims to bring together insight, advice, and guidance from leaders and experts in the field. As we were working with some great industry experts on an episode about technology and industry disruption, the world changed dramatically. We still hope to be able to bring you that originally planned episode in the future. But in the meantime, we wanted to talk through some advice and ideas on how to effectively deal with the unusual situation we're all facing. Sara and I have checked in with some of our contacts who are in a variety of different circumstances, and we're going to share their comments throughout our discussion. We know that some communities are starting to slowly open up again, and we hope that, no matter where you are in this process, the comments and ideas we've gathered will help you to cope. Sara, to start, I want to ask you how you're doing. How are things in London in general? How are you coping?

S

Sara Grimme 01:09

Hi, Meredith, and hello to everybody listening to the podcast today in these very, very

strange circumstances. Things in London are very interesting. I don't think I've been into the office since late February. My partner and I are sharing working from home, and we live in a two bedroom flat. So we have one office area in a massive open-plan living space. So I'm doing this podcast on the kitchen table. And we're just trying to make the best of it that we can as I think a lot of people out there are. How're things in Boston?

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Meredith Adinolfi 01:46

Yeah, same here Sara, pretty much, I'm on my own in my own space, which is nice in some ways, and difficult in others, but I have a nice little workstation setup for myself. It's been, similarly, a couple months since I've seen my coworkers in person and been in the office, but we're making do. It is, sort of, encouraging and maybe somewhat surprising to see how well we can do our business this way, and how we can find ways to still connect with each other as we need to. But I do miss everyone day to day and I do miss the office culture. In Boston, in general, I think it's like a lot of places, we're pretty locked down but there are starting to be discussions about what it would look like to open back up and to start having some ability to do some things again. So that is encouraging. But I think we have to wait and see, it's kind of a day by day situation, it seems.

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Sara Grimme 02:36

So actually, on that note, one thing that is about to open back up in the UK is we are allowed to sunbathe, and, for, well, from tomorrow, and for any of you who have spent much time in the UK, that, you'll know as soon as the temperature gets above mildly freezing half of the country's out because it is so cold here. So I'm very much looking forward to sunbathing in the still somewhat cold weather. It's the small things that are exciting these days. So as you said in the introduction, one of the things that we wanted to do today was actually get some really good advice from our peers and those around us. And we know that people are living in a variety of different circumstances at the moment. I, myself, have colleagues who are on their own, who are with their partners, who are single parenting, who, with kids who are managing very, very senior positions and trying to keep an organization running. And what we've actually done is we've interviewed some people that we know to get a sense of how they are handling the situation. So, Meredith, perhaps now it would be a really good time to hand over to you and I know that you have some comments from the CEO of Elsevier, could you perhaps share some of the advice that she has given?

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Meredith Adinolfi 03:42

Yes, thanks, Sara. I did have an email conversation with Kumsal Bayazit, who is the CEO

of Elsevier, as you said, and that is actually the organization that I work for. So I can vouch for what she says here in the comments I'm going to share. She is definitely doing all of these things that she says she's doing in her comments. I asked her two questions, and there are several gems in each of her answers, so I think I'm just going to actually read what she said to each of these questions. The first thing I asked her was, "what is your advice for balancing working, family, social distancing, and stress right now?" And this was her answer:

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Meredith Adinolfi 04:17

"Focus on what you can control and don't worry about what you cannot control. Ensure that your family is your number one priority and you take the time you need to refill your energy jar. We all need to be mentally and physically healthy to get through this period. We can only do our best and give ourselves a break when we don't meet the expectations we set. Take the time every day to be grateful for the positives in our situation. Whether that is kindness you witnessed that day, or a conversation you had with your teenager, or a funny meme that made you laugh out loud, and show empathy to everyone around you, as it is impossible to know what their personal circumstances are. I meditate, very badly I might add, to deal with the stress and also do yoga."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 04:57

I love this answer because what she's really really talking about here is taking care of yourself and your loved ones first, and giving yourself a break that you can always be perfect in this situation, and there going to be times where you have to make trade-offs.

S

Sara Grimme 05:10

And, actually, the other thing I really like is what she's saying about showing empathy to everyone around you. Because we don't know what other people are going through. And I think, that's, that's one of the things that we look at how we're managing in our own circumstances and project that and this is one time more than any other where I think just giving everybody that you work with a break. We just have no idea what people are dealing with right now that, to me, that really resonated.

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Meredith Adinolfi 05:36

Yeah, me too, and that's why I had that statement at the beginning where I said, I can vouch for all this. That's the number one thing that I can vouch for, that I think Kumsal is doing excellently as the leader of our organization, is making sure people understand that

they and their priorities for themselves and their personal well-being come first, and that we need to be gracious with each other when it comes to the professional space. And, yes, we still have goals, but we need to be forgiving and understanding and empathetic.

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Sara Grimme 06:05

And flexible.

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Meredith Adinolfi 06:07

Yes, and definitely flexible as well, that has been, I think, probably the word, the most heard word in our organization. And I don't know about you, Sara, but be flexible with yourself and with others, and when you say you're going to be flexible actually mean it and stand by it and show people through your actions that you mean it.

