

April ESP President's Message

Greetings from my home office! I hope that you are all safe, healthy and finding your way in the new world brought to us by COVID-19. As Extension professionals, we pride ourselves on business and productivity. Our current situation has us a little off-kilter because we aren't dashing from one program or meeting to the next. Several have remarked that their calendar hasn't been this clear since high school! I ran across an article from *The Chronicles of Higher Education* that provides some great advice for adapting to the need to feel productive during a lengthy crisis situation. In the article "[Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure](#)," Aisha Ahmad, reinforces that fear, anxiety and a sense of productivity paralysis are normal reactions. She offers that the "normal" we return to post-COVID-19 will not be the same normal. The way we live, work and educate will be changed forever, in many ways for the better. Ahmad proposes that we'll adjust in stages.

Stage one is what she calls "Security." Take some time to secure your own oxygen mask, and then focus on the health and safety of your loved ones. Build a support network and find ways to connect with others outside of work. I've been hosting virtual story time each week for my great-nieces and nephews. Four generations gather online for 30-60 minutes each week to hear a story, but more importantly to check on each other and offer emotional support. In this stage, allow yourself some grace. It's OK that you aren't as productive as usual. Although social media has been a great way to stay connected while we're physically separated, it can be difficult to see coworkers putting out awesome programming on social media while you're still adjusting to a toilet paper shortage, your new role as an elementary or high school teacher, and your spouse vacuuming during your Zoom. It's OK to be at a different place than your peers. Just breathe.

Ahmad calls the second stage, "The Mental Shift." During this phase, the mind and body begin to adjust to your new normal and a sense of stability returns. It's OK to spend some time in denial. Denial is a normal stage of grief and adjustment. You'll get through it. The shift doesn't happen at the same rate for everyone, so continue to practice patience and give yourself some grace. Give your colleagues grace. We **will** be productive again. As you make the shift, you're likely to find new and improved ways of working. Focus on outcomes and impact instead of measuring business.

Finally, in stage three Ahmad says we "Embrace a New Normal". If you've taken time to meet your basic physiological and safety needs and allowed yourself to work through denial to come to terms with your new reality, you will begin to thrive once more. Ahmad reminds us that this is a marathon, not a sprint. Pace yourself to avoid burnout. During this time, keep things in perspective. Be thankful for what you *can* do instead of focusing on what you can't. You can work in your pajamas. You can catch up on your reading. You can develop some fantastic Zoom and Facebook Live skills. You can enjoy family meals. You can learn with your kids (I'm sorry if you get to learn algebra). You can continue to hone your professional skills. You can make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Your KSRE and Epsilon Sigma Phi family is here to support you. Reach out if you need something. Check in on your coworkers. If you've embraced your new normal, lend a helping hand to someone who isn't there quite yet. We'll get through this together!

Stay safe and healthy.

Jennifer Wilson
Alpha Rho Chapter President