



STAYING CONNECTED FROM HOME

A Course on Social Distancing with Your iPhone

Lesson 3: Staying Organized & Productive from Home

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LESSON 3: STAYING ORGANIZED & PRODUCTIVE FROM HOME

Utilizing Apple's Built-in Tools: Staying on the Ball with Notes, Reminders & Calendar

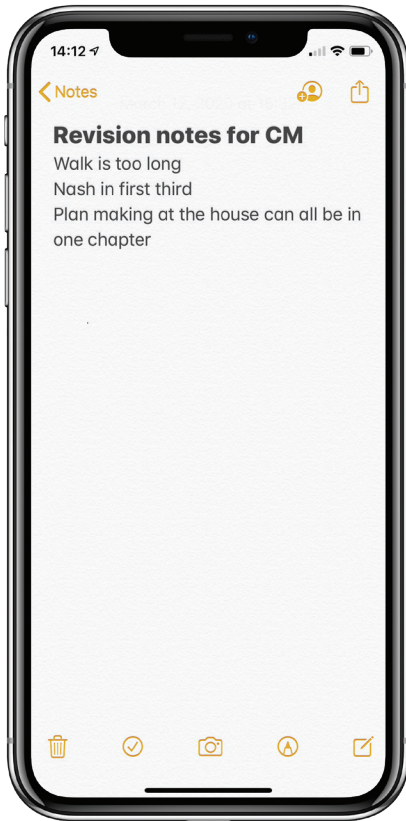


Figure 1

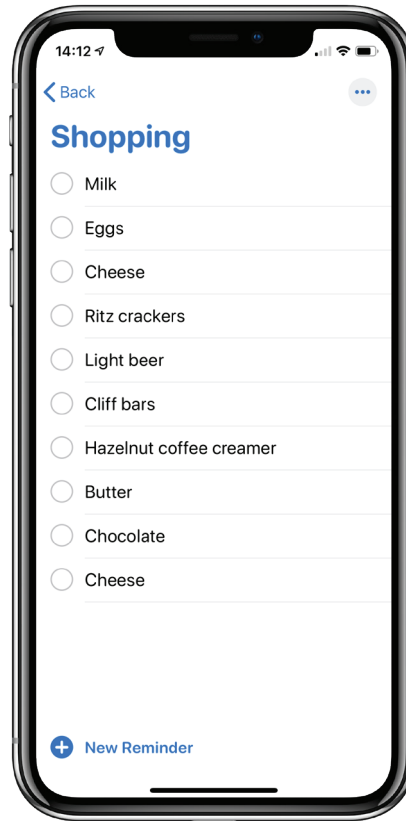


Figure 2

Notes

Lately I've taken to opening the Notes app (figure 1) more than maybe any other app. Need to compose a thought before you say it out loud in a meeting? Need to make a shopping list to make sure the one trip to the market goes down without regrets? Need to figure out just the right way to respond to a frustrating Facebook post? Pop open the notes app and do a couple of drafts of revision before you go forward. It seems like almost all my communication is by text these days so having a scratchpad handy is critical.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

NOTES TIP: SHARE A NOTE FOR COLLABORATION.

The first thing to know is that note sharing only works for notes you've saved in iCloud. So first make sure you have iCloud enabled and that you've started a note in your iCloud folder. Once you start typing, you'll see the contact icon with a plus at the top of the screen. Tap that to add people.

Choose how you'd like to send an invitation. You can send an invite via Messages, email, Facebook, Slack, and more. Enter the recipient and tap Send. They'll receive a link that allows them to open the Note on their iPhone and edit or add to it.

You can see who is collaborating on a note with you at any time by tapping the avatar icon at the top.

From there, you can add more people, copy the link to share it with others, or stop sharing to kick the other participants off the note.

Within shared notes, if you tap the contact icon, you'll now see a list of people who have access to the note. If you created the note, you'll be able to add or delete people from this list.

Reminders

The thing about the Reminders app (figure 2) is that telling Siri "Remind me of X thing at Y time" often takes less time than unlocking my phone, let alone navigating to a third party reminder app like Google Calendar. So as one day fades into the next and I keep busy with work and hobbies, remembering deadlines, meetings, and the like has to be about ease of use, and Reminders is just the easiest to use.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

REMINDERS TIP: ADD A REMINDER WITH SIRI.