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Sara Grimme 06:25

Yep, and don't give people a hard time if they miss a deadline by a couple of days. I think it's something that we're all struggling with at the moment as we try to balance work and life and home and being contained in a very small area of space.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 06:38

Yes, and the other piece related to that is making sure people understand that if they need to miss a meeting or a call, or they need to be late to it, that is okay, they can rearrange their days as they need to. I'm making sure that the expectations we set are consistent with the message we're giving about flexibility. So this leads kind of nicely into the second question I asked Kumsal, which is "how are you thinking about leading your organization and goal-setting, given the challenges we're now facing?" And this was her answer here:

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Meredith Adinolfi 07:08

"I'm leading the organization with transparency so that our employees understand where we stand at any given moment. I'm prioritizing employee health and safety and business stability. I'm erring on the side of over-communicating versus under-communicating, and I want to ensure empathy and authenticity comes through every communication. While I continue to build scenarios, and how things can evolve constantly, and have a game plan to respond to those scenarios with my team, I constantly remind myself and my teams

that this is an unprecedented time, and any scenario is as good as its assumptions. A scenario does not equal a forecast. So it is good to have a game plan but continue to watch actual trends day to day to trigger different responses based on actual data. And despite the fact that we have to focus on day to day during this period I ensure, to the degree possible, that we continue to focus on longer-term critical strategic projects to ensure we can put our best foot forward as we come out of the situation."

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Meredith Adinolfi 08:03

So, a couple of gems in here but something that really stuck out to me was her statement, "a scenario does not equal a forecast." I feel like this is so relevant to, of course, what she's saying about the business, but also what we're seeing happening in the world and what we're seeing all of our political leaders, kind of, trying to instill in us is that you can do modeling, you could do scenario planning, but there's a bit of an unpredictability that's coming along with this situation. So we have to do whatever planning we can but we also have to be willing to, kind of, let things unfold and take it day to day. And that may change the way that we view the next few weeks based on what actually happens, instead of what we think is going to happen.

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Sara Grimme 08:43

And I would imagine as well, it's, it's one thing to be doing this at Elsevier, but there are many other much smaller publishers out there who would be balancing all of this at the moment, and that scenario-planning must be immensely difficult and stressful.

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Meredith Adinolfi 08:56

Yes, absolutely. I think, I can only imagine what it's like to have to do scenario-planning on any scale, when there are so many uncertainties in the situation and that's what I find so fascinating. You're right, especially in smaller businesses, this takes on a completely different challenge, so. Sara, who did you talk to in this space of senior publishing leaders?

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Sara Grimme 09:19

So I spoke to someone who I promised would remain anonymous. I actually promised that for all of my interviews, and this is someone who has a relatively senior role in a medium-sized publisher, and also has three children. So I asked a couple of different questions. The first one is "what has been the biggest challenge for you in terms of balancing your time with family and at work?" Because I know that that's been something that everybody has been struggling with. And, again, I'm like you I love this response that I want to read out all

of it, and it is that:

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Sara Grimme 09:51

"The biggest challenge is that there isn't enough time. They need you to be mom, teacher, playmate and parent, and you need to work. I realized fairly early on I couldn't do it all and I would just get angry if I tried. So now I don't try in the mornings, I've accepted we won't be getting all the schoolwork done, but we'll get enough done; that I won't get that strategy pitch written, but I will manage the team and ensure they're all okay, and it's also okay to have a bad day, to log off work, and be with the kids."

S

Sara Grimme 10:17

And I think this is something that really resonates with so many people out there, and the main thing that I take out of that is, we can't do it all, and we, we shouldn't be expected to do it all. But equally, I don't think anyone is expecting us to, to do it all. And just, you know, the point about her focus is managing the team and making sure they're okay. If that big thing doesn't get done, that doesn't need to be done urgently, that is fine. And you can have a bad day. That, that to me, is what I really took out of this.

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Meredith Adinolfi 10:45

Yeah, I agree. That's a great sentiment that I feel like ran through everybody that I talked to when I was trying to gather some, some comments for this podcast was this idea that you cannot do it all, and if you expect yourself to do at all or others to do at all, that's only going to lead to more stress and more tension. So really, it's this idea of accepting what is actually possible.

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Sara Grimme 11:06

And actually, it's funny at the start of the podcast before we, we started recording, something we were all talking about was none of us have any time anymore. I mean, we're all, we're all the busiest we've ever been as we're trying to manage getting everything done. So I think, for anyone listening, it's, if people are telling you to go and learn a new language, that's absolute garbage. Just get through the day. And that's the thing to focus on.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 11:29

That's a great point, Sara, I think. I've heard from a lot of people that it can be a bit

overwhelming or demoralizing to see all of the things that people are doing during this quarantine period. Learning languages, running, doing all sorts of new projects or creative endeavors. And that's great for those folks who are able to do that and who have the time, for whatever reason, or maybe that is top on their list of priorities for the free time that they have outside of work. But it's also okay, if you don't do any of those things. Just because we're in a quarantine period doesn't mean you have to do those things, it is about getting through and knowing what actually needs to get done.

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Sara Grimme 12:05

Right. And actually, I think that's a beautiful segue. So the next question I asked was, "you're in a relatively senior role, how are you managing your need to lead a key department with your need to manage your family? And the answer here was:

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Sara Grimme 12:18

"I'm making the most of Slack, WhatsApp, email, and video calls, setting up time to chat and not just focus on work. But I'm also making sure that each week, everyone knows what should be focused on, and what the deadlines are. The team will know my hours are more fluid than theirs, but I ensure they flag anything urgent so even if I'm dealing with an anxious and unhappy child, they can get on with their work while I'm with the family."

