

Episode 1.8 The One About 2020

[00:00:00] **Mandy:** Hi, Wayne and Becky, how are you today?

Becky: Good. How are you? Mandy and Wayne, hello.

Wayne: Hi, I'm good too.

Mandy: I'm glad.

Today our plan is to talk a little bit about our experiences working remotely, dealing with all of the stuff that has come from COVID since March. Hopefully we can share some ideas that might help others and maybe learn a little bit more from each other too. Just a note for our listeners, this will be our last podcast for 2020, and then we'll be back in January.

Becky: Fireworks

Mandy: Huzzah!

Becky, do you want to start and tell us what your experience has been?

Becky: Yeah, it's been the longest eight months of my life. [00:01:00] I really it's been rough. It's been really mentally taxing, which has made it very physically taxing. And that's made it hard.

One thing I'd like to say for faculty and educators to recognize, because I recognize this. I sit here and I tell everyone it's easy to go online, just put the web camera up, put a mic on it's easy, blah, blah, blah, blah, and then we were doing the workshop Wednesdays, so we went remote and the very first one that I gave was probably the worst teaching performance of my entire life. I knew in theory how difficult it was to present remotely but I realized just how difficult it is. It gave me a little bit more empathy for our faculty that I was pushing. Oh, it's easy. Just do it, just do it, just do it. It was like, okay. It is not as easy as I thought it was to do. And it was more of a synchronous. I think asynchronous is a little bit simpler, but, as an educator, recognize that even those of us that should know, we know the best practices and we know how this is [00:02:00] supposed to be done.

That doesn't mean in reality that we're going to be perfect either. So, for my fellow educators out there have some grace for yourself because this isn't easy. And we all recognize that even if we're supposed to be the quote unquote experts in the area, it doesn't make it easy to do any of this on top of all of the personal non-educational stuff that we're looking at.

Give yourself some grace and admit that, it's okay to not be okay. And it's okay to screw up. So, yeah. And I've done it more than that time.

Wayne: Can I throw something in there that's kind of related to that, that I've thought about recently, I don't teach, but I work with faculty and a big part of the challenge starting in March was, getting faculty who really only taught face to face. to teach remotely, and what's funny about it is it wasn't necessarily the challenge of them [00:03:00] presenting remotely.

It was the challenge of the tools that they normally used in the classroom and converting those to something else.

And one thing that I would say, and I mean, feel free to correct me if you disagree with this or virtually slap me. Is that a thing in WebEx? For saying this, but I think, that a really helpful thing for faculty is, if you're just switching over to trying to do this, or you've been trying to do this and struggling a little bit, making the things that you used to use face to face work remotely is to consider looking for alternatives. A good example of that is if you teach face to face, you might give a test or an exam in class. And the students in that class have that hour to take it, for example, that moving into online doesn't necessarily work the same [00:04:00] way and you might end up pulling your hair out as an instructor, trying to make what you used to do, fit into this new box of online.

Whereas if you think about it more from the perspective of a teacher who just teaches asynchronously online, and maybe open that exam up for a period of time in that day. And the students don't have to take it between one and two, or use additional tools that we have available to protect the integrity of the exam and things like that.

I've seen some of those things over the last several months and it seems like in some ways it's made it more frustrating for some of those instructors, instead of just trying to open up a little bit and make things a little easier for themselves in that way, does that make sense?

Mandy: Yeah, that makes perfect sense.

It's interesting that you mentioned that because that's one of the things that we've talked about, in helping [00:05:00] faculty move to online. And I remember when I first started teaching online several years ago, one of the first things I learned was that you can't just convert a face-to-face class to the online environment.

That was sort of a misconception back in the day when we first really started seriously teaching online that, Oh, you just take all your materials and stick them into the LMS and you're good to go. That does not work because then you're creating a correspondence course basically.

And I think we've moved past that. I hope we've moved past that. I don't know, but yeah. I think that that does create a lot of frustration for people who are new to teaching online, because especially doing it under duress like a lot of people had to in the spring, that was a big ask anyway.