If your iPhone doesn't have a Home button, then hold the lock button or say, "Hey, Siri" to activate Siri.

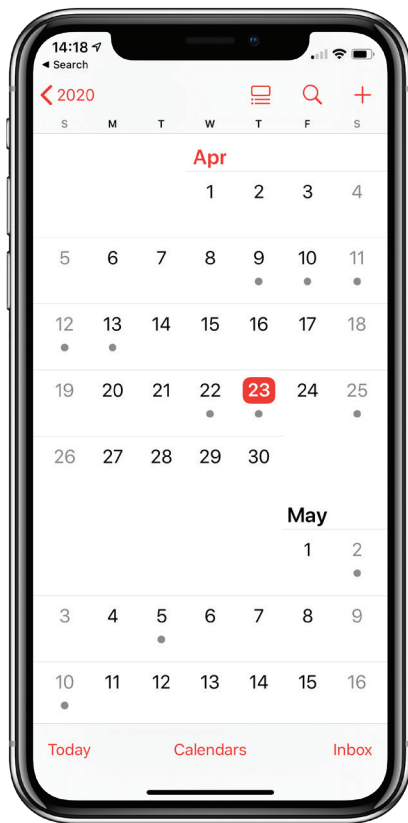


Figure 3

Calendar

The built-in Calendar app (figure 3) has one of those simple-yet-elegant designs that Apple is known for. It gets the job done without fuss, and for millions of users, it offers everything a Calendar app needs.

– Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

CALENDAR TIP: INVITE OTHERS TO YOUR EVENTS IN THE CALENDAR.

When adding an event like a Zoom call to your calendar (tap the date you want the event and then tap the plus icon in the top right), make sure to tap the Invitees option on the calendar details menu. Here you can enter email addresses for people you want to invite to your event, and they'll get an email about it. If you put the Zoom link in the Notes section of the Calendar event, then their email invitation will include the Zoom link for easy access to the event.

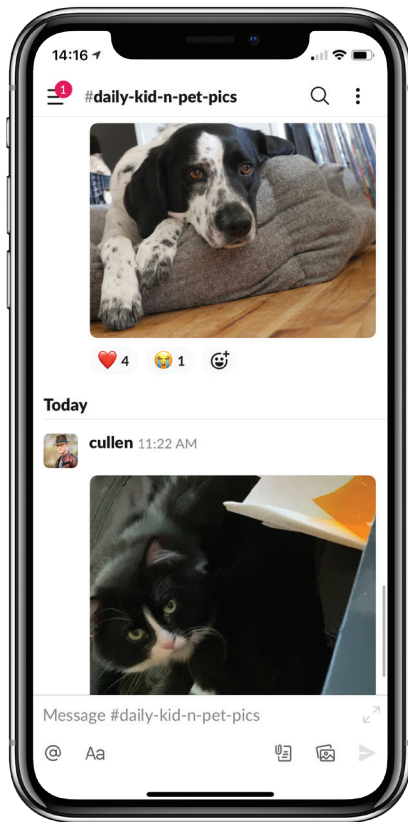


Figure 4

Collaboration-Oriented Messaging Apps

Slack

(Free, \$8/month/user for premium)

While I use Asana (below) to manage iPhone Life's contributors and staff magazine deadlines, most of our in-house communication happens on Slack (figure 4). Our team has a strong work ethic and a good sense of humor. Slack keeps us productive and laughing, whether we're telecommuting from home or working together in the office. Skype used to be our app of choice for collaboration, but Slack lured us away with useful features like Channels, which lets us separate things like headline brainstorming sessions from pictures of our pets. Slack's hilarious GIF generator alone made the switch worthwhile. Private messaging makes it easy to get in touch with the right people at any given time via one-on-one communication or small group discussions. Slack also makes it easy to search for and locate files exchanged between people, although the free version deletes your archive once you hit 10K messages. Notifications from Slack's iPhone app keep us informed on the go, and we can snooze notifications outside of work hours, allowing us to unplug after a long workday. Slack has useful app integrations with services like Asana, Google Drive, and Zoom. Any time a contributor contacts me via Asana or shares a Google Doc with me, I get a notification via a direct Slack message. We started out using Slack for free, but it quickly became worth it to upgrade for unlimited message archive and video chat. Paid plans start at \$8/month per user for small to mid-sized teams. With these features unlocked, I can search all my Slack interactions to find the PowerPoint presentation I forgot where I saved or a conversation about a coworker's favorite kind of breakfast tacos from a year ago. With so much sharing of sensitive information happening in one place, you might be wondering how secure Slack is. This cloud-based service encrypts data as you share it as well as once it's delivered. Even so, we still make an effort not to share things like account passwords just in case.