S

Sara Grimme 12:42

And, I just, I mean, I'm obviously not in a position where I have children at home but I just thought that was such fantastic advice for anyone who's managing both a team and childcare.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 12:50

Yeah, that's a challenge that I think a lot of people are facing, and I'm not in that situation either, and there are some days where I think about the fact that it's hard enough just to do one of those things, right, and managing a team during these types of circumstances. That is hard enough in and of itself. Nevermind if you also have a family that you're trying to balance.

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Sara Grimme 13:10

So the next question that I asked is, I love the answer to this one enormously, "what has worked for you in terms of structuring your day, if anything," so the answer was:

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Sara Grimme 13:21

"Constantly getting up earlier, until you realize that you can't get up in any earlier. We do have timetables, we know when we're all breaking for snacks, when electronics are allowed, and when we're exercising or doing clubs. A new addition, which is working well, is spending every evening setting up work for the next day, including post-it notes to mark where you need to start and finish. And that way the older kids are clear everyday on what they need to do, and you save a lot of time explaining. There's also notes on the study door for when they need to keep out, and talking through the schedule for each morning, plus holding family meetings when it's all too much. Routine works. Even if it's knowing, on Friday, we're choosing a Disney film, everyone chooses in order, and if Mom wants to watch 'Frozen 2,' that's tough, as it's on the schedule. And alcohol is allowed every day at 6pm. If it's on the schedule, then it must occur."

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Sara Grimme 14:11

And I love the candidness of this. You know what? It's hard. It's really hard. And you're allowed to have these guilty pleasures because we need them.

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Meredith Adinolfi 14:19

Yeah, I love that too. I love the idea that you schedule in something that is an important part of your day for relaxing, whether that's a glass of wine, or it could be any number of things. I do that with my daily workouts because I know for me that time is super important for decompressing and I put it into my schedule. I planned myself into a workout class that is live streamed, and I know that I'm going to do it and feel a lot better and be able to give more to everything else after I do that. So that can take different forms but I love the fact that a 6pm alcohol break is written into the schedule.

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Sara Grimme 14:53

And can I ask you something about your, your exercise? Is that something where you would actually, if there's a class that you really want to do but it's during the workday, is that where you would block out time to make sure that exercise can happen?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 15:05

I have not yet done anything like that during my work day, but I fully support that. I have people on my team who have definitely done it, we even actually have some corporate wellness events that occur during the day. We have meditation events, and then we have

some yoga and some other fitness-related things that are short, but they're during the work day. So I fully encourage the team to do that because you can't always control when the classes you want to take happen, and also, some people really benefit from something in the middle of the day to get your body moving, maybe get outside for a run and get fresh air. So I haven't done that myself lately, I have more of an evening workout schedule, but that's just personal preference.

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Sara Grimme 15:43

Next question is "what is your advice to someone new to their career who may be trying to balance childcare, school at home, and full time work?" And the answer is:

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Sara Grimme 15:51

"Be realistic. You can't do it all, your family needs you more than your office, your line manager and HR team will get it, and they will support you."

S

Sara Grimme 15:59

And this next bit of the answer I think is key. And that is "reach out and don't just think you can do it all You can't. And that's okay." And, you know, I think that's so important. Ask for help. Talk to your colleagues, if you need to talk to your boss if you need to. We're all struggling, and it's okay to acknowledge that.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 16:15

Yeah, that is a really important point, the aspect of asking for help if you need it, that goes along with what we've been talking about around flexibility and empathy and giving grace to people, but I think that we haven't said that explicitly so I'm really glad that came up in this answer, because we all do need to help each other. And this is anyone, whether you're balancing family, or if you're on your own, whatever it is that you need, there is help to be had in your organization or in your network. So be asking for it.

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Sara Grimme 16:44

And then I have one final question, which is "what has been most surprising since the stay-at-home order started?" And the answer here is:

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Sara Grimme 16:51

"How nice and exciting it is to see someone you know and speak to a real person, such a treat. Finding an open coffee shop without a cue, remembering why you married your husband, and that your kids are actually cool, funny and entertaining. And if they haven't done all the English comprehension exercises they were meant to, but have recoded an HTML page, then they're going to be okay. I still haven't figured out how to make them wash more frequently, so I'm keen to hear tips on that."

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Sara Grimme 17:17

I'm afraid we don't have tips on how to make your children wash more frequently. But you know, it really is, it's the small, it's the small pleasures, isn't it? When you find that open coffee shop, it's, it's magic, you have a flat white that you haven't had to make yourself. I think it's finding the pleasure in the small things.

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Meredith Adinolfi 17:33

Yeah, and I love that answer. I love that aspect of getting to see your colleagues as real people. I've really enjoyed seeing a little bit more into people's lives, I feel like people are opening up a little bit more about their home life, and it's not necessarily always in a lot of personal or sensitive detail, it's just a little bit of a view into 'Where do they live? And what does it look like? And what's their living situation?' I've really actually enjoyed that aspect of things.

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Sara Grimme 17:57

I've enjoyed meeting people's pets.

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Meredith Adinolfi 17:59

Yes, that is great.

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Sara Grimme 18:01

It's added a really nice touch. And what we'll often see is people will apologize, "oh, my cat might jump on my laptop, or my dog might be in the screen." It is delightful. And it's such a nice break from the seriousness of our days.

