

Moving Through 2020

Ten tips for dancers on planning, creating and looking after yourself in the current times.

Written by Jorja Follina, freelance dance artist based in Scotland.

1. Routine Routine (and sometimes not) Routine

I think it's important to establish a daily routine, whatever that means for you - not so that it's set in stone and you have to stick to it 100% of the time, but so that you have a frame of reference. For example, I'm setting my alarm for the same time each day and aiming to get up and do some sort of movement first thing. This doesn't mean that it happens (or happens in the same way) every day, but I have a rough guide to follow and can acknowledge when I need a day to break the routine.

I've been learning a lot about circadian rhythms recently and particularly the effects that light and dark can have on our mood and energy. For example, exposure to bright, natural light first thing in the morning really helps to wake me up and gives me a little energy boost.

2. Importance x Urgency = Priority

We all know the feeling of drowning in a neverending to-do list. Consider these two factors before trying to tackle it all at once: *importance* and *urgency*.

One tool you can use to prioritise tasks is this calculation:

Give each task on your list a score out of 5 for importance, and a score out of 5 for urgency (5 being the most important or most urgent, and 0 being the least). Multiply these two numbers together. For example food prep might have an importance of 3 and an urgency of 4, giving it a score of 12.

Now rearrange your list to start with the highest scoring tasks, and end with the lowest. With this in mind, you can move on to scheduling your week and clearly see which things need to be prioritised.

For some people this might be a task you use in a literal sense each week, and for others it might just be a nice reminder to really consider the order in which you complete tasks.

(p.s rest and fun are also important, and sometimes urgent!)

3. Schedule Your Week

Planning can be your best friend or your worst enemy. Try to set yourself specific and realistic plans each day. Where possible, assign these tasks specific amounts of time you are willing to spend, and decide when you're going to tackle each one. An example I use a

lot is assigning 30 minutes a day to catching up on emails - rather than letting them distract me from other tasks throughout the day.

Again, it's not about clinging to the plan or feeling disappointed if you don't follow every detail, but taking the time to do this at the beginning of the week can save you from the page-long list which can often seem unachievable. Take one task at a time.

4. Piggybacking Habits

Small efforts add up. Baby steps can break down tasks and make them more achievable. If you are struggling to remember or find time to create a new "good habit", then consider "piggybacking" it onto an existing one. There are so many behaviours which we automatically perform every day, so creating a link between these and new behaviours can act as a helpful reminder.

Social scientist BJ Fogg calls these "Tiny Habits" and emphasises that it's not about needing to increase or progress the goal - if sometimes you feel like doing more, great, but give yourself credit for achieving this tiny goal you set out to do, every time.

Here are some examples:

"Every time I'm waiting for the kettle to boil I will close my eyes and take 3 breaths"

"After I brush my teeth I will do 3 squats"

"While I'm cooking I will listen to my podcast"

5. Listen To Your Body - Find Enjoyment

This is advice I think many dancers are familiar with, but I'm finding it even more important at the moment. During these strange times and with our usual routines disrupted, many of us are finding our energy levels varying each day. Try not to fight this, but allow yourself to feel how you're feeling.

Personally I'm trying to find some sort of movement every day, but letting my energy level determine what that is. Some days I might do morning yoga, a HIIT class, ballet barre and then some improvisation. Other days I might roll around on the floor for 5 minutes, go for a walk or do a mini dance with my hands.

There are no brownie points for forcing yourself to do more - work with your energy levels each day to really find enjoyment in moving, or however it is you choose to spend your time.

6. Experiment Without Expectation

So many of us are using the time and space we're finding in this situation to try new things, which is brilliant. Maybe you're making bread, crocheting, drawing, or creating dance in a new way. This is great, but I find often as artists we can become fixated on *producing*. Allow

yourself to enjoy the *process* and learn through it. Experiment without expectation, learn from the failures - and you might surprise yourself now and then with where this leads you.

7. Eat, Sleep, Relax

As dancers we are very aware of the incredible benefits of movement on our bodies and minds, but it can also be helpful to remind ourselves of other factors affecting wellbeing. Take care of your sleep pattern, notice how what you eat affects your mood and energy, and prioritise time for relaxation.

If you're interested in learning more about these factors I'd highly recommend Dr Rangan Chatterjee's podcast, *Feel Better Live More*, in which he discusses what he calls the "Four Pillars" of health: *eat, sleep, move, relax*.

8. Ask For Help

I, like many freelance artists, enjoy being independent and don't often go out of my way to ask for help from others. But with so much uncertainty at the moment and a lot of time on my hands, over the past few months I finally decided to reach out. I have been amazed by the kindness and support others have offered, and the strong sense of community within our sector.

Some of this support has been through accessing online coaching and mentoring programmes which have been amazing, while I've also enjoyed and found so much value in conversations with peers, companies and organisations who are all experiencing this in their own ways. I have benefitted from the experience and positivity others have offered, as well as realising I also had a lot to offer in return.

9. Don't Be Shy

Promote yourself, share your work, ask for feedback. You may be surprised at its reach and the value others might find in it. Having said this, putting yourself out there doesn't mean you have to post a video every day or create something new every week. Consider the full range of ways in which you can contribute to the industry, keep yourself involved and be a part of the bigger conversations that are happening at the moment.

Two months ago I definitely didn't see myself teaching online classes, recording podcasts, researching people's daily lives, presenting talks, or writing a blog - but if these might benefit individuals or even our sector, then why not give them a try.

10. The Bigger Picture

Understandably, so much of the content we see, conversations we have and work we are doing right now is consumed with the current pandemic the whole world is dealing with. It's important to acknowledge the situation and have these conversations, but also to be able to zoom out and see the bigger picture. COVID-19 and the lockdown will have lasting implications for the way in which we are able to work and create for some time - but things will get better. When it feels like all we can see and hear is determined by this virus, try to step back and consider your aims for the next day, month and year.

To conclude, I'd like to share a piece of advice which a fantastic mentor offered to me recently and it really stuck with me:

Each week, think about doing:

-Something to maintain or develop your practice now

-Something to develop yourself for, or invest in, the future

-Something to offer back to the community