And then also asking people to have to convert their materials to [00:06:00] something else and figure out a different way to assess their students or to offer their content. When you're already stressed out and in a time crunch, because what did we have, three days, five days.

That's right. We had a workweek pretty much to move everything to online and I know it was hard for a lot of people.

Wayne: And I totally get that too and I'm not suggesting that people should have just said, well, how can I convert all of the things that I normally do, but I'm just saying if there were

things since we're talking about self care, in teaching and the time of COVID, I think one big piece of self-care is, don't stress out about trying to take these things from one box and make them fit perfectly in another. There is probably a better way that'll make it easier for you. And no matter who you are listening to this, if you teach there should be, I guess I can't guarantee it [00:07:00] support to help you make that happen. I mean, we're it here, but, I'm just saying.

Becky: I agree. I think one of the biggest problems from a K-12 perspective, which I know that isn't necessarily our audience, but there are a lot of educators out there. In looking at it from that perspective, I feel like a lot of teachers are getting a lot of gruff, over the way they're doing things, but they didn't maybe have the support monetarily. I'm not saying necessarily, from their admin, but monetarily. In a perfect world, there would be unlimited amount of money to use the technology, to train the teachers on the technology. But instead everybody was thrown into this world where this expectation was just that it would work.

I want you to all look back at March, April, May when everyone was teachers are the greatest, teachers are wonderful blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And now it's November and I hear a lot more teachers, aren't doing a good job and teachers don't care about their [00:08:00] students and well, it's not about the money.

It was a calling and that's crap because I'm sorry, but I want you to tell me anyone out there who does a job and doesn't do it to get paid. I mean, this whole idea that educators are the next Mother Teresa is so frustrating to me. And I think it's detrimental to the educational field and to educators.

I just want to say, I see you and I hear you educators and what's happening right now is not okay. I think even that feeling, and maybe this extends beyond education, but this feeling of not being enough and this feeling of, if I protect myself and my family, am I letting down my coworkers?

Am I letting down the students that I'm supposed to be supporting? To try to prioritize right now mental health, physical health, just everything in general is being put on the shoulders of the people that they're also being expected to prioritize other [00:09:00] people's children too. And it's not fair.

This is not fair. What's happening right now.

Wayne: And a big piece of that too isn't just the money necessarily. I mean, a piece of this rolls into the money part of it, but if you weren't set up as an organization, a school district, a single college, whatever it might be, if you weren't already set up to provide those kinds of tools, then that makes the struggle even worse.

And then, I'm not saying here, so don't "at" me, anybody, but I've heard of places where the public school system did pretty well with things, and other places where they really didn't and it's very inconsistent and students don't know what they're doing and instructors don't know what they're doing.

And I really think that that comes my personal opinion anyway, is that it comes from a top down approach to somebody at the top said, here's what we're all going to do. Here's [00:10:00] how it's going to be handled and managed and trained whatever, and the places where they just said, all right, each of you schools figure out a way to do it.

And every teacher there figure out your own way too, and that just doesn't work. I hear about it even here. I'm not complaining, but I'm just saying that we find different tools that do similar things. And then you might have a student in four classes and for one class, their teacher's using Zoom and one class they're using WebEx, one class they're using Teams, one class they're using Slack, and all at the same time, and that consistency, I think, I also feel like I'm complaining.

Becky: No, no. I agree with you. And from an IT perspective, I mean, that's kind of like saying, okay, we're at war and there's the battlefield and there's one doctor and everybody's going to fight a little bit different, but you need to figure out how to fix all of them. And that's not [00:11:00] okay.

Wayne: I just think teachers, especially if they haven't taught online, like public schools, especially where, here anyway, they barely used any of the online resources that they had before this happened. And again, this is anecdotal, my opinion, but I feel like if that stuff had been pushed a little bit more beforehand, training provided before it was absolutely critical with the tools they already had, then it could have been a little more consistent. Just my opinion.