–Donna Cleveland, Editor in Chief at iPhone Life

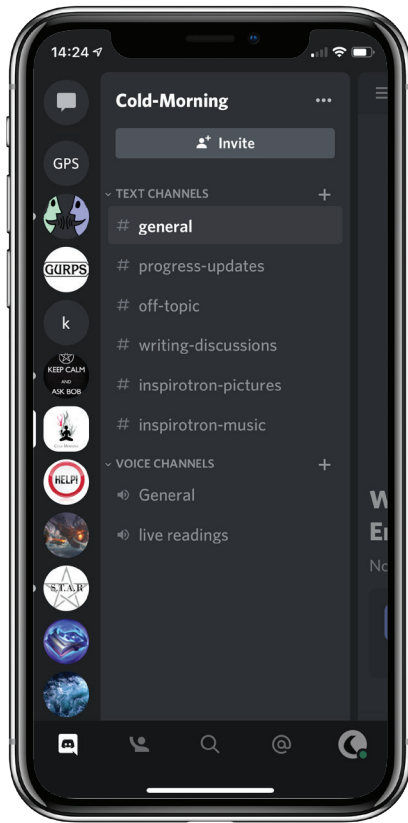


Figure 5

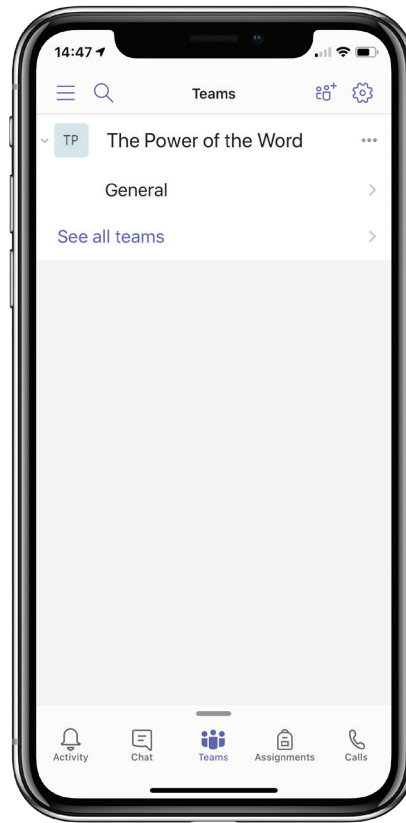


Figure 6

Discord

(Free, \$4.99/month or \$49.99/year for premium)

Discord (figure 5) is a text, voice, and video chat app that started out for video gamers to run in the background while they are playing games, so they can talk to each other to coordinate their strategies. Discord is designed to use less internet bandwidth so that the game can get the most resources. This makes it a great choice if your internet is shaky or if you're running other, more demanding apps at the same time as a conversation. Accounts are free with a premium upgrade, but even the free account has a ton of features.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

DISCORD TIP: NAVIGATING DISCORD

Discord is organized into servers, which function like permeant group chat rooms. Your servers will be listed in a drawer down the left side of your Discord interface. Inside a server you have multiple rooms, including text-chat only rooms and audio/video-chat rooms.

Discord servers are usually organized by topic, and if you search around on google you may find that there are Discord chat servers for all kinds of interests, hobbies, and fan groups. For example, a Discord Server dedicated to motorcycle maintenance enthusiasts might have text-chat room for asking about particular parts or tasks, another text-chat room for pictures of beautiful motorcycles, and an audio-chat room for troubleshooting. This lets people connect with those who have shared interests. You can create a new Discord server by tapping the plus button at the bottom of the server drawer.

Microsoft Teams

(Free, \$5/month/user for premium)

Microsoft Teams (figure 6) is like Slack but for workplaces that are fully invested in Microsoft software. Much like Slack, you can communicate with custom groups of people within your organization by creating different "Teams." The app is well organized and makes it easy to share documents and spreadsheets with coworkers. You can also communicate privately with colleagues using the Chat feature. The app is free for teams of up to 300 members, and for larger teams, plans start at \$5/month per user. Microsoft Teams offers more capabilities in the free version than other apps listed here. However, the fact that it requires you to have a Microsoft account disqualifies it immediately for many users, including us at iPhone Life.