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Meredith Adinolfi 18:13

I agree. And I actually think this is going to change the way we work permanently, that it's going to become more acceptable to have your children and your pets, or your spouse, or your partner in the video when you're on a video call if you happen to be from home for whatever your situation is. I think that has been a little bit more, kind of, hid off to the side for work from home situations but I think this has changed that permanently, which I think will be a very good thing for everyone.

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Sara Grimme 18:39

Agreed. Okay, shall we move to the next interview?

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Meredith Adinolfi 18:42

So this is Gabe Harp. He is the Senior Manager of Digital Products at MIT Press. I used to work with him for several years at Cell Press, and many of you who are in SSP know him, he's a visible character in SSP and he does a lot for the organization. His situation is that he has been working from home actually for quite some time, so this is not a new scenario for him. And he has two young children at home. He has twins, a boy and a girl. So he's balancing that with his job. And of course, the situation for him has changed in the sense that everybody's at home together. Whereas, that maybe was not the situation previously. I asked him some of the same questions. I think he has some interesting additional answers. So the first thing I asked him was "what have been the biggest challenges for you in terms of balancing your time with family and at work?" And this was his answer:

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Meredith Adinolfi 19:31

"Earlier this year, January, February, I was beginning to chafe at working from home. Those two hours of overlap during which the kids were home after school and I was still at work, it was hard to concentrate. They were so loud. Well, my perspective has shifted a lot since then. And surprisingly enough, with this change in perspective, I find myself feeling more relaxed about work. On the one hand, I do feel that I'm working more than ever, on the other hand, I'm putting less pressure on myself and that's important. I've learned to give myself more leeway and this is actually helped me get better at honestly estimating my capacity."

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Meredith Adinolfi 20:03

This feels so similar to the answer that your connection gave, Sara, in terms of being realistic, and also just putting less pressure on yourself when you're trying to balance

everything.

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Sara Grimme 20:15

Absolutely. And I think that is the one consistent message that we got out of every single interview.

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Meredith Adinolfi 20:20

Yes, definitely. So I then asked Gabe, "what has worked for you in terms of structuring your day?" What he said was:

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Meredith Adinolfi 20:26

"Having a structure in the first place. Not everybody needs this, but I certainly do. I block off 9 to 10am and 12 to 1pm each day to help with the homeschooling of my children. And the first hour we read and write poetry, we're on Poe's 'The Raven' at the moment, and learn about one US state each day. In the second hour, I support them in their school-assigned virtual work. They're of an age where they are not fully self-sufficient with computer-based learning so I assist with logins, webcam troubleshooting, browser navigation, and other logistics, on top of the actual content of the assignments. This aspect, navigating the technology, has been harder than I would have guessed, and I really empathize deeply with the families who do not have access to the resources, language, technology, internet, that we do."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 21:09

This brings up something really important that we haven't necessarily touched on, which is that, as a parent who is attempting to facilitate homeschooling for your children, you are stepping into a variety of roles in that capacity that you are not used to you're not trained for, and you're doing it at short notice with little time to prepare. I know that a lot of schools are providing really good resources to help parents do this effectively, but I think Gabe is hitting on something here that we just never would have thought, that something like understanding all of the technology involved in a virtual lesson would be something we'd have to know on short notice to do on a daily basis.

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Sara Grimme 21:46

And I assume that not every parent is as tech-savvy as Gabe is, and will necessarily have the skills or the experience to be able to help with those things, particularly when they

happen last-minute, and you're perhaps in a meeting. So I can see how this raises a number of different issues that people would be dealing with.

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Meredith Adinolfi 22:03

Yes, absolutely, and that kind of harkens back to something that came up in your answers, which was this concept of setting aside time where you are and aren't available for these types of things. Gabe had some suggestions about times that he blocks off for particular things, but then there was also this concept in one of your answers, Sara, about making sure there are periods where your children know that you are, sort of, off limits, in a way, and as long as they are settled and have what they need, you kind of get your alone time to focus.

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Sara Grimme 22:32

But also making clear to your work that there are boundaries. So, for Gabe, that's 9 to 10 and 12 to 1 each day. For other parents, that could be the entire morning because that is what the situation necessitates. So I think it's, again, thinking about flexibility and making sure you ask for help as and when you need it. My sense, certainly, from Digital Science, is that there is a tremendous willingness to help people as and when they need it, and, and I think given the industry that we work in, most organizations, if not all, will give that same level of flexibility.

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Meredith Adinolfi 23:01

Yes I agree and something else, I think, that maybe is important to note here, I don't know if this came up in any of our answers, but the flip side of all this is that there are people who are in situations where they don't have children, or perhaps they're live on their own, and it can actually be sort of dangerous for those people in terms of taking on additional work from people who might have a little bit more on their plate to balance. That's something I've noticed and I've had to try to keep an eye out on my team, just making sure that those who are in that situation don't overwhelm themselves, because we all obviously have mental health needs, physical needs right now that go beyond the norm. So I think it's just a reminder to, kind of, be watching everybody in your organization, and not just those who might have a more obvious situation that requires extra flexibility.

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Sara Grimme 23:46

And that's actually, it's a really good point that we'll touch on with the final interview from someone who is in a position where they can take on more, and they have, and this

individual talks about what that has led to and the need for, for a break, and for a mental health day. So it's really interesting that you raised that and I'm really glad that we'll be covering that in a later interview.