Mandy: I agree. Just from my experience as a parent, when everything got shut down, I was really impressed with the way that my kid's school handled it, because they had to pivot quickly.

And it was interesting because I'm actually on the school board in that district. And we had voted to not close the schools the day that the governor made his announcement that all the schools were going to be shut down. It was sort of [00:12:00] like whiplash because we, we had this meeting at three o'clock and had all of these deliberations and just felt like this isn't the right time to do it.

Let's help the teachers prepare for this because it's probably going to happen, but let's not do it today. And then at five 15, the governor made his announcement. But I think you made a really good point about having strong leadership and, I felt like, especially at my kid's elementary school, the principal immediately went into planning action mode and got all the teachers together and was just like, what are we going to do?

What's gonna work? What's not gonna work? And they were all on the same page. I thought that was significant because, it's a small school, that helps of course, but that was really important because they were all using Google classroom in some way and then some teachers were using different, [00:13:00] complimentary technology, but they were all using Google classroom and then the librarian made sure all the kids had access to Epic so they could read books. There was a lot of important collaboration happening that I think contributed to that success.

Looking at things right now across the nation, how things have gone, I think you're right, Becky, there has been this shift in perspective about schooling in general. And I think people are exhausted and yeah, COVID fatigue.

And we've been fortunate here because our schools started in person. I think it might be difficult to understand what it's been like in more populated areas where people have not left their homes in months.

Becky: We've been lucky.

Mandy: We've had restrictions, but we've been able to live our lives.

Becky: Oh, yeah, with fishing, and camping we can social distance. [00:14:00] Thank God we live in Montana and you're right. I would sit and watch the news of people in New York and just think, Oh my gosh. I think I would have had a nervous breakdown. I really do, because I think I came close to anyways.

I will tell you and I'm not going to get political at all, but after the election, is when my brain finally allowed me to have some peace. I feel like since March, we had COVID and then we'd had so much civil unrest and then the election, we've had so much information in the form of headlines thrown at us that there's no time to process.

I think that was a lot of my problem. I don't think it would have mattered who got elected. I think my anxiety level would have decreased just because I had an answer. It wasn't so much about what the answer is. It was not having an answer. And I think with COVID for me personally, it's kind of the same thing.

I feel like I'm hiding from and running from an invisible [00:15:00] thing that I can't see. I don't know where it is. And then I question, am I too safe? Am I not safe enough? Am I being an idiot? Am I a sheep, am I not a sheep? Because every issue has become politicized, you don't know who to believe anymore. Am I right? Am I wrong? And those questions just go around and I don't know the answer other than, you've just got to stop looking at social media. FOMO is a real thing.

Have you guys heard the word FOMO before?

Mandy: Oh, yeah.

Becky: Wayne, FOMO is fear of missing out.

Wayne: Oh yeah.

Becky: It's an actual phenomenon.

Wayne: Every child has that, right?

Becky: They do, every person. If I don't have cell reception, I'm fine. But I don't have self-control when it comes to not reading the news, seeing what's going on, I'm afraid I might miss something that I have to make sure if I have that ability again, if I have no cell service, if I'm out camping, I can't access it, I'm fine. [00:16:00] But as long as I have access, I'm afraid

I'm going to miss something and that it's going to be big and that it'll be life altering. That's never happened.

Wayne: Right, here is tip number one for self-care then, because if you already know this about yourself, this is an idea.

Someone can make money on this, but it's related to an idea that does exist. So if you already know this about yourself, that if you have access, you will look. And that it helps you when you can't look. So you don't look that that makes sense then, wouldn't it be great if there was a way that you could prevent yourself from looking for a period of time.

And when I say it's related to something that already exists, there's an app, that people can, I've heard of it. I've never used it, but there's an app that, you can run it like if you're going partying, you can start this app before you start drinking and it prevents you from texting and calling [00:17:00] until either a certain amount of time has passed or

Mandy's rolling.

Or even better, there's a really difficult question that you have to answer a math question or something. That's dual purpose.