—Donna Cleveland, Editor in Chief at iPhone Life

Tools to Track Goals, Visualize Tasks & More

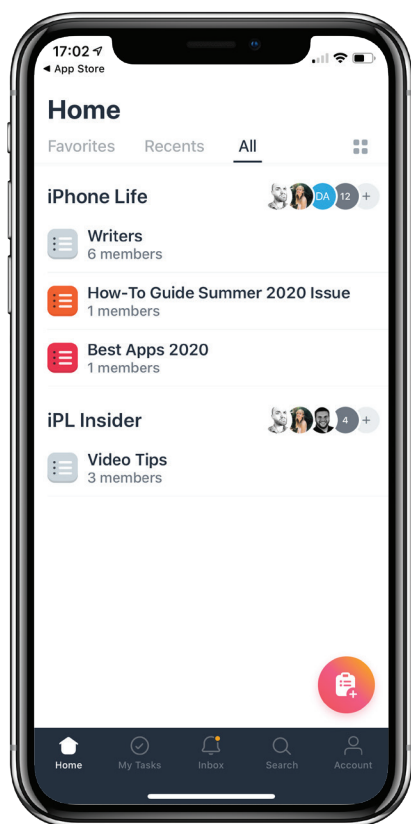


Figure 7

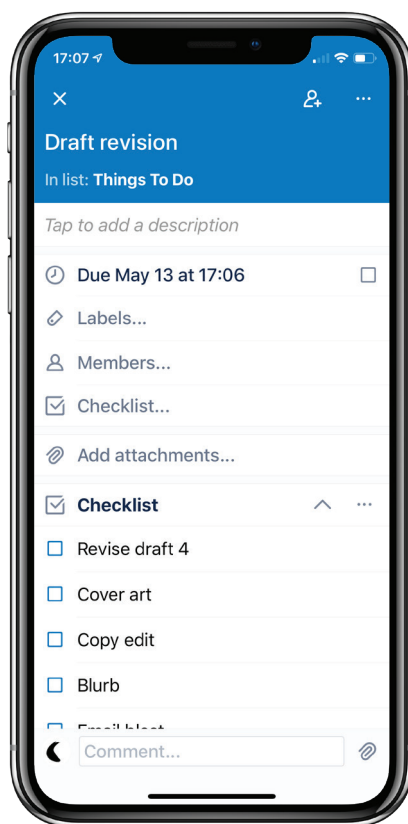


Figure 8

Asana

(Free, \$10.99/month/user for premium)

I began using Asana (figure 7) as an editorial calendar a few years ago to help keep track of important dates and article assignments. With Asana, I can create an assignment for a contributor and include a task description and deadline. When finished, the author can attach the finished draft and mark the assignment as complete. My only complaints is that you can't assign a task to more than one person and that the iOS app lacks the desktop version's calendar view. At iPhone Life, we use Asana's basic free plan. It allows up to 15 users, but you can assign tasks to as many people as you want. As a small team working with a wide range of contributors, that works great for us. For larger teams managing projects with full-time staff, a paid plan makes sense. Paid plans start at \$10.99/month per user.

—Donna Cleveland, Editor in Chief at iPhone Life

Trello

(Free, \$9.99/month/user for premium)

Millions of people use this project management app, and for good reason. Here's how Trello (figure 8) works: You

create boards for new projects, and within those boards create lists, which you can fill with cards that represent tasks or ideas. A popular way to use Trello (and the way we use it at iPhone Life) is to create lists for each stage of a project, such as Incomplete, In Progress, and Done to easily see where you are at a glance. In a nutshell, Trello gives you the freedom to structure your workflow in whatever way makes the most sense to you. Unlike the rigid structure of most to-do apps, Trello can hold huge amounts of formatted text, checklists, and comment chains within cards. This level of detail within a simple framework makes Trello an invaluable tool. As you use Trello, you naturally create a log of past projects, which you can revisit when training a new team member. Delving into a project history and reading through comments is a great way for a new employee to learn the thinking behind a project and how it developed over time. At iPhone Life, we use Trello as a tool to track our progress on marketing and growth projects. Its flexibility is a great strength for collaborative projects like ours are. We can assign tasks to multiple people, create tags so that we can group specific types of tasks and projects, set deadlines for subtasks, and easily move cards into different lists until we can finally move it into the "Done" list, which always feels incredibly satisfying. The free version of Trello is pretty robust, in that you can create unlimited personal boards and unlimited cards. If you're using Trello extensively for a larger team, you can upgrade to a plan starting at \$9.99/month per user for unlimited team boards and much more.

