

Post Pandemic Potential



By Eve Menezes Cunningham

By the time you read this, you'll probably have had both doses of your vaccine. Things are already beginning to open up again and there's a sense of optimism as we begin to see people we've missed for months and do the kinds of things we never expected to have to live without. People have been going misty-eyed watching strangers meet up for coffee.

How are you doing?

Maybe you've been thriving throughout this very strange time. Did you learn how to cook more complex things, do DIY tasks you'd have previously felt were beyond your capabilities? Write that novel? Create and sustain healthier habits?

Or maybe, like most humans, it's been more of a struggle than you might have expected (had you been able to predict such a thing). Have you been stressed and anxious about the ever-changing public health messaging (beyond the consistent social distance, mask, wash hands)?

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Overwhelmed with home schooling? Are old habits suddenly back that you may have thought you'd overcome years ago?

As we ease back out into the world now, I hope you'll find the following ideas helpful in terms of reconnecting with that sense of post pandemic potential – but doing so with a heavy dose of self-compassion and acceptance.

Health and fitness goals

What's your goal here? Maybe your old fitness routines became inaccessible as gyms and pools shut down. Perhaps you've developed fitness routines for the first time in decades, making the most of your government-allotted daily walk, online classes and other exercise options.

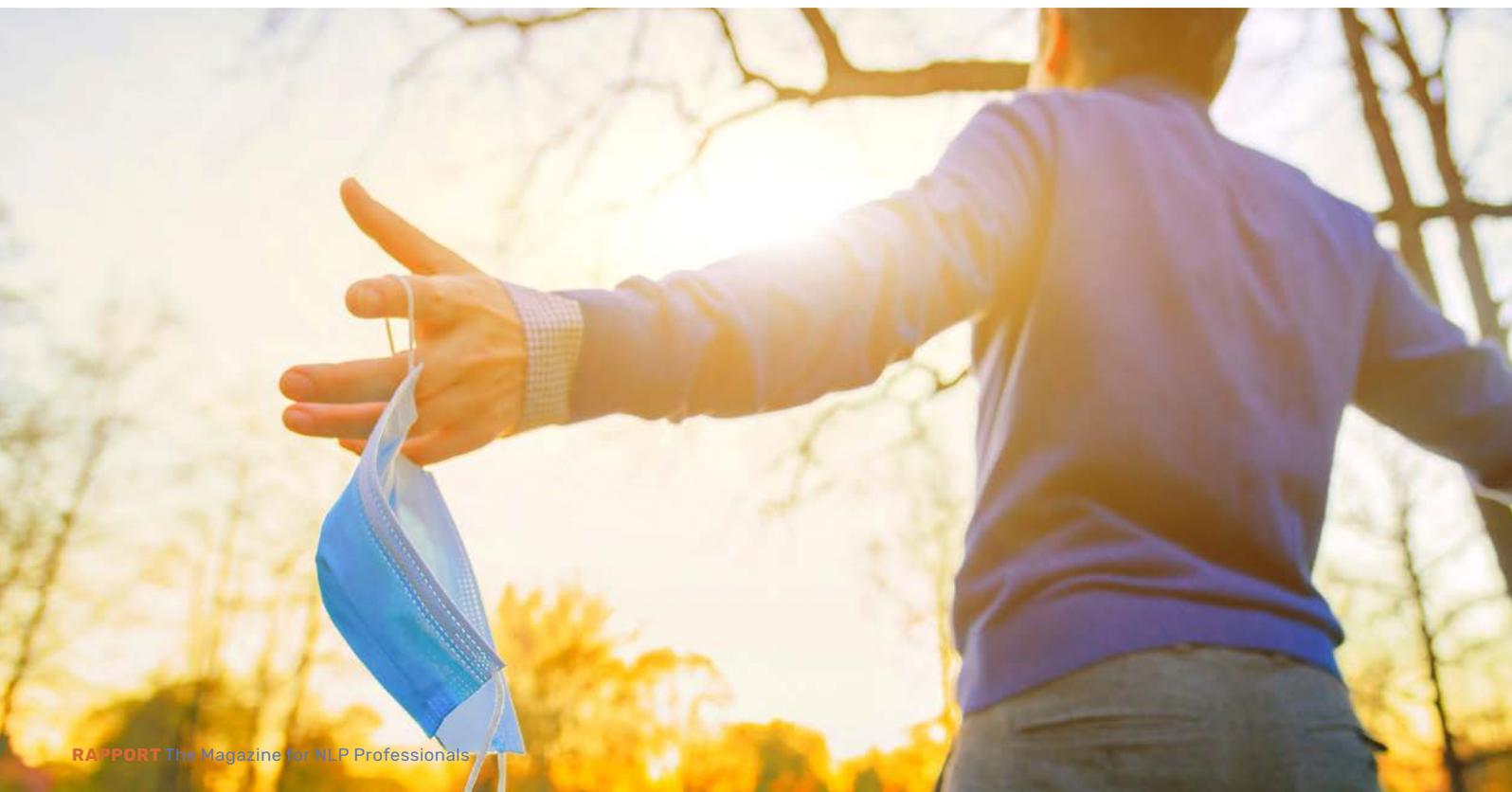
What would be a well-formed outcome in this area for you? How are you doing (assessing it with honesty as well as compassion)? How might you adapt

your approach to better suit fluctuating energy levels and headspace? How might you create a spectrum so you can do *something* towards these goals each day while accounting for any obstacles that might crop up?