Becky: It's a great idea.

Wayne: It's also making you think. Right? I think something like that should exist, disable all social media on your phone for the next four hours.

And you can't access it until that time.

Mandy: That is hilarious. And I love it. I have a less hilarious solution related to that. Just mine is not funny or cool like that. It doesn't make you answer a math question. we're cool. No, I think it's hilarious. I seriously was laughing super hard. I was trying to be quiet.

If you have an iPhone, you can actually use the screen time feature so that you limit how much time you can spend on an app. [00:18:00] I do this to my children, my kids' devices are completely locked down, because they are all about the YouTube. And I have their YouTube.

Not the TikToks. They don't have access to that. They're too little, but they really like YouTube kids and they would watch that for hours and hours if I let them. But what you can do is, you can actually go into your own screen time on your phone. And you can set it up so that you can limit how much time you spend on specific apps.

Like you get. If you get all your news from Facebook or you start doom scrolling and you're on Facebook forever, you're on Twitter forever or whatever, you can go into that app and say, I'm only going to allow myself 10 minutes a day to use Facebook. And obviously you can override it. I mean, there's options to do that, but you have your

Wayne: partner put in a passcode, right.

Mandy: I mean, if it's really a problem. Yeah. You could. And that's the thing. I [00:19:00] don't really experience FOMO. I'm kind of one of those people where I'm like, you guys are

nuts, I'm going to go sit under this tree over here and just stay away from you. So I don't really care what other people are doing most of the time, but I did notice, especially in the spring. And it's continued since then too. I feel like to be a responsible citizen, I should at least have a general idea of what's happening in our country, because I thought about getting rid of all of my social media and just doing a total detox of news and information, but then that felt like too much.

Like I was kind of irresponsible maybe. So I made a rule for myself because I use Facebook mostly, I follow all the news organizations that I prefer on there. And I just made a rule that I could not get on Facebook until my kids had gone to bed. My husband and I take turns lying down with the kids at night and basically when I put my kid in bed and laid [00:20:00] down next to them, I was allowed to be on Facebook until my kid fell asleep. Which is 10 minutes, 15 minutes on a bad night, really. I put those boundaries on for myself and just said, you have this amount of time to look at Facebook.

And then as soon as that kid's asleep, you have to be done.

Wayne: I'm getting the impression that wouldn't have worked for Becky, she would have like loaded bit I'm up on caffeine before, and they'd be like, why they're not going to sleep,

Becky: Frankly, my kid is on FaceTime every night when she goes to bed. Her and her friend in Texas, Facebook for hours and go to sleep at like, they'll wake up in the morning, still on FaceTime.

I know it's ridiculous. But, number one, that wouldn't work because I go to bed before she does. And also, no, I don't have the self-control. Yeah, I wouldn't be able to do that.

Mandy: That's okay. No judgment, I mean, there's technology solutions and then there's less technical solutions.

[00:21:00] One of the other things I did that has helped me a lot and this took a little bit of time, but I went through my Facebook feed and, I didn't unfriend anybody, I've already done that. I forced myself to pick the top five people that if I didn't know what was going on in their lives, I would be sad.

I unfollowed everybody else. I did the same thing with different news and information organizations. That might feel like a head in the sand kind of approach, but it's helped me to compartmentalize things a little bit. It's also helped because when we were at home in the spring, I was trying to help my son with all of his schoolwork and then I was in meetings all the time cause I was still trying to work from home and I was teaching and it was just a lot. And then my daughter was having nothing to do with online school.

She revolted and decided she was just going to do whatever she wanted to. [00:22:00] I could not let myself get engrossed in anything that was going on with social media or the news, because it was so upsetting, emotionally and mentally to have to keep switching all of these different contexts.

Maybe another tip too is think about what can I actually reasonably expect from myself in a day? Because I'm used to functioning in this very perfectionistic place, which is also not healthy. I've had to step back and think about what is reasonable and what's not reasonable.