—Donna Cleveland, Editor in Chief at iPhone Life



Figure 9

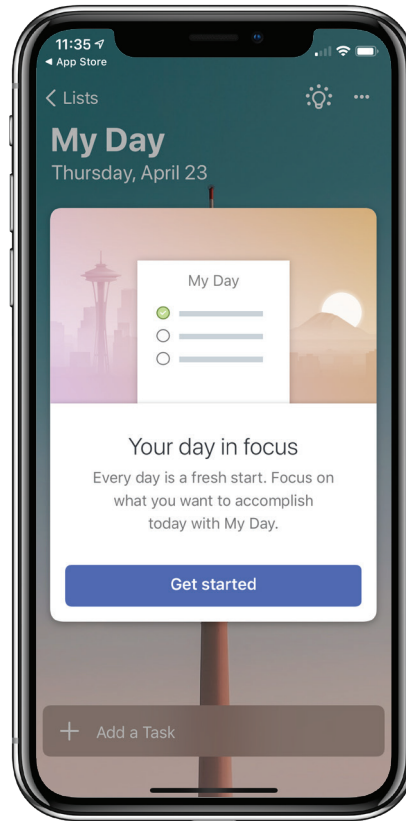


Figure 10

Google Calendar

(Free)

I've been using Google Calendar (figure 9) for many years, and its online accessibility, connectedness with all my devices, and advanced functionality really fit the bill for a modern Calendar app. In particular, these days I've been finding the need to keep a Calendar of video chat appointments and integrating Google Calendar with Zoom and Google Hangouts has made that kind of coordination trivially easy.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

To-Do

(Free)

To-Do (figure 10) is Microsoft's answer to the Reminders app. It's basically the same as Reminders—a minimalist app with just what you need to keep track of what you've got left to do. Why use it and not Reminders? It's more beautiful. Honestly, the design aesthetic is lovely. Also, if you already use a Microsoft account then it will hook into that in the same way that your Reminders app automatically hooks into your iCloud.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

TO-DO TIP:

Change your Siri shortcuts for "Remind me" and "Open List" to reference To-Do instead of Reminders.

If you're going to use To-Do you'll want to do this, since by far the easiest way to add a reminder to your daily list is with the help of the voice assistant. Simply open the To-Do app, tap your name at the top to go to the settings page, and then tap the Siri Shortcuts option. Tap the two plus signs to add the shortcuts to Siri, then practice telling Siri to add a new task to your day.

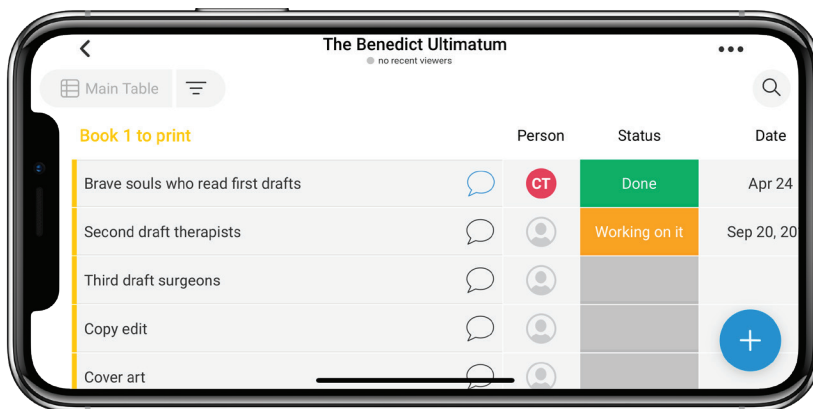


Figure 11

Monday

(\$39/month and up)

Monday (figure 11) is a powerful task delegation and tracking tool. Think of it as Reminders on steroids. It lets you create projects that contain lists of tasks. Tasks can be delegated to team members, can be tracked in their state of progress, and can be assigned deadlines. This powerful tool is free to get started with, and a great option for keeping track of your next big project or even your weekly household chores.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

