

LETTER OF VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE

meaningful expressions and understandings from different cultures on
how to deal with the crisis



✉ **Pandemic, work-life balance, new normal** **By Anonymous**

Pressured to stay in the office overtime, I escape finally around 11pm so that I won't miss the last train home. I make my way back to my sorry home base past midnight and then drop onto the bed. Next to the bed stands my shiny guitar I bought with my bonus salary 5 months ago. I've barely touched it. I try to fall asleep dreaming someday I'll be playing the guitar in front of thousands of my imaginary fans.

The morning arrives at 7am, shave and shower done, run to the station, get myself packed like sardines and transported safely to the same place I managed to leave 10 hours ago. Repeat this tomorrow. Repeat this next week, next month, next year, until the pandemic hits.

Now I spend the whole day in my sorry home base that has turned into my sorry home office. Now it is time to start remote work, remote meeting, remote fake-smiling. I still have to shave and make myself presentable. However, no more overtime in the office, no more packed like sardines, no more reluctantly joining nights out with my colleagues, a tad bit more time before and after going to bed. Is this the work-life balance that I was told about? Heard it exists only in a fictive land of Far West known as Europe but now it's found here in Japan. What would I do with this new found privilege to balance my 'work-life'? Staying home made me realize that I didn't have the 'life' bit to begin with. I am still devoid of energy to go out of my home base all the same. But all is well here. This is where I wanted to be.

I'll happily stay home. I may read those books I was meaning to read. I may finally play those games I bought only because they were on sale. I'll binge watch some subtitled American series - yes it's not only entertainment but part of my continuous self-improvement. I'll order absolutely unnecessary gadgets on Amazon. They'll arrive tomorrow cos I'm a Prime member. I don't even have to receive them in person - they'll leave them in front of the door cos the Coronavirus is out there. Finally I might get to play that guitar (rather quietly cos surely my neighbours are stayin' home likewise) and I might do that in front of my virtual fans on YouTube. This is the new normal and I'm loving it. Or loving part of it at least.

A number of major Japanese corporations is now encouraging remote work. Some are going all the way to get all the employees to work remotely. Could this pandemic be the catalyst for change? Much needed change for the toxic work culture and corporate office life? Or would they somehow manage to find the way to transfer all the toxic bits of office work seamlessly into the online environment anyway? I have my apprehensions. However, for the time being, even the management of my sorry company, who remain forever fond of Toshiba fax machines, decided to follow the government guidelines, the suit of more relevant top corporations and tech companies. So it took this global pandemic to cause the ripple. But this might actually bring the lasting change.

This might give us the chance to balance our work-life or to finally work on the life part that was non-existent. Or can I at least wish for a bit more time to stay home and breath?

*6 weeks later I started commuting again and it's back to the old normality. Gutted but everyone tells me that I should be grateful that I wasn't made redundant. They aren't wrong, probably.

Anonymous,
30 years old,
Japan