Mental health

I imagine that people who haven't had *any* mental health bumps in the road are as rare as unicorns – whether that's been increased anxiety at the idea of getting back out there (if you were happily cocooned in lockdown) or the desperation to connect with fellow humans when these everyday connections were suddenly outlawed.

We're wired to connect and the idea that things that help us feel better could potentially kill each other has been challenging for everyone. You may have watched loved ones get sick, had funerals





and weddings that haven't felt remotely like the ceremonies you would have wanted, or been sick yourself. Maybe it's dealing with polarised opinions, being out of work or overworked, worried about money?

Now that things are beginning to ease up, consider what might be a well-formed outcome in terms of your mental health. Again, assessing it with honesty and compassion, how are you doing? How might you adapt your approach to better suit fluctuating energy levels and headspace?

If you've managed to put some healthy boundaries and habits in place during this time, how might you sustain things as life gets back to a new normal?

Work and creative endeavours

In some ways, mothers have a built in 'pattern interrupt' with maternity leave, where they often do something different when back in the workforce. It may have been forced by employers not supporting part time hours or other adjustments, or other ideas may simply have come to the surface, having had a break with time to think (while keeping a brand-new human being alive and dealing with all that new parenthood entails).

This global pandemic means women and men of all ages have had to reassess, pivot and even dream bigger. Some people have struggled to harness the headspace needed to be creative while others have been inspired to make new or long-held dreams a reality.

Film director Nicole Russin-McFarland says she wanted to be Peter Jackson after seeing the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. "The idea of being immersed in the best of blockbuster filmmaking in New Zealand sounded tempting. With the pandemic, I decided, 'Why not?' As a result, I'm working towards fundraising from others in 2022-2023 to film in Wellington at Jackson's Stone Street Studios. I have been making films in the UK during the lockdown, working with actors working from home to show I am worthy of being invested in to rent that space."

Maybe you know exactly what you'd like to be doing creatively or in terms of work as we emerge from our cocoons. Maybe this is a completely new thought for you. Either way, what would be a well-formed outcome for you in this area? How are you doing (again, assessing it with honesty as well as compassion)? How might you adapt your approach to better suit fluctuating energy levels and headspace?

The work culture has shifted dramatically and putting some thought into the changes that have been forced on you and your business, assessing what's been better than you might have anticipated and what you really miss, will help you co-create a more rewarding workplace for the future.

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Relationships

Maybe you're emerging from your cocoon feeling more loved up than ever? Are you happy to be seeing other loved ones (and strangers) but quite enjoyed all that time to yourself?

Perhaps you're spending a lot of energy reining in your homicidal urges because the way your loved ones breathe is so grating! Maybe you've been in lockdown alone, thinking about all the strangers you'll be hugging soon. Perhaps you've ended a long-term relationship because you couldn't delude yourself about it any longer. Maybe you're ready to join a dating site or ask friends to set you up because you envy even the couples whose breathing is irritating each other...

What would be a well-formed outcome for what your relationships look like? Is what you're currently doing working? How might you adapt your approach to

better suit fluctuating energy levels and headspace? This might take a bit longer as you reassess *all* your relationships – who have you missed the most? Who *haven't* you missed?

Parenting

Can you *imagine* having known, when you decided to become a parent, that one day schools would suddenly close and you'd have to navigate endless changes with work while home schooling and helping your children address an increasingly uncertain world? Containing their emotional rollercoasters as well as your own?

"I realised pretty quickly that I needed to move from my masculine 'get stuff done' energy to be more nurturing and to really listen," says Wendy Molyneux, the Heartfulness Coach. Wendy has been locked down with her teenage daughter, who struggles with anxiety and OCD. "We tried to sit down for 'Tea at 3' most days and just touch base. I had been up for hours working. She had likely not long got up and it was a tough lesson to stop trying to control her and just let that be. I aim to do my Heartful Breathing meditation twice a day (it usually ends up being once!)."

"Getting my daughter involved helps move her from her over-stimulated headspace into her calm, energetic heart space. It's a work in progress but we will get there. Lockdown has been a great opportunity to shine a light into some dark places and positives have come out of it in terms of our connection and me being inspired to help other 'failing' parents."

Now that schools have reopened, what would be a well-formed outcome in terms of the way you parent? What's been working about your existing approach? How might you do better for you and them by amping up the self-compassion? What have your kids learned from the experience? Have you talked to *them* about elements you might want to keep?

Whether you choose one area to reassess or several, be patient with yourself as you make progress. ■

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