

10 Working From Home Tips For Success



Not so long ago, working from home was the exception, rather than the norm. Most folks went to the office daily, forming a firm border between their work and personal lives, and telecommuters were few and far between.

But in a world wracked by the COVID-19 pandemic and an increasing need for mobile-friendly agility and remote working support, the home office has become, er, a *home office*.

When you live where you work, you face new challenges, and gain new opportunities, compared to commuting to the office.

By following a few working from home tips for success, you can ensure you're still connecting with coworkers, hitting your goals for productivity and performance, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

The Challenges of Working from Home in the New Normal

Since the novel coronavirus pandemic struck in late 2019 and early 2020,

organizations around the world have had to make radical adjustments to everything from logistics to operations to human resource management to stay afloat, let alone profitable and productive.

Supply chain disruptions, coupled with health and safety mandates, suddenly made remote work an essential part of any plan for competing effectively.

Scrambling to balance the public health against their need to do business, both small businesses and large corporations either enhanced their existing remote working programs or hurried to develop effective ones.

As of November 2020, facing an unending and deepening COVID crisis, companies like Google, Indeed, Amazon, and Microsoft had given their employees permission to make their work from home (WFH) arrangements permanent. Twitter, Square, Uber and American Express also extended their work from home policies.

This seems to suit Americans just fine, as a 2020 survey from IBM found that more than half of survey respondents—54%—said they wanted to keep working from home for the foreseeable future. A related survey from 451 Research found two-thirds of companies surveyed said they were likely to extend their own remote work policies indefinitely.

Popularity aside, remote work brings a range of challenges for both individuals and teams. A home office, coffee shop, or hotel room may offer a certain kind of freedom that comes with a more casual work environment, but can also introduce new distractions and temptations to focus on anything but the task at hand.

Family members, domestic distractions such as chores, or even the lure of television and video games make it critically important for workers to have a plan for staying focused and productive.

Getting teams ready to work from home often requires investment in new equipment (e.g. laptops, printers, etc.), hiring new staff to train or join remote teams, and radically transforming internal workflows and policies to accommodate a remote workforce.

But for employers, business owners, and team leaders, remote work represents a management challenge as well as a logistical and financial one.

Maintaining remote worker productivity, ensuring employees feel connected and fulfilled, and protecting business continuity are just some of the responsibilities resting on the shoulders of remote team leaders and management as more and more companies pivot to accommodate staff that work at home most or even all of the time.

Managing remote teams requires different skills than traditional management, as well as a keen understanding of the unique challenges that can make forging disparate professionals in far-flung locations into a cohesive team feel like herding cats.

At the end of the day, remote work is about getting the job done. Taking a proactive approach and following some basic work at home tips can help everyone get more from their workday and ensure their work hours are productive and healthy ones.

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Essential Working from Home Tips for Success

While it might surprise you to learn that staff who spend their workday at home are often more productive, happier and less likely to look to move jobs than their office-bound counterparts, they're also lonelier and susceptible to poor work-life balance (it can be hard to call it a day when you live in the office, after all).

And without countermeasures, folks working at home full time can feel disconnected from their organization's goals, as well as their coworkers.

Fortunately, following a few simple tips can ameliorate these difficulties and help you achieve a work life that's productive and satisfying without wreaking havoc on your personal life.

1. **Schedule your work day.** Without the need to report to the office, attend face-to-face meetings, or get ready for a lengthy commute, it can be tempting to take a casual approach to getting things done.

- Block out official work hours, and schedule your tasks and meetings within them. Use an app like Google Calendar to stay on top of things with reminders as needed.
 - If, like most folks, you're more productive at specific times compared to others, build your schedule around your availability and energy. Schedule low-energy, simpler tasks for those times when your mental and physical resources are at an ebb, and high-energy, complex tasks for when you have the energy and resources to give your best.
 - If you're a night owl or otherwise on a different schedule than your coworkers, you might be at your busiest when they're fast asleep. Be ready to break up your schedule across the day or schedule and attend meetings with other team members to make sure everyone's on the same page and nobody's left waiting for the things they need to finish their own work.
 - Finally, stick to your schedule! Be ready to switch off and step away when the day is done. Segregating your workspace and following your schedule will help you keep your work and private lives separate without compromising either.
2. **Create a daily to-do list.** Take a few moments at the start of the day—or after your daily check-in with your team—to set down the specific tasks you'd like to accomplish during the workday. Make note of the amount of time required for each task, the physical and mental resources required to complete it effectively, and then adjust each day's list accordingly.
 3. **Establish your official home office.** Setting aside a specific room or area for work not only helps you keep your home life separate from your work life, but makes it easier to seal out all-too-tempting distractions. Wherever you set up shop should be comfortable, contain all your work tools, and, ideally, a door. This helps truly separate your work space from your home and allows you to “leave work” both for breaks and at the end of the work day.
 4. **Get an early start.** Dive right in and get ahead of the game by tackling tasks you can readily complete at the start of the day.
 5. **Take breaks!** Regular breaks—including lunch!—are important to your mental and physical health and refresh you so you can be at your best. Plus, they help give the workday a predictable rhythm that reinforces the “at work” mindset.

6. **Healthy habits make for happy workers.** Just because you're working at home doesn't mean it's time to crash on the living room sofa with chips and soda while you work twenty hours a day. You can't do your best work if you're neglecting your mental and physical well-being.

- Get outside for fresh air and natural light at least once a day.
- Take your lunch away from your desk and, if possible, without any devices.
- Prepare and eat balanced, nutritious meals that will keep you energized rather than sluggish and cranky as the afternoon wears on. Balance your proteins, carbs, and fats carefully. Preparing your meals the night before (or preparing them and freezing them on the weekend) can help you save even more time. Best of all, eating at home instead of hitting up a takeaway or ordering from a delivery service will save you calories *and* cash.
- Try to include a bit of exercise on your breaks, whether it's a short walk, a quick jog, or a few trips up and down the stairs. The endorphins will improve your mood.
- Take advantage of coffee breaks to connect with coworkers, either with a quick call or in whatever approved communication tool your company uses, such as Slack, UberConference, Skype, or Discord.
- Consider scheduling your daily workout as you would a meeting.
- Don't forget to spend actual face time with other human beings (while still observing whatever COVID-related health and safety guidelines are required in your area).

7. **Skip the doomscrolling and distractions.** It can be tough to leave social media and personal phone calls aside during the workday. But setting your phone to "do not disturb" and checking it—and your social media accounts—only during your breaks will help you stay focused and productive.

If you're having trouble disconnecting from the mediasphere, consider dedicating a specific machine for work purposes only (this is much easier, of course, if you have a work-issued PC and peripherals).

If