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Meredith Adinolfi 24:04

Okay, excellent. So the next question that I asked Gabe is "what is your advice for someone new trying to balance childcare, school at home, and full time work?" And again, his answer resonates with the answer you got to this.

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Meredith Adinolfi 24:16

"Give yourself permission to not do it all. Make the adjustments that you need for your own work and family situations. Ask for help and understanding." Again, asking for help comes up here. "Let your children's school know if something is not working well. For example, we have told our school that we do not want our children to have more than 90 minutes each day of screen-based schoolwork and the teachers have been very accommodating. And lastly, let your colleagues know if you need an adjusted schedule or reduced workload. My hope is that employers will be as equally understanding and supportive as my own have been."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 24:45

So this kind of resonates and reinforces the point you just made, Sara about Digital Science being understanding and that the people you work with are there to support each other. Gabe is here giving that sentiment as well on behalf of MIT Press. I could give that on behalf of Cell Press and Elsevier. So I think we have a little cross-section here to tell us that, if you're not already reaching out for help and talking to those that you work with about your situation, you should do that because we have enough evidence to suggest that there's going to be support and understanding there.

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Sara Grimme 25:17

Yep. Which I think is fantastic. It's great to see our industry rally around that.

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Meredith Adinolfi 25:22

Absolutely. So this last question that I asked Gabe was, kind of, the most fun one, "what has been the most surprising or satisfying to you since the stay-at-home orders first started?" So he pointed to a couple of things and I think they're fun. So I'm gonna actually

tell all of them. In terms of his kids, he said, "My kids are helping me to spot birds. Highlights from this week are a pair of Blue Birds, a Pileated Woodpecker, and Sparrows that are constructing a nest in the birdhouse that my daughter and I built last Spring." I love this one, because, again, this sort of highlights that we are multi-dimensional people, and just because we're "working from home," doesn't mean that that's all we're doing. There's a lot that makes up a day in the current circumstances. And also, I think Gabe did a really nice job of highlighting here that there isn't one right way to give your kids what they need right now, there can be any number of activities that complement whatever you're able to do on the homeschooling front. And this might be a particularly important point for parents who are struggling with the technology piece, or their schedule, or the timing of things. There's no one way to give your kids a good educational, well-rounded experience right now. Gabe's most delightful discovery was, "Toni Morrison as a narrator of her own audiobooks. Amazing. And then on the work front, as a home-based employee, I find that I've gotten to know my colleagues much better over the past two months than I did in my first year at the MIT Press." So this gets back to what we were talking about before, Sara, about getting to know your colleagues in a slightly different way and getting a little bit of a peek into their lives.

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Sara Grimme 26:47

Okay, so shall we move on to the next interview?

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Meredith Adinolfi 26:50

Yes, let's do that.

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Sara Grimme 26:51

And that was with a single parent. So the first question I asked was, "what have been the biggest challenges in terms of balancing your time with family and at work?" And the answer is:

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Sara Grimme 27:00

"To find time to focus. My children are nine and 11, and can therefore do their own homework, but our house is not large and they like to be with me in one room. So that meant that when I was working, and they did their homework, they would interrupt every 10 minutes, ranging from 'Mom, can you explain?' to 'Mom, I'm bored,' to 'Mom, I'm hungry.' Eventually, I started wearing noise-cancelling headphones and just told them not to interrupt me for an hour. That was the only way to get work done."

S

Sara Grimme 27:24

I love the honesty of that answer. I mean, so many people must be dealing with this.

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Meredith Adinolfi 27:29

Yes, absolutely. I think this is a common issue for anybody trying to balance actually anything with their work.

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Sara Grimme 27:37

In this case, I think the children being a little older probably makes it a lot easier to be able to say 'don't interrupt me for an hour,' I can imagine that for anyone with younger children, that must be incredibly challenging.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 27:47

Yeah, we heard that from both of the other parents that we talked to in their answers, this idea of creating some space where, you know, you're going to be able to work and it's, kind of, a keep-away, so, and for the children, but you're right, depending on the age and what the needs of the child are and what other support you have in the household.

S

Sara Grimme 28:02

Exactly. So the next question is, "how are you managing your need to get your work done with your need to manage your family and their schooling as a single parent?" And the answer here is that:

S

Sara Grimme 28:12

"I've tried to put our well-being before anything else. This is a difficult time for a lot of people, there's a lot of anxiety in society, and kids are as affected by it as we are. So although I did feel it was important for them to do their homework, on days when they found it hard to get motivated, I allowed them to do a bit less, same for me on my off days, and I sure had them. I tried to take good care of myself and allow myself to get slightly less done than I normally would. All in all, not being overly perfectionist has been quite healthy for me."

S

Sara Grimme 28:42

And there's two things I really liked there. The first is not being perfectionist. It's something that we have heard consistently. But the other point is that this is really hard for kids. And, for all of you parents who are listening to this, it's, it's appreciated that your kids need you, because they are probably anxious and worried and missing their friends in the same way that the rest of us are.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 29:03

Yeah, I really appreciate this point coming up in this answer, because we haven't touched on this aspect that this is difficult for kids. And it's difficult in a different way than it is for us as adults in the working world. But I think this really, kind of, echoes how we're feeling about our own need to balance things and our own, maybe, isolation from our colleagues and our family, friends, loved ones. It's just this feeling that you're, sort of, getting through it but it's very difficult, especially if you don't have as complex an understanding as an adult might have of what's going on and why this is all necessary. That can be really hard, and that's going to always take precedence over everything else as a parent.

