

This week's question to consider:

How do I continue doing any of this work when I am so tired that I cannot feel rested no matter how much I sleep? I am starting to feel despair that things will never change.

Pro tip: You don't. That is how. The opposite of overwhelm is being in a state of doing nothing. This nothingness is a crucial element in the cycle of social justice work.

There is a real danger in our profession, educators. We are living during a difficult season in time. We have been asked to adjust to constantly changing expectations, with the overlying constant that is a state of fear around getting seriously sick. Replanning is second nature, and "pandemic" is a loaded word. Our world has been shaped by the past two years or so.

In activism, as in education, as in all caregiving professions, there is the looming threat of burnout. We open ourselves to varied and vast emotional landscapes. There is no way of escaping the intensity of the job while we are in it. It's an intense job.

Luckily, nestling periods of absolute rest between intense periods of activity is an essential component of the cycle of activism.



The timeline varies from person to person on how much time to spend at each of the five stages in the activism cycle. Perhaps you are quick to notice a particular terrible thing you want to work on. Maybe the thinking stage is intense and takes a very extremely long time. Possibly, you've allowed for enough rest between things and you're ready to do another thing. It's an individual thing and depends on your relationship with the Terrible Thing you Noticed. Each of these stages can also occur somewhat out of order. The most important thing to know is that rest is part of this cycle. In fact, it's essential.

I've been asked by a number of people who know me how I am able to do this work as my job, seeing as these issues touch on my life personally. After all, I am never not brown, nor am I ever a heterosexual human, to name two. The intersectionality of my identity means that certain things cannot escape my notice. This is true all the time, though, whether I do work of this nature or have an unconnected sort of job. The difference is that I now have the ability to channel those experiences into my work and use them to spark ideas and build resources wherever they apply, and try to enact change on a larger scale, rather than being limited to one-on-one conversations around these topics. There's a reason, after all, that I am able to speak and teach and write about these topics so often. I've thought about a lot of this for years.

Beyond that, though, I have carefully considered how to do this work as a job. The answer is multilayered, but there are two essential components that enable me to do this work. First, I work in the counselling department, where there is a team of extraordinary like-minded humans. Much of their work intersects with mine, and there is a lot of collaboration. Second, I have set firm boundaries around rest, especially. This means that I think about these issues and do my work, but during non-working hours, I do my best to think about absolutely nothing and spend time doing things like watching my cats stalk the squirrel on the back porch (that squirrel is *daring*, I do not know where it gets the *audacity*, and neither do my three cats, which is why they are actively monitoring the situation). I protect my sleep more than I have ever protected sleep in my entire life. And when I'm not in a headspace to learn more things, I don't force it.

Ultimately, if you are in a state of feeling tired, unable to take in any new information, or coming anywhere near a state of despair, this means you are in the rest part of the cycle.

All this to say, take a break from actively thinking about these things when you need to. And when you feel rested and ready, please, come back, because we need you.

Recommended Reading:

Article by K. Jagoo (October 2020) | [How to Rest and Recover While You Fight for Social Change](#)

Take care this holiday season, everyone. Weekly columns will resume in January.

Rest is resistance,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach
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