Avoiding that catastrophic thinking because that's a really easy rabbit hole to go down too where it's like, Oh my gosh, if I don't get this report done today, the world is going to explode. No, it's not, it's not. One of the things that this pandemic has forced me to do is to better understand what my priorities are in general. [00:23:00]

Maybe take a few minutes and write down what's important to you. What are the top five things that matter to you right now? And if you have to separate it between what are my top five personal things, what are my top five professional things? That's fine too. I have a sticky note with my top two priorities sitting here on my desk right now. And every time I start getting overwhelmed and feeling like I'm drowning, I look at that and I'm like, Oh yeah, those are my priorities. And then it gives you the opportunity to ask yourself, okay, is this thing that I'm stressing out about supporting those priorities?

If it's not, then you decide, is this something I actually have to do or focus on or not? And at work a lot of times it's still something you have to do, but if it goes into that other category where it's not supporting your priorities that you've identified, then maybe it goes [00:24:00] to the bottom of the list. I don't know if that's helpful, but that's a skill that I've had to learn, because you can't do all the things all the time and be overwhelmed and be exhausted by all of the information and be in zoom or WebEx meetings, six hours a day and still expect yourself to be a productive, kind, and loving human. That's a lot to ask.

Becky: Yeah.

Wayne: One thing that I discovered over the last several months is this is hard for me cause I'm busy all the time. I mean, we all are, but between working full-time and trying to go to school and the family and the dog and the birds and whatever, just very busy.

There was a long span of time where I didn't pick up my guitar. And I really enjoy playing my guitar and I've found doing that again was really cathartic. We should write a pamphlet. But that's another thing, do those things that you enjoy, to [00:25:00] step away. Because when we were working from home for that two months, when we weren't shut down, but we were all home.

I don't think I really knew when to stop working. I'd get up, I'd start working, five o'clock rolls around and I'm not going home. I'm already there. I just keep working and stuff. And then somebody says what's for dinner. And I'm like, Oh, it's 8:00, and I'm not salaried. I think doing those kinds of things really helps. Dave and I had a conversation a while ago about kind of the same thing. He felt kind of the same way. You didn't really know when to stop until they put things in place to, help each other stop when it was time to stop.

Mandy: I'm glad you said that about playing guitar Wayne, because that was another thing I felt like I wasn't allowed to do things that I enjoyed, that somehow that was frivolous, I don't know why. Nobody told me I wasn't allowed to do fun things.

I was the same way too. I'm in school too, and then I'm working and I never felt like I was [00:26:00] allowed to stop. I felt like every second that I was doing anything that wasn't for my schooling that I'm in or that wasn't for work, every time I had to sit down with my son for a couple hours and help him figure out how to do math, I immediately was like, how am I going to make up these two hours?

That was a completely unreasonable expectation. I found myself staying up until two o'clock in the morning and working, and then trying to get up at six and trying to function. That made me a really horrible mean person.

Wayne: It's interesting because, a while ago before all this started, I was actually, I was looking into, CBT, I'm going to elaborate CBT cognitive behavioral therapy, just so nobody thinks it's weird. Not that there's anything wrong with CBT, but whatever, but cognitive behavioral therapy. And one of, I think there's multiple sort of [00:27:00] tracks to that, for depression and anxiety. But one of the things that kind of spoke to me is I think part of the reason I stopped playing was because I was in kind of a down place.

And, what's interesting about that, but I thought this was really interesting is that, this will help you feel better. But you can't make yourself do it without a lot of effort. If you can make yourself do the things you enjoy, you will feel better. And I think, this whole year, if it's really taught me anything, is that I have to do things I enjoy.

Or like you said, I am not fun to be around. So, I'm sorry, kids. You're in bed. You're going to hear me belting out, like Don't Stop Believing on the guitar.

In the living room.

Becky: That's awesome

with the cockatiels going

I do agree with the hobby thing, for both of those points, feeling like you can't do anything fun.

