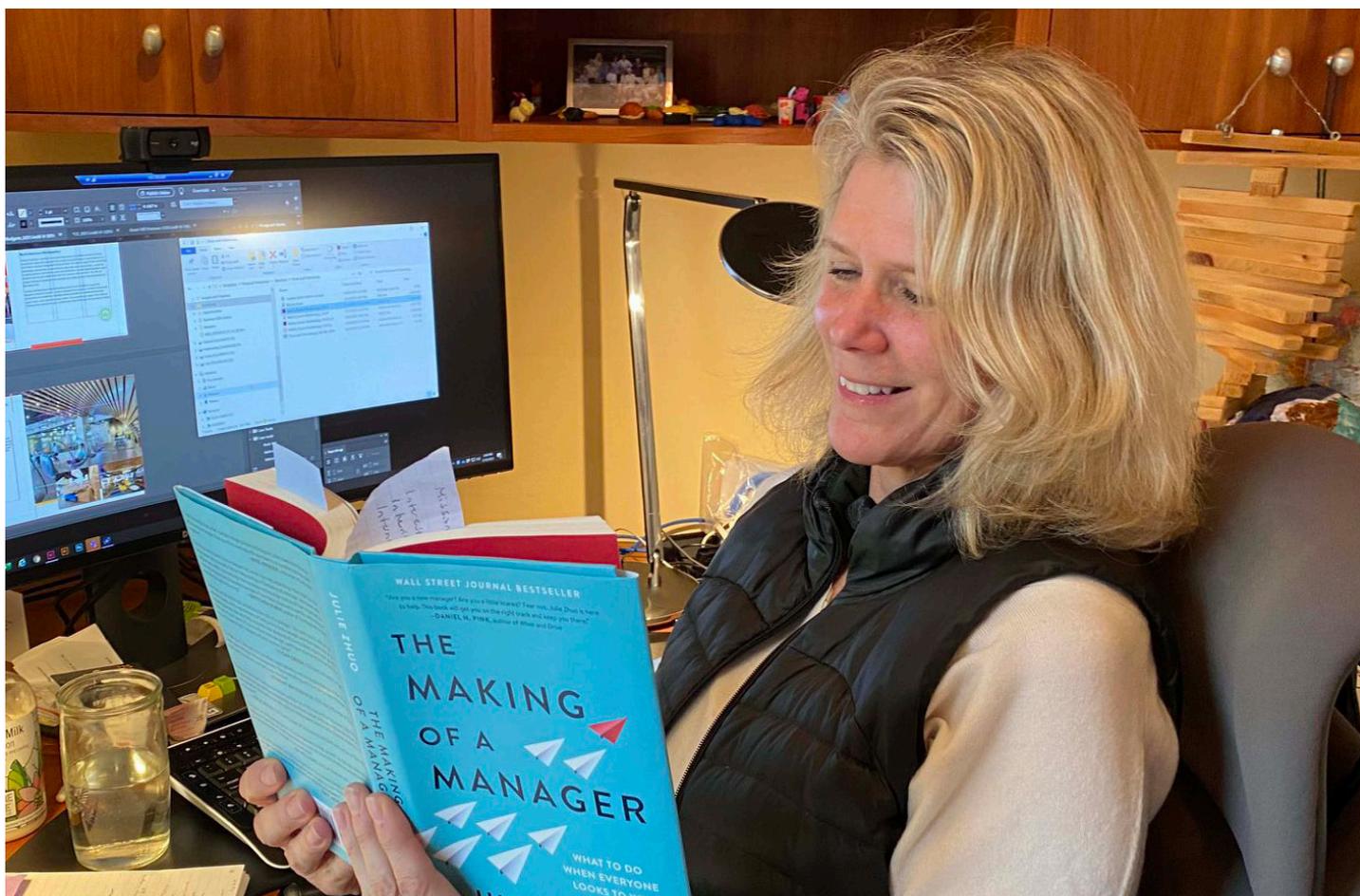


## Wellness

# By reading (and stretching, and walking, and cooking), employees are rising to the challenge

By [Lauren Daley](#), Globe correspondent | March 22, 2021



Columbia employee Katy Tassmer and one of her “Page Turner” reading selections. Courtesy of Katy Tassmer

Katy Tassmer recently enjoyed “Talking to Strangers,” by Malcolm Gladwell, “Pachinko,” by Min Jin Lee, and “Educated: A Memoir,” by Tara Westover. She’s downloaded Audible, joined a Zoom book club with co-workers, and is now reading both Zadie Smith’s “White Teeth” and Julie Zhuo’s “The Making of a Manager: What to Do When Everyone Looks to You.”

The “Page Turner” challenge has “completely changed my reading life,” says Tassmer, managing director of marketing at North Reading-based construction management company [Columbia](#). “I can’t stress enough how much it connects us during these times.”

There’s a lot more reading in North Reading these days.

The challenge is just one part of Columbia Thrives — a wellness program Columbia developed through Hingham-based corporate wellness and nutrition program provider [Wellness Workdays](#) in 2018.

Through it, Columbia employees have taken part in physical activity challenges, stretching and ergonomics lessons, sun safety, and healthy cooking demonstrations, among others.

Wellness Workdays’ clients include MIT, New Balance, BJ’s Wholesale Club, and TomTom, among others. Its big-picture goal is to make “corporate wellness a mainstay in the American workforce,” says wellness account supervisor Laura Walsh. Goals with clients include reducing health risks, improving quality of life, and enhancing productivity.

Their programs, including Columbia Thrives, “provide a holistic approach and cover all pillars of wellness, including diet, physical activity, stress reduction, behavioral health, and financial wellness,” she says.

It seems Columbia isn’t the only company looking for wellness during these stressful times. Wellness Workdays was founded 17 years ago; this past year has been “one of our busiest,” says Walsh. “This pandemic has almost forced people into more of a mindset of preventative health.”

As for the reading challenge, just a few minutes reading a day can be beneficial for mental and emotional health, Walsh says, citing a [2017 UK study](#). “The past year, I feel like everyone’s waking up to bad news, lots of anxiety; the pandemic is out of our control. Reading is a healthy activity to get people away from their blue screens. It’s a self-soothing activity,” she says. “It’s been tied to a lot of health benefits both physically and mentally. It’s a way for people to escape.”

By taking part in various challenges — like “Align Your Spine,” “Gray Matters,” and “Page Turner” — Columbia employees earn points that can ultimately lead to gift cards. Tassmer purchased a Fitbit with hers.

Columbia started its three-week reading challenge — at least 15 minutes a day — in December. Nearly four months later, Tassmer and others are still reading. Book clubs have blossomed. Coworkers have swapped recommendations: “A Walk in the Woods” by Bill Bryson, “American Dirt” by Jeanine Cummins, “Where the Crawdads Sing” by Delia Owens, “Home Body” by Rupi Kaur, “Things You Save in a Fire” by Katherine Center.

“I now read and listen differently,” Tassmer says. “I fill in the gaps in my schedule by reading in manageable bits while waiting for appointments, [audiobooks while] walking at lunch, anytime I have downtime. [T]hat time might otherwise have been spent scrolling through my smartphone.”

Learn more at [www.wellnessworkdays.com](http://www.wellnessworkdays.com). Lauren Daley can be reached at [ldaley33@gmail.com](mailto:ldaley33@gmail.com). She tweets [@laurendaley1](#).