S

Sara Grimme 29:43

Right. Exactly. And actually, that's, it's a, it's a nice segue into the last question, which is "what is your advice for someone new to their career who may be trying to balance childcare, school at home, full-time work on their own plus, and thinking about all those anxieties?"

S

Sara Grimme 29:59

"Lower the bar. This is an extraordinary period and it will pass. Don't be too hard on yourself, you can't be the perfect parent, employee, and teacher all at once. It's okay if they don't finish their homework every day and it's also okay if you don't manage to work your normal hours every day. And make sure you leave the house at least once a day with or without kids, depending on their age. Walk around the neighborhood or in nature. It keeps you sane."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 30:21

That's an excellent point about getting outside, fresh air, changing your scenery, whatever that means for you. That is going to be very different if you're living in a city versus maybe in a suburb or with a little bit more space. But either way, I have found that to be, I was hesitant about that at first, because I wasn't sure exactly what that would mean, in, sort of, a close, concentrated city setting, but it has proved to be really important.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 30:45

Okay, so here, we wanted to gather some comments from a slightly different perspective. So I spoke to my colleague, Kalika Genelin, who is the production resources manager at Cell Press, because I work quite closely with her. I also happen to know that she has a background in development and counseling psychology, she actually worked in that field for several years before she got a job in publishing. So we thought it would be interesting to bring the perspective of somebody who faces all of the same issues, a lot of the things that we've been talking about, but applies a slightly different lens to it. So the first question I asked her is, "do you have any advice for dealing with anxiety and stress while trying to focus on work?"

M

Meredith Adinolfi 31:25

"First of all, it's important to realize that you can't push away a feeling forever, and that includes anxiety, fear, and worry. But you can feel them, you can survive them, and you can let them pass. That might not seem like good news at first, as we don't necessarily want to sit around feeling afraid or worrying. What you can do is stop multitasking. We hear that a lot, this idea that we need to stop multitasking, that we can only really monotask, and it's true, the brain can only attend to a very small amount of things well, really only one thing at a time. When you have stress and anxiety running in the background, it's very hard to stay focused on anything else. So take practical steps to help yourself close a few of those anxiety and stress tabs that may be open on your browser in your mind."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 32:04

So she has a couple pieces of advice on this front. And the first one is to use a timer. "So setting a timer for three or five minutes to allow yourself space to breathe and perhaps meditate if that's something that works for you. Do anything, walk around, anything that kind of gets you a little bit of space from whatever happens to be going on. And then also, use that time to acknowledge what is going on with you and what you're feeling. Let that feeling come in for the period of time that you have the timer set for. And then maybe set another timer for the next phase of that, so perhaps if your first phase is thinking about what's going on, thinking about your heart beating fast, anxiety you might be feeling, that maybe your next five minutes are to get up and move around, maybe get some fresh air, focus on the surroundings, there's a chair, there's a pillow, that will help to ground you in the present moment and get out of your head a little bit. And then when you're done with those two phases, you can return to work. And whenever the anxiety comes up again, let that anxiety know that it will have the opportunity to be heard again, and it will be let in again at a later time. It will help your brain to stop cycling quite so much. The trick is you

have to mean it, you have to treat it like an appointment and actually come back and do the exercise again at a later time. And when the time comes, it doesn't matter what else is going on in your day, repeat the exercise. If you can do that twice a day, you'll spend a total of 20 minutes dealing with your stress directly, but it will save you hours of interrupted focus, and will give you more fully process your emotions. The more you do it, the more helpful it becomes.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 33:40

Another suggestion is to "avoid opening so many tabs in your mind to begin with. None of us can avoid anxiety and stress altogether, and we know that. We want to stay informed." But her advice here is to "stay informed, but know the limits of what makes sense for you. If you're receiving notifications, checking Facebook multiple times, refreshing statistics, watching the news, that takes you out of whatever you're focusing on. And it's now a good time to think about adjusting your approach and perhaps paring down what you're intaking. We actually do not need to be as informed as we are. Sometimes we conflate being informed with caring, as if we do not seek to learn about things that are happening, that will mean we don't care about the world or our fellow humans. But caring begins with ourselves and what we put our attention on. And that's what will grow. If we seek out moving, anxiety-provoking information, our brains will feel stimulated, fast-moving, and anxious. If you can stay offline, or turn off or silence your phone notifications for a period of time, that can be a big help, and take other steps to virtually detox at whatever pace and frequency makes sense for you." Our last suggestion on this front is to "take a dance break during the day. Nothing helps anxiety and stress like a good dance break." That is very true.

S

Sara Grimme 34:53

I love that, that is like, that is such great advice.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 34:56

Yeah, I asked her a couple more questions. The next one was, "are there any tips for dealing with guilt and anxiety that results from feeling like you're shortchanging your family, your kids, or your job, and here she just says that:

M

Meredith Adinolfi 35:08

"Guilt and anxiety are normal feelings, and they won't really go away. They're part of our condition as humans. We're always striving for perfection and judging ourselves, and it's

very normal to do. What causes problems is when it narrows our focus instead of enlarging it. When we're creative, we're engaged in making the world better, contributing to society, and adding to the human experience. We often get to that creativity through frustration of one kind or another. However, guilt is also born of imperfection, and it's a cousin of shame, not creativity. All that is to say, Please be easy on yourselves. Rather than trying to do everything well all the time. Instead, try to do everything well enough. Define what that means for you and the important areas of your life, family, health, friendship, and then define what very good or great looks like. Aim to reach a very good or great target once a week in a couple of your most important areas and let yourself off the hook otherwise. Then reexamine your priorities as needed. It's okay to shift resources from parenting to work and vice versa. In fact, it's not only okay, it's healthy and normal."

