

Anonymous

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Just before he began his fellowship at Cambridge, Philippe found out that one of his parents, who lives in another country, had been diagnosed with a progressive form of dementia that also involved a gradually increasing paralysis. Although Philippe could not take up the role of the primary carer due to the distance, the circumstances made him reflect on his current situation in life and what he wanted to achieve. There was also the ever-growing possibility of future health crises that would require him to travel home at short notice to assist his other family members.

As he approached the end of his fellowship's first year, he realized that there would be a variety of benefits if he reduced his hours to half-time and worked from home. First of all, it would give him the flexibility to return to his native country to assist with caring responsibilities at a short notice, should it be necessary. Second, it would afford him more time to work through some complicated academic puzzles: spending less time per day but more days on one particularly complex issue would be beneficial. "Often it is vital to be able to step away from a problem in order to return to it with a fresh perspective," he says. Philippe had also recently certified to open a private practice in a helping profession and was contemplating whether his future lay in that profession or in academia. His time off work he could therefore use to do some trial work to develop that perspective. Finally, Philippe had come to perceive the academic system, in which long working hours and many administrative activities still appear to be necessary for success, as confining and rather counter-productive to his creative thinking.

Therefore since the second year of his fellowship, Philippe has been working 50% FTE. He usually spends two and a half days a week on his academic work, although "in reality, academic work spills over into other areas of my week", he says. Most days he works from home, but comes into the department regularly for meetings and seminars, especially during term time. Fortunately, he was able to extend his funding and will therefore stay two years longer than originally expected. This also meant that he is now able to space out his research trips so that they impact less on his family life. Since he has taken on the role as a Director of Studies for one of the colleges, the extension of his contract furthermore provided continuity to both students and staff of college and department.

Although his department and sponsor were very supportive of his change in working arrangements, Philippe thought that it might impede his progression since he would be perceived as not being interested in an academic career. This is not true, however, and he would consider a full-time job in academia if a healthy balance of research and administrative work and life outside of it can be achieved. At the same time, he is now able to imagine a career that progresses beyond the strictures of academia.