

Go the Distance

Jemma on going the distance

Contributors name:

Jemma Cawood

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I'm studying English Language and Literature degree. I just had GCSEs at that time I left school. I left school at 16, and then I went straight into work. The first year I went into work, I was actually part time. So I worked 2 and 1/2 days a week and I did English Language and Literature A-level in the first year.

I was 24 when I decided to do distance learning. I was pregnant, and I've been made redundant. I decided that I wanted to take a career break while I was a mom. But when I returned to work, I didn't want to go back to sales and I wanted to go into a different environment, which I knew would be more flexible and I could then work that around being a mom as well. I've been studying for nearly six years now.

At the start of the year, I try and get as far ahead as possible. So I know that I'm going to have a cold in December. It's going to happen. All the kids are going to have a cold, or something's going to happen. So at the start of the year, the first thing that I'll do is try and plow through it as much as I can. I can usually start a couple of weeks early as well because I get all my books early, so I can start a couple of weeks early.

I try and plan that I study between Sundays and Thursdays because they're usually days that I wouldn't go out and socialize anyway. I study at home on the sofa. I don't tend to move. I sit there, as soon as it starts, get my laptop fired up, I'll get my books out, and I sit there and I try not to move as much as possible for the whole evening.

I've tried to time things to happen as much as possible so they don't clash with my studies. We moved house during the summer of my third and fourth year. During what would have been my second or third year, I was pregnant. The hardest thing was that I was incredibly tired, and I had just found that I was falling asleep a lot while I was trying to study in the evenings.

So I tried to give myself extra days and extra time to do the studying, and I also had my dad helping me out as well. But luckily, we got through that. I had the majority of the pregnancy while I was on summer leave, gave birth in September, and then started my next year in October.

I think there's always been times where I've thought that I'm not as good a mom because of everything that I'm doing. When you're juggling everything in terms of work, in terms of studying, in terms of having a social life, there's always been times where I've thought I'm not giving everything to being a mom.

One of the key drivers for me when I started the degree was that I wanted to be a role model to my children. And I wanted to be able to come out at the end of it and say, mummy's got a degree and look what I've done and look how I achieved it. I've shared some of the things that I've been learning with the children. I've spent a bit of time reading about absolute poverty and children who were living in poverty and things. I think it was important for me to talk to the girls about how lucky they are.

One year I actually studied I did a module on childhood, which really enlightened me, and I also did children's literature one year. When I went back to work two years ago, I told them I explained to them the whole situation about how I had children and how it's distance learning. And for them, I think, it was a positive. I've now got a permanent position. But they've been incredibly helpful in terms of flexibility, in terms of childcare. They know what's going on in terms of studying.

My boss said to me one day, can you tell me what dates your actual assignments have got to be in, so I know just in case you're going to turn up one day really tired and I know not to ask you about it too much.

At work, I can be answering phones. I can be helping out doing meetings, going to different meetings. I can be sending out lots of emails, constantly seem to be writing something, responding to somebody, and then getting on the phone to people trying to chase different things that need to be chased.

I think that my studying does help in terms of the way that I've got better at writing, just writing things. I think, I can-- it sounds strange, but I can write an email better because of I've got more used to writing assignments. I've learnt to get my point across better, so I suppose speaking in meetings. I've learned that kind of negotiation tactics and things, so that's quite good.

There were times where, certainly, motivation's been difficult. What one of the best things to do that I've found to turn it around is to focus on aspects that you can find interesting. My final assignment, I've decided to write on Donald Trump's tweets, just because I find him absolutely fascinating.

We do have a student Facebook page, which in this last year I've joined. It's just nice to have that someone else who understands what you're going through. I'm so motivated at the moment to get it done because I'm so excited about finishing. My advice to somebody who's maybe struggling with motivation would be that the end is in sight. Just remember the reasons why you started it. Remember the why you took it on. Think about how good it will feel when you finish because that's certainly what drives me through.

I'm really lucky to have an incredibly supportive husband. He pushed me to do it when I was talking about it. He said, why not? You do it if that's what you want to do. Over the six years, life hasn't stood still. I've had two children. I've moved house. So much has happened in those six years that I've been doing it, but it's been great. I've not regretted one moment of it now.

There's a huge sense of achievement for me turning 30. The fact that it coincides with the week that I finish this degree is just amazing. It's really good for me. I'm so excited about turning 30 and looking forward to what the next decade holds, basically.