S

Sara Grimme 36:07

Yet another really, really astute answer that I think we could all learn a lot from.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 36:12

Yes. "What do you suggest for those who live alone and might feel isolated or disconnected during this time," so I'll kind of paraphrase here, but the first thing that she emphasizes here is that there's a difference between being alone and being lonely. Being alone in and of itself isn't necessarily a problem. It's important, actually, for our mental health to get some time alone to sit quietly and process. But when it can transfer into that area of perhaps being lonely and become challenging is when it happens for long stretches of time, which many of us are experiencing right now.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 36:42

One thing that she points out here is that there's a concept from Buddhism, that asks us to recognize our feelings, but also recognize that they're real, but not true in all cases. It means when you have a strong emotion that is causing you pain, you can acknowledge it, but you can also recognize its intensity doesn't point to truth. For example, I feel lonely, that feeling is real, the loneliness is real. But I'm not actually disconnected from the people I love and this feeling won't last forever. I'm having a shared experience felt by many others that actually connects me with the world more than ever before. And she has a suggestion here for an article that, if this is a concept, an idea that's interesting to you can read a little bit more about it. It's called 'Real But Not True: How These Four Words Could Help With Strong Emotions,' it's an interesting framework to think about.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 37:30

Lastly, she recommends "find something else that can help you to find comfort and joy. It's something we all crave, and this is going to be something different for everybody, but it can help us care for ourselves, when we might be feeling disconnected. Take a dance break, take a bath, read a good book, do anything that helps you feel a little bit more connected and brings you joy and comfort. And then work that into your schedule." And she says here that it might seem silly to work it into your schedule, but as we talked about with one of our previous answers, it's actually a guaranteed way to make sure that you have the time in your day to do what's important to you, what's going to boost your brain for the rest of your day, and keep you focused in the times you need to.

S

Sara Grimme 38:04

And it does seem that if you don't build these things into your day, it's very easy for them to not happen. So I think that's really great advice.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 38:10

Absolutely. And just lastly, "any other advice or tips for finding balance and caring for ourselves during this time?" A lot of this echoes what others have said, but her main advice here is to "just forgive ourselves and others, be unapologetic in setting boundaries." We've talked a lot about that throughout, "know what your boundaries need to be and make sure you communicate them and don't feel guilty about doing it." And then "find a support system. And again, that's going to mean something different for everybody. We're not always going to know what to do, or be as productive as we want to be. We're not always going to react in the best way. We may not always meet other people's expectations. But carry those feelings and just give yourself some forgiveness when you, when you feel them, give others forgiveness when you notice that in them. Each moment is going to be different. You may feel that you failed at something and then the next time that happens, you may succeed with flying colors. Cut yourself some slack, look around, see that everyone is struggling and cut them some slack too. We are all in this together and we all have to take care of ourselves."

M

Meredith Adinolfi 39:11

Lastly, she emphasizes that "there are so many support options available here." And I think this is a really important point to end her advice on. "There are so many companies that are offering free or low cost webinars, meditations, classes, recovery meetings, anything that you could think of that supports you in your normal life, or that you may

need now and not normally, it's likely there for you and a lot of them are free or very low cost. There's also telemedicine and virtual therapy. Don't hesitate to make use of any of these support options if you need them. Now is the time to reach out for help and take care of ourselves so that we can continue to take care of each other."

S

Sara Grimme 39:45

I think that's once again really fantastic advice, and I must say thank you so much for getting that, that interview and all that wonderful advice.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 39:52

Yeah, it's just such important advice right now. And a lot of it hits on things that we don't think of ourselves. So.

S

Sara Grimme 40:00

Sometimes we need to be reminded, don't we?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 40:03

Yes, absolutely. And we know that we have one more interview. So shall we move on to that?

S

Sara Grimme 40:08

Absolutely. So this interview is with someone who's quite young, lives with their partner, has just moved in with their partner, in fact, and so it's a bit of a different perspective. So the first question is "what has been the biggest challenge in terms of balancing work and free time? Have you managed to make free time, or do you find that the workday extends?"

S

Sara Grimme 40:25

"My workday is definitely longer. The time I used to commute, even if it was just one to three days a week, was an extra three to six hours that you still listen to music or a podcast, and now has directly translated into attempts at bumping hours. Being in an office means you spend probably 20% of your day mingling with coworkers, whereas now you're much more likely to be heads down in your laptop. I've started volunteering at a food pantry delivering to families who cannot leave their homes during one of my

weekday mornings, to try to even out the imbalance in hours."

S

Sara Grimme 40:57

And the reason why, well, there's a few reasons why I love that answer, but one of the big ones is we're all stressing about not doing enough work. Many of us are doing more work than we ever have done before, and I think this is the first time I've actually spoken to someone who has recognized that fact and actually made the decision to claw some of that time back and do something that's that's a really good thing to do.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 41:20

Yeah, and I love that this person refers to the volunteer work and the charity work as a way to balance out the work time. That's a really great perspective.

