
Excel

Unblending work and life – Get your head in the game by establishing transition rituals

by STEPHEN KEARNEY

As many of us grapple with the challenges of working from home, we are learning that it's sometimes difficult to shift our mental space when we shift our physical space—particularly when they are in such physical proximity.

Often our mind stays in the WFH office, even though our body is in the kitchen or out for a walk trying to spot teddy bears with the kids. This can lead to frustration, resentment, stress and irritability. To others, this can look like being distracted when talking to whānau or other people in your bubble, or forgetting small but potentially important details of both work and home life.

Providing our mind with a clear and consistent signal that we are shifting from one mode to another can help smooth the transition, and the more we do this, the better our minds become at it. One way to help your mind with this is a transition ritual.

A transition ritual is a sequenced set of mental and physical actions that signal and support a change in mental state. They can be used to enable a shift in mental focus or in physical arousal. They are employed by high performers across a range of contexts. High performing sportspeople use them to shift focus, such as [Johnny Wilkinson's pre-kick ritual](#). Soldiers do slow walk-throughs of critical drills before embarking on missions, to focus their mind and get their head in the game.

A transition ritual need not be long or convoluted. It can be as simple as putting your work stuff away or tidying up each day in the same way. It might be something a little more deliberate. For instance, for myself, when I head back into

the house from our home office, I spend 60 secs doing a short breathing exercise like this one [here](#). This helps me decompress and let go of work, and begin to get present in a different way for a different context. However, you can do whatever works for you, it might be pausing for a minute in the garden and feeling the sun on your face. It might be listening to a particularly meaningful music track.

As you do your ritual, if you notice your mind drifting to work, deliberately bring it back to the moment. And perhaps connect with whatever value or quality you want to bring into the context you are going into. It might be patience, compassion, decisiveness or calm. If you aren't sure what values matter to you in that context, then it might be helpful to write down a few thoughts. Connect with the felt sense of whatever value matters to you, and how you would be acting if you were living that value. This makes it easier for your actions to be intentional, rather than reactive.

Times when establishing a transition ritual might be helpful include:

- Before going to bed, particularly if you have been working in the evening or checking your emails on the couch whilst you watch Love is Blind out of the corner of your eye (hypothetically).
- As you move between your work-from-home space and your family space.
- As you sit down for meals together.
- As you sit down for your tele-hui with your friends and whānau outside your bubble.

In a world that can feel reactive and overwhelming, transition rituals are one small way we can be more intentional as we choose what to do with our head, heart and hands, so we might turn them toward who and what matters.