Jennifer Edouard

Frontline worker. Healthcare hero. “We’re grateful to you!” Over the past few months, as COVID-19 has overtaken our world, tossing it upside down, healthcare workers, of which I am one, have been put through a particularly rigorous ringer. Unemployment checks have become more attractive as coming to work means wearing astronaut-like apparel and the risk of a beyond undesired virus. The few that remain are forced to work extensive hours in the wake of necessity. I chose to stay on at my local nursing home even though the recent dozens that have resigned quote it as one of their best decisions yet. I believe in hard work, teamwork, and helping those that do not have the resources to properly help themselves. I work a twelve-hour day more times than my mental or physical health would deem appropriate, and when I find a day away, I sit in front of my computer attending zooms, writing papers, and completing various assignments as I strive to gain my degree in Finance at Grand Valley State University.

What if I just quit working? I cannot deny that this has sounded like a nice option more than once. If I do not have work, I could spend my time immersed in schoolwork, obtaining my degree with more diligence and attention. On days that I cannot spend as much time in school, I get so stressed and feel like I’m under so much pressure. However, quitting my job would drop one stress while picking up another. Not being able to pay for college and falling into debt is a fear that grips me probably tighter than it should. Some days, I feel like I have already done a lot of saving and I should be okay to the end of my college education. However, most of the time I worry about random expenses that could come up or picking up fewer hours and completely regretting it later.

Balancing school and work does not happen evenly every day or even every week. I spend one day knee deep in schoolwork and get stressed about catching up at work. I work one day, and immediately pull out my laptop when I get home because I’m scared of falling behind for college. What I’ve written is not about balancing school and work, most days I feel like I’m not doing enough in one or the other arena. I do not see a clear balance between the two. I have that on the list of things I’m striving towards. By the time I graduate, I hope I can know that my combination of school and work has been fruitful. Until then, all I can do is pour my heart into both areas as much as I can and find where that gets me.

To close, I want to describe an encounter I recently had with a friend of mine that I work with. Due to a lack of employees, my company has had to downsize its facilities, laying off a few workers and moving some down to part-time. My coworker and I feared this as we both need the checks from our current hours. Due to the time and effort that we have put in, our company opted to keep us where we are without any loss of hours or threat of losing our jobs. She’s been through so much in her life and has two kids; she often says, “you could be my daughter,” so sometimes I get some helpful motherly advice from her. When we found out management opted to keep us, she said, “It’s mamba mentality; you keep going and going no matter how tough it gets, give it your all. In the end, it will pay off and you will be absolutely primed.” I have already thought about that so much over these past few weeks, and it will be something that sticks with me always. A work and school combination is not about balance to me, it is about giving my absolute all so that I can arrive strongly at the finish line and be able to say I did everything I could and worked as hard as I was able to.