Talking to Your Support Network

When you discuss your new commitment to online education with your family, friends, and co-workers—your support network—it will help to know the answers to key questions they may have related to your motivation. In addition, you can create a more robust, honest discussion by offering details about online learning and how your schedule and responsibilities may change. With these considerations in mind, requests you make for support may be better understood and received.

**Tip:** If you complete the support network exercise first, you may have a better idea of who can lend the best support for specific tasks.

**Talk to the people in your home and your friends**

1. **Questions your family and friends might ask you**
   - Why are you attending school?
   - What are your goals?
   - What do you want to accomplish?
   - Why is this important to you?
   - Why have you decided to attend school at this time?

2. **Talking points for discussing your decision to return to school and what it means for your schedule**
   - Attending school means things will change for you and those around you.
   - The daily and weekly time commitment of attending school is significant. (10–20 hours a week is equivalent to a part-time job.)
   - Change can be scary.
   - Change can be exciting.

3. **Discussing the differences between online schools and “traditional” schools**
   - Family and friends will recognize the “traditional” school tasks you’ll be performing: reading, writing papers, going to a library.
   - Family and friends may not recognize the following school tasks associated with online learning (i.e., these may look like “playing” on the computer): checking e-mail; participating in online Discussion; watching streaming media or a course DVD; searching the online library.

4. **Tips for setting ground rules for study time and location**
   - Identify and communicate your study space.
   - Establish rules for when you can be disturbed when in that location.
   - Try to set a schedule for when you will be in that location (mornings, evenings, weekends, etc.); consider setting a study schedule for each week and posting it where household members can see it.
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- Identify someone people can go to with questions when you are not available.

5. Tips for you saying, “I need your help,” or getting help with household tasks
   - Ask people to take over or help you with specific tasks.
   - Make a schedule of who will do what when.

6. Tips for maintaining balance—or scheduling fun together time
   - Say, “We all will need rewards on a regular schedule—me for studying and you for supporting me.”
   - Say, “Let’s decide how we will reward each other for supporting roles.” (Examples: go to a park or the beach for an afternoon, go out to eat, etc.)

By the end of the discussion, you should have the following items:
   1. Rules for study time
   2. A list of tasks and people who will be responsible for them
   3. At least one reward and a scheduled date for it

Talk to Your Employer and Co-Workers

Here are recommended questions to consider and talking points to use in a discussion with your employer and co-workers about your new commitment.

1. Questions your employer and coworkers might ask you
   - Why are you attending school?
   - What are your goals?
   - What do you want to accomplish?
   - Why is this important to you?
   - Why have you decided to attend school at this time?

2. Questions your employer might have about how your school attendance will affect your job—and tips for responses
   - How much time will you spend on your coursework?
     - The daily and weekly time commitment of attending school is significant. 10–20 hours a week is equivalent to a part-time job.
   - How might attending school bring changes to the workplace?
     - You might not be able to take on as many outside projects so that you have time to study.

3. Discussing the differences between online schools and traditional schools
   - Employers and co-workers will recognize the “traditional” school tasks you’ll be performing: reading, writing papers, going to a library.
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Employers and co-workers may not recognize the following school tasks associated with online learning (i.e., these may look like “playing” on the computer): checking e-mail, participating in online Discussion, watching streaming media or a course DVD, searching the online library.

4. Consider asking your employer the following questions:
   - May I use my work computer to do homework during lunch hour or breaks, or before or after work?
   - May I use my work computer to access university websites and my online classroom?
   - To what extent may I share workplace issues in my classes?