

Working@Home

Tom Coughlin, Past President, IEEE-USA

It is approaching 2 months of sheltering-in-place here in California. I haven't travelling outside of my local area for about that time as well. A big outing for the week is going to stand in line (about 6 feet between each masked person) outside of Costco waiting for when the over 60 hours start. Last time I went I scored a bale of toilet paper and some sanitizer wipes as well as some fresh fruit! All of our kids are back from college and staying with us, so we have a busy house. Today my wife cut my hair to get it off my ears, using my beard trimmer.

There are good aspects of staying at home. It is sort of an extended vacation. I have had lots of time to spend with my son Will, home from college at NYU, when they shut down in early March. He is doing remote classes and we have been watching various Science Fiction TV shows together, some bonding time, since when he goes back to school or eventually off to work, I will probably see him much less frequently.

I am now caught up on West World and I got to watch the first season of Picard—thanks for the GIFT, Patrick Stewart. They have interesting and contrasting visions of the future of artificial life forms. I have also worked on cleaning out old and unneeded stuff from my office (and rediscovering old treasures), and help my wife get her office at home organized as well. She is a school nurse and has been working remotely. Fortunately, her schools decided that they are not opening before the end of the school year!

My work has slowed down a lot without the regular interactions at conference and physical meetings. As I have been working for many years and putting money aside, I should be able to weather this time but I am worried about folks who are just getting started or who live paycheck to paycheck.

So how can you stay engaged with your profession and continue to make progress. I think there are three key things you should do. First keep in touch with colleagues and clients—by phone or email now, don't let them forget that you are around and eager to help. Second, tune your skills and extend your knowledge with some of the courses available through IEEE ILN and many other sources. Finally, take time to read and think about things. Rarely do we get an extended period when we can think, tinker and experiment, like you can right now.

I have been working with a colleague to finish a joint report on emerging non-volatile memory technologies and doing some small consulting projects. We communicate regularly by phone and email. I have been doing lots of teleconferencing, both for IEEE volunteer meetings as well as for my consulting work and have regular remote briefings with companies. In the course of the last month and a half I have done several meetings with Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, Webex and a bunch of other teleconference packages with varying degrees of success. I suspect when we come out from this period of isolation people will be a lot more

comfortable working with these tools and remote participation may be a lot more common in the future.

Like many other IEEE members, I have been using my idle time working on learning new things. I listen to on-line lectures and courses and I have had time to do some writing and connect with old friends and colleagues, both to find out if they and their family are well and to catch up on things. This down time has given me time to organize my work space and contemplate what I want to do next.

I know this confinement will pass, but it may still be many months before things return to anything close to normal. However, when we do get out again, will it be the old normal or will things be different in some way. I suspect that people will be more comfortable working remotely and using the cloud to get things done. Data centers, particularly hyperscale data centers will grow to meet increased demand. You would do well to learn about and use more of the online tools available.

IEEE must be ready to deal with a changed world where people may deal with each other remotely or, when things are safe, in person. What can we offer that will have great value for our members?

On-line products and remote experiences will be important offerings in this new world. We also need to find ways to do larger meetings, like physical conferences to support our need to meet and interact with each other. Can we use AI tools to make our vast IEEE engineering library and things like Data Port to provide new ways to learn and discover new things? I would be interested in your ideas of what IEEE should become in a post COVID-19 world.

Thanks for reading and stay safe!

Tom Coughlin

