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My way of working

CJ Walker explains how she manages her time to keep up-to-date with trends and complete her work.

I was going to start this article by explaining that no two days are the same; that each day is typically untypical. And then I saw Catherine Cotter already said exactly that in her Autumn 2017 *Communicator* article. (Well done, Catherine!) So now I'm not sure where to start. I think our field is expanding so rapidly that this must be true for most of us, just in different ways. So I'll try to tell you about my day.

Instead of describing any single day, which wouldn't reflect any context, I'll try to explain how I've broken things down for a general daily routine — my blueprint for work, if you will.

I own a recruitment agency in digital communications in France that has recently moved into providing training and consultation in digital communications as well. I've been doing this for eleven years now but it feels like I'm still learning how to do my job, as there is so much to do to keep up!

My work involves a mixture of several languages. English, of course; but because I live in France, I interact with the world around me too. Some of my communication is in Swedish because my Swedish colleagues feel more at ease with me expressing their ideas in their native tongue. They do a lot of excellent research, so I like to keep the creative pathways open. I read a lot in Norwegian, Danish and German too.

I work alone in my home office, but I have two employees and several contractors who are all in different countries so I'm talking or chatting with somebody using communications technology almost all of the time.

> ❝ *Emails are organised by urgency, language, and time required to respond.* ❞

Unless I'm writing. Or eating. (I go out to lunch a lot with real people.)

My day starts early. It's my time to myself to prep what's coming. I wake up between 05h and 05h30 and start writing before anything else is filtered for the day in my head. Then I make a strong cup of coffee (or three) and check the news — first world, then local, then specifically in our field. This can be on social media or saved articles on the net. I take notes because stuff always comes up later and I like to be able to refer to it. Evernote is my friend. I have quite a complex taxonomy set up within it with my own metadata. I think it's beautiful!

Next, I start the email organisation. This gargantuan task gets broken down by urgency, language, and time required to respond. I prioritise by chunking those that can be dealt with by quick responses together leaving the hardest stuff for later in the day when I can sit down to think with some more context. But at this point in the day, the organising is mostly an outline of what I'll have to do. Finishing up is usually something that happens in the evening.

> ❝ *My goal is to finish my work by Friday.* ❞

I wake my children up and go through the prepare-the-day routine with them, and send them off to school. Then I go on a run or walk or do something physical to wake my body up before everyone gets into their offices. This helps me reflect on what's coming and how to schedule around it from a bit of a detached distance after the email overwhelm. Some of my best ideas come during this time.

At 09h15, the calls start in France and Sweden. I can't call the UK or Ireland before 10h because of the time difference. This part of the day is usually spent talking to clients and collaborators to check on project status, recruitment requirements, etc because they're in the office. With job application candidates, I often have to talk to them after work hours.

I reserve the time from 11h to 12h30 for putting together the items/documents requested by clients and collaborators during the morning. This stuff is the creative part.

Then, I have lunch. I don't eat at my desk, and because I'm in France, lunch can last a while. And because it's France, the food is really good. But it's nice to see another human face during the workday.

After lunch, I work on the non-creative admin because there's lots of it when you run a company — and especially so in an admin-driven country like France. I leave the radio on in the background, and change the broadcast country/language according to what day of the week it is. Then I make a lot of coffee to help motivate me to plough through the necessaries.

I usually have bookkeeping and paperwork to keep up to date, people to contact about specific projects, contractors and colleagues to keep up with, marketing ideas to develop, articles to write, website-related tasks to look at, and online networking to do. I make sure to update my calendar and the database for the team during this time.

And, of course, the eternal email load again. I do what I can to get through it now, prioritise what I'll have to do in the evening, and what has to get pushed further forward. My goal is to finish it all by Friday so I can shut my computer and be with my family at the weekend. I live in a very optimistic state.

I work until my second son gets home about 18h00 and then I go to the kitchen to my parental duties. Adolescent boys eat a bunch. So do their friends. But it's a good break and fun to cook that much.

After supper (dinner), I make the calls to people who need to talk outside of office hours. These are usually candidates, but can also be colleagues and people about voluntary work. I try to work only three nights a week, but it's a struggle to reign it in when I think I have a good idea I want to develop or I have a spate of really good candidates.

I read to learn about trends in our field and who's doing cool stuff before I go to sleep. Sometimes I take notes, sometimes I just read. This can be books, podcasts, audiobooks, online courses, etc. I use this knowledge to help make connections for my clients and candidates, and to help with course development and consulting, of course.

If the reading I've done was online, I read from a book for about 30 minutes before going to sleep to avoid that 'screeny' feeling you get if you stay up too late on the computer.

> *Email is broken down by urgency, language, and time required to respond.*

I love what I do because I get to constantly explore my deep curiosity for where things are headed. This could be about our field, the technology and applications driving it, or what makes people doing this work tick. I love putting these things together, whether it's a client looking for a perfect-fit employee, a talented professional looking for the perfect opportunity, or someone who can explain what influence digital communication will have in the lives of our children when they're adults. Making sense of things and making appropriate matches feels like a bigger task than I can ever fully cover, and I have the perfect job to enable me to explore that for the rest of my career. **C**

Reference
Cotter C (2017) 'A typically untypical day' *Communicator*, Autumn 2017: 46

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The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC) is the largest UK body for people engaged in technical communication. The ISTC was formed in 1972 from the Presentation of Technical Information Group (est 1948), the Technical Publications Association (est 1953, later the Institution of Technical Authors and Illustrators) and the Institute of Technical Publicity and Publications (est 1963).

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