S

Sara Grimme 41:32

Absolutely. So I'm going to move on to the next question. "How are you finding being stuck in a small apartment and working full time? How do you find space?" This person lives in New York.

S

Sara Grimme 41:42

"Exercise is key, going outside at the right times- really early and not on weekends, so that you avoid anyone else allows us some space. With that in mind, the space itself is something we're used to so it's not the worst thing in the world."

S

Sara Grimme 41:54

And then the next question is, "do you have a roommate? If so, how are you managing everyone working in a confined space?"

S

Sara Grimme 41:59

"I live with my partner, so we collaborate on giving each other space throughout the week. I think there's solidarity and understanding that everyone needs space. I find that my friends handle things in a similar way with their roommates. Everyone knows that everyone needs to keep everyone else in mind more than they normally do."

S

Sara Grimme 42:15

And I think, I think that's a really good point, we all just need to be a little bit more conscious of how other people are dealing with this and the fact that other people need space or time or whatever it might be so that we can all get through this.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 42:26

Yeah, I've thought a lot about people who may be living with roommates, especially situations that are perhaps less congenial than what is being described in that answer. I think that's a totally different challenge than being at home with your family or kids or your partner. So it's just another layer of this that people may be struggling with and may require a little bit of understanding and flexibility around.

S

Sara Grimme 42:47

Absolutely. And so, in terms of the next question, "what has worked for you in terms of structuring your day?"

S

Sara Grimme 42:53

"So instead of shortening the day, I keep distractions around for random times in the day. I may work on a puzzle for 20 minutes in the middle of the day, or maybe I work with a TV show on in the background, or I take a meeting while I wash dishes or cook a meal. Finding ways to do things that give your mind some sort of break, while remembering you're probably working more hours than you should, and you can dilute some hours and still accomplish what you're supposed to be doing in a given week."

S

Sara Grimme 43:18

I think that's absolutely spot on.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 43:20

Yes, I definitely agree with that advice.

S

Sara Grimme 43:22

This actually goes back to a point you made earlier, Meredith, where there are people in your team that you're watching really closely to make sure they don't overburden

themselves, because they have the perceived time to do so.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 43:33

Yes, and I've especially thought about this for newer people who might have joined the team somewhat recently and, kind of, are thrust into the situation and they may feel, kind of, a pressure or obligation to be at their desks every hour from 8 to 5, or 8 to 6, whenever their hours happen to be, to prove themselves and develop that trust that you normally would have time in the office space to develop. Those are people that I think we definitely need to be on the watch for and make sure they understand that they're entitled to flexibility, as well, and they're entitled to basically whatever they need, just as anyone else would be.

S

Sara Grimme 44:06

I think that that's a really great point. And, actually, the next question that I asked was, "what advice would you give to others, especially those starting out in their career or relatively new in the industry, on how to work during the lockdown?" And the answer there, actually, I really loved this, so to:

S

Sara Grimme 44:22

"Use the stress to build camaraderie, camaraderie with your coworkers." So for anyone who is new, this is advice from someone who's been around for a while, "start the first 20% of every call, and ask people how they are. Just because you can't see people doesn't mean you can't continue to build relationships with your coworkers. And if you are running a team, set that kind of culture and it will be followed. Drive the idea that you don't need to spend the whole meeting talking about work. The work will be there tomorrow, but the time to detox is what's going to keep your staff healthy throughout this pandemic."

S

Sara Grimme 44:53

I just thought that was brilliant. I love that answer. It's, I think it's absolutely spot on. We're all working so many hours, starting the first 20% of every call to just have a chat. That's okay.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 45:05

Yeah, I love that too. It also allows everyone involved to take a breath, because I'm sure we can all relate to this, running from one meeting to the next, and one discussion to the

next, to being busy and feeling a bit harried. So if you have that 20% of time upfront to just remind each other that we're human beings, we're people first. That, I think is a welcome, it's not exactly a break, but it can operate a little bit more like one.

S

Sara Grimme 45:28

Right. And just to go to the final question, "what has been most surprising to you since the stay-at-home order started?" And I think, Meredith, this relates to a point that came up earlier. And that is, "the most surprising thing is that I'm taking mental health days for the first time in my life. I recognized that I was hitting the hours too hard, and I knew I had to take some time off to recover. Given that a lot of vacations might not actually happen, a day off here or there can really make a difference." And I think that's a point I just really hope people pay attention to. It's something that is happening for all of us. And we have to make sure, it is exactly what Kumsal said at the very beginning, we have to make sure we look after ourselves.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 46:09

Yes, well said on that point.

S

Sara Grimme 46:11

Okay, so that, that is all we have for today and I hope that there was some good advice in there for all of you, regardless of your career stage of your job. We've really enjoyed this, and we've really enjoyed speaking to people who have been able to give us some really, really powerful information, some of which I myself will be taking on board. Any final thoughts from you, Meredith?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 46:31

Yes, just echoing that. Thank you to all those who gave us comments. We know it's a busy time, and there isn't always time to be responding to extra emails or engaging in extra conversation. So thank you, to those who were named, and also those who were not, on this. We really appreciate your comments. I learned a lot. I took some great ideas that I'm going to start trying right away myself.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 46:50

And we will be back in normal times with our next podcast. And in the meantime, I hope everybody stays well and stays safe.

