

## Getting on and getting along through the lock down: Suggestions customized for your personality



(Image: Pixabay)

We are, wonderfully, all different. Each of us will get on and get along in different ways through the next weeks.

How are we different? There are five fundamental dimensions, summarized by the OCEAN mnemonic—these adjectives give you a clue about where you are on these dimensions. Openminded: from focused at the low end of the dimension, to creative at the high; Conscientious: from spontaneous to organised; Extroverted: from independent to talkative; Agreeable: from competitive to kind; Nervous: from at ease to anxious.

Which of the OCEAN dimensions is particularly you? (Obviously curious open-minded folk will be interested in a more nuanced view – try this free tool – Google “iPIP neo”.)

### **Suggestions, to suit your style**

Personality researchers Benjamin Chapman and Lewis Goldberg explored the behaviours of Americans. The differences between the different OCEAN personality dimensions inform these suggestions.

#### **Openminded**

At the personal level: Read, watch a movie and listen to music (possibly but not necessarily all together). You folk have diverse tastes in music — heavy metal, punk, rock, jazz, classical, gospel – you can see why you get the Openminded label!

Eat something spicy for breakfast. Make time with yourself to day-dream or meditate. Do something artistic, play some music, practice a language. You could write a journal or do some creative writing.

This last one might be tricky if you are sharing your bubble – sitting around the house naked.

For your bubble-mates (and those you make non-touching connections with): Read them some poetry, discuss a book or movie. Try cooking a new recipe with your (younger?) house-mates. Get together with the gang to make a chart showing options for activities.

### **Conscientious**

You are probably through several projects already. Make plans, get the place better organized, do the chores at the bottom of your list.

Discuss the plan for the day with everyone at breakfast. Agree whose doing what. Have a roster for meals and chores. Recognise and reward the effort of your fellow bubblers.

You don't appreciate a soundtrack to your activities, maybe you could get out the earmuffs when your fellow bubblers turn up the music?

### **Extroverted**

Do some home decoration. Do your exercise (keeping your social distance). Have a hot bath.

Isn't social media a blessing? Get a virtual session going with your coffee gang. Tell a joke (preferably a dirty one). Discuss how to make money out of this opportunity. Plan a neighbourhood expedition – spotting bears or other wonders. Talk on your phone while you walk.

Organise celebrations (applauding health and other workers putting their lives on the line) or pull together events such as Informal Friday or marking the weeks as they go by.

Background music – preferably something poppy, or dance-friendly.

### **Agreeable**

Think of different ways you can be nice. And think of different ways you can be nice to yourself. Sing in the shower. Do the ironing. Do dishes.

Try to anticipate what will be a hassle for a home buddy and deliver the solution.

You're amenable to the pleasant sounds of classical, even jazz or gospel.

### **Nervous**

Maybe get up a bit earlier – so you have some quiet time early. Try deep, regular breathing (there is evidence that 6 breaths a minute is calming). Try the "may you be happy, may you be well" mantra when you see or hear someone being silly or weird.

Share a silent sit with others in your bubble – its relaxing and energizing being silent with others doing the same.

When you want to turn up the volume (not too high) – you share Agreeables preference for jazz, classical, and gospel.

### **What happens when it gets tough?**

As New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Adern said – this will get worse before it gets better. Coping strategies for each of the OCEAN dimensions:

Openminded – get rid of mental clutter, focus on the three things you need to do – make an action plan for each.

Conscientious – Pause, go back to the problem, consider your options, don't get hung up on keeping going down the path you find yourself on. Get a routine for exercise and relaxation – keep a record.

Extroverted– stay connected, work your network. Do a shared exercise class via video.

Agreeable – be kind and generous, but beware that it's not all one-way giving. Be prepared to pull back to conserve your energy. Cuddle a bubble friend or pet or teddy.

Nervous – instead of ruminating – get a notebook, write out your concerns and your feelings about them. This writing is not something you're going to put out there – it's simply your expression. The research indicates that the optimum writing time is 20 minutes, at the same time each day for 3 days.

Practice sleep hygiene – especially regular sleep and wake times, and including plenty of tiring exercise early in the day.

If your concerns are overwhelming – talk with a friend, talk with a phone counsellor, (phone or text 1737) use the mental health resources on Le Va (<https://mentalwealth.nz> ) or the Mental Health Foundation (<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/resources/> )

### **Set the scene for action**

It's not all about personality. A lot of our behaviour is routine, triggered by external cues. Think green traffic lights, or an App ringing. Now, many of your daily triggers (such as your work-station) are outside your bubble, and so not guiding you. Set up some new ones – work with space and time.

Make a workspace that is going to help you focus, that has the tools you need, and doesn't have distractions that will encourage procrastination (try turning off social media, putting the phone out of sight).

Have start and break times. Needing to get something done in a defined time reduces off-task mucking about. Having a break (including a technology break) helps you and the gang re-charge. Keep to daily routines, including getting up, dressing.

In longer time-frames – celebrate knocking of the weeks and any other achievements.

### **Goals**

Goals are really useful tools for enabling you to get things done. Possibly you could try to do something 'against type'. Openminded – finish reading (or writing?) that book? Conscientious – listen to a short mindfulness session on an App? Extroverted – sit alone and drink a glass of water slowly? Agreeable – plan how to tell your friend that you are not comfortable with something they are doing? Nervous – Doing that thing you've been avoiding?

**Stewart Forsyth** is an organizational psychologist and executive coach based in Auckland, New Zealand. [stewart@fxc.co.nz](mailto:stewart@fxc.co.nz)