



What's In Your Back-to-Work Bag?



We asked a few of our colleagues what they would add to their back-to-work bag that could be useful for staff—newcomers and veterans alike—to better navigate *la rentrée* this September. This is what they had to say.

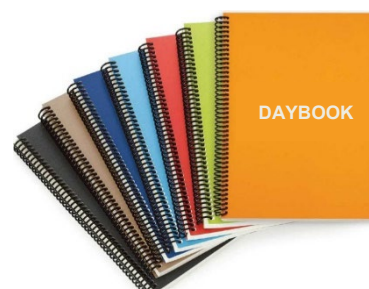
Liana Mehring from the Engagement and Investment Department

La rentrée. Back to School. Back to Work. As a child, I found the words used to have a melancholic ring. My younger sister was born at the end of August and her birthday was always tinged with an end-of-summer sadness. A drive to the party store for confetti and streamers was always followed by a stop at Staples to buy binders and pencils. Today, as adults, we still fill our proverbial backpacks with all the essentials of returning to work. My own back-to-work bag contains the following:

- Sunscreen and a hat. Let's be honest, the September sun can still burn.
- Scheduled buffer time in my day to catch up with colleagues. Any given trip to the coffee machine could result in up to three posed and reciprocated questions on the subject of 'How were your holidays?'
- A *curated* selection of vacation photos on my phone to show colleagues. I like to queue up select photos because a picture is worth a thousand words and its best to avoid swiping across an 'Oops, I didn't mean for you to see that' in your camera roll.
- Fresh snacks. Who knows how long that apple on your desk lasted in the heat.
- A fully equipped mountaineering outfit (waterproof pants, jacket, neck gaiter, ski goggles and insulated mittens). That mountain of emails waiting for you at your desk is not going to climb itself.

Dan Donachie from the Preparedness and Resilience Department

If there was one item that I would classify as essential to carry with me in a back-to-work bag, then it would be my daybook. Having a daybook was a trait I picked up on from my time working as a veterinary inspector with the police who must always carry one in their role. For my daybook, I have a bound A4 notepad which I carry everywhere with me at work and on



missions. Each day I simply write the date and then start to populate it with what usually consists of a rough plan for the day, as well as notes from meetings, zoom calls and phone calls. And for me, it saves the need of having multiple pieces of paper or posts, which I would inevitably lose. A daybook also acts as a good reference if you ever need to go back and check a fact or detail sometime later after the meeting whether it was days, months or even a year after the meeting.

Zoltán Szabó from the General Services Unit

The first thing you should have in your bag is PATIENCE. Got used to being all comfy over the summer months with fewer Parisians, less traffic and noise pollution? Well, buckle up! It's September and they are back! 😊 Best cure for it? A spoonful of patience. Some say it's a virtue while others think it's solely the domain of saints and kindergarten teachers. I say it's a skill. And like any other skill, some people might be naturally better at it than others, but everyone can improve with practice. Smarter people than I have written thousands of pages on the subject and about things you can do—practice mindfulness and meditation, exercise positive self-talk, be patient with yourself, test your patience, etc. My advice: LIFE IS TOO DAMN SHORT to waste it on getting angry with others! Consider it the 'Carpe diem' approach to patience.

Research dating back to the 80s has connected [impatience with irritability and higher risk of heart problems](#). And a 2016 study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, found that impatient behavior was actually linked to [people having shorter telomeres](#), a part of our DNA that influences how our cells age, suggesting that being more impatient might therefore accelerate the aging process—as opposed to how our cells would otherwise age if we act more patiently. So, if not for the first reason, then do it for your health and for your natural *fabulousness*! 😊

Alex Ginzburg from the General Services Unit

How often does it happen when something that is supposed to weigh you down actually lifts you up?

That is what happens when you put a book in your bag.

It is the hot-air balloon that lightens the plight of the furious rat-race through the dark and crowded tunnels spreading under our City of Lights.

It is the secret door of the no-escape-game we play every day pretending we are serious and responsible adults in a fair and square world.

It is the caring caress of spring water on the dried up river bed of your life force.

For me, there are actually two books: [The Daily Stoic](#), by Ryan Holiday, and my own notebook, to jot down ideas of beauty and peace that flutter by like unsuspecting butterflies.

And I've discovered a surprisingly fun fact: petty thieves will alleviate you from anything they consider too hefty for you to carry—your phone, your wallet—but oddly enough, never ever in the glorious history of petty thieving has a heavy heart not been relieved by the lightness of a book.

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