One of my hobbies is sewing. I love to sew. [00:28:00] And I saw a need. I have a lot of friends that are nurses when all of this started that were reaching out on Facebook. Please start sewing masks. We don't need them yet, but we're going to, the hospitals not accepting them yet, but this is going to become a need, please, please, please help fulfill this need.

And I love to sew and I am still sewing masks to this day. For me, it felt like that was what I could do to help because that's part of it too, is I feel like, for my family. I am the one who helps everyone. I'm the one who makes sure everything's okay. No one really makes sure I'm okay because I make sure everybody else is okay.

And I'm just never not okay. And I'm wonderful today. I didn't feel like I didn't really have anyone checking on me and I always am the person like I want to take care of others. Well, I am not a nurse been there, done that, didn't pass A&P one. So not ever going to be a nurse, but bless them, [00:29:00] bless our healthcare workers. I love them and appreciate them.

So that's what I could do. I think it helped me because I was able to de-stress by doing my hobby, doing something I really enjoy. And I also was able to give back to my community.

And like some of the people my husband works with. I got really mad at him at one point, he asked me if I'd make a mask for a guy he worked with. So I made it and he was telling me when the guy asked how much he owed and my husband says, Oh, nothing, she doesn't charge. And the guy says, no, no, really I've got to do something.

And my husband's response was no, really she gets off on this. And I was really offended. I was like, excuse me, like, did you seriously say that? And his words were incorrect. He didn't say it in such a kind way, but, that was my way of helping. If I would have charged for those masks, then I no longer would have been doing a good deed. I would have been using my hobby for self gain. And that wasn't the point of this hobby. The [00:30:00] point was to do what I could do to help others and it gave me a purpose in all of this, instead of just sitting at home, scared in my closet. I got to do a hobby and I got to help others with my hobby.

I think that kind of helped keep me sane. So yes, please don't quit your hobbies.

Wayne: Yeah, I think I'm going to start writing, like COVID like rewriting lyrics to songs

Becky: too. I got sucked into Facebook videos this weekend, and I watched Facebook videos for four hours. You guys. That's my dirty little secret.

Wayne: Maybe I could overtake my son's 65,000

is insane.

Mandy: All right, friends. Just to recap, it sounds like if we were going to offer advice to people or think about things that we've done that have helped ourselves basically be kind to yourself and try to [00:31:00] figure out what's important and what's not, and focus on the stuff that's important first.

Don't try to force things to fit in places where they don't. So if you're trying to convert, in-class experiences into an online experience just recognize that it's not going to be a seamless transition and be kind to yourself and be okay with that.

Wayne: Don't be ask

Mandy: for help. Ask for help.

Wayne: Especially if you work here, ask us for help.

Becky: Yes, please do.

We love to help.

Mandy: We do love to help. We want to help and people who are in similar positions at other institutions want to help. You're probably feeling overwhelmed but don't be afraid to ask for help. If you are able to help, that's great too. There's that Mr. Rogers quote, where

he talks about how his mom told him to look for the people who are helping [00:32:00] when life is scary. I think that's true.

Look for the helpers and be a helper if you can, because that can take the emphasis off of the things that are scary and worrisome.

Wayne: When you turn off social media, turn on Bob Ross or Mr. Rogers or Steve Irwin,

or is there another, there's like four, there's always four on that picture. I don't know.

Mandy: And get away from media, figure out what your consumption needs actually are and try to limit it beyond that, because nothing good comes from watching the news 24 hours a day, nothing good comes of that and do fun things, figure out what it is that you enjoy, or if you don't enjoy anything, find something new to enjoy, create a new hobby.

Give yourself permission to do something that makes you happy because you deserve to feel happy. You deserve to feel okay.

Wayne: Perfect. Perfect note to end this on.

Becky: Everybody have [00:33:00] a great holiday season, stay safe, mask up, stay home, keep your loved one safe. And you'll hear us in January.

Mandy: Thanks friends. I'm so glad you're here and I appreciate you.

Becky: I appreciate you guys too.

Have a good day. Bye.