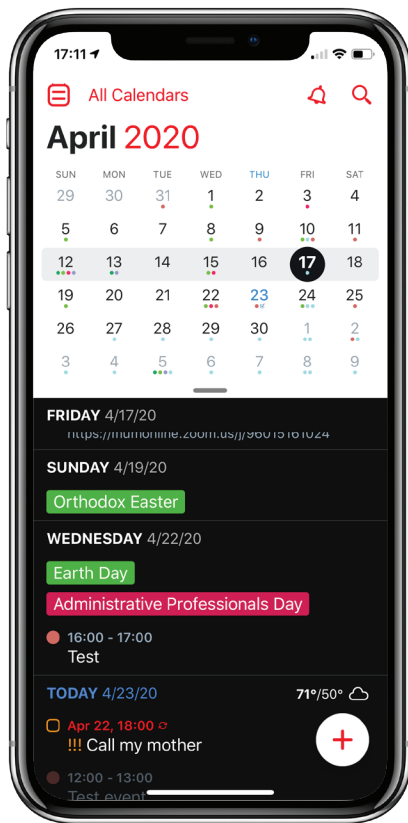


Figure 12

Fantastical

(Free, \$4.99/month or \$3.33/year for full feature set)

Fantastical (figure 12) is a tricked-out calendar app (get it? FantastiCAL as in Calendar). It ties into your existing calendars, reminders, and contacts which makes it super easy to install. You're not migrating those functions to fantastical, you can still use the original apps, but with Fantastical you a variety of well-designed views for visualizing your schedule. It's high-contrast design and day-ticker layout let you see what's coming up with ease. When adding events, it visualizes their timespan for you in a simple but really neat way. If you're looking to upgrade from the basic Calendar app, Fantastical might be worth a try.

—Cullen Thomas, Writer & Producer at iPhone Life

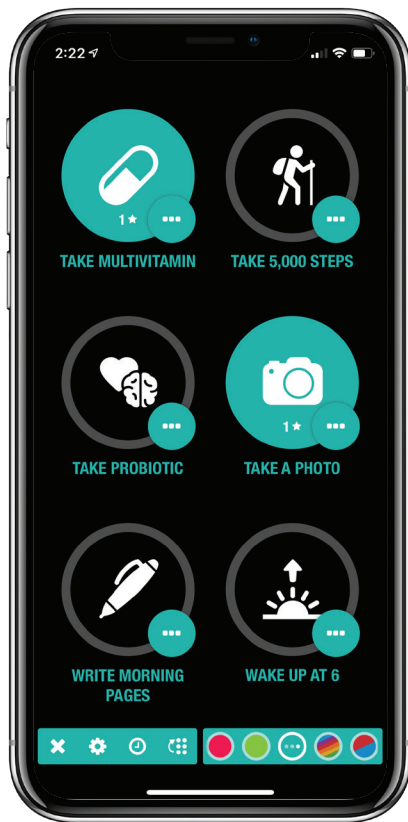


Figure 13

Apps for Maintaining Healthy Habits

Streaks

(\$4.99)

I've become very anxious since I started social distancing. The result of this, unfortunately, is that I binge on Netflix and spend hours on my phone. And, surprise, this makes me feel terrible. I recently downloaded the habit-tracking app Streaks (figure 13) in the hope that it would help me develop a healthier routine—and so far it has been great! It's hard to remember all of the daily tasks I would like to complete when I'm feeling down, and so receiving those little reminders helps push me towards accomplishing my goals. By the end of the day, I feel much better, both physically and mentally. Every time I complete a task for the day, then my streak is extended. If I don't complete a task, the streak is broken and I'm back to 0 days. I feel very motivated to avoid breaking the chain, which is the beginning of creating what I hope will be lifelong habits.

—Rheanne Taylor, Senior Video Producer

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Do you have a project that would benefit from collaboration? Pick one of our collaboration apps and try it out with your team. Whether your team is a knitting circle trading patterns, your bicycling buddies planning a trip for when this all ends, or your weekly dividing up of household chores, there's an app that can help.
2. Start something new: a new painting, a new vacation plan, a new novel you want to write, a new genre of film you've never watched before. Use one of these apps to plan how you'll go about it. You'll have to decide which is appropriate, but Notes and Reminders are perfectly valid choices.
3. Extra Credit: Snap a screen-shot of your app To Do list or team breakout and share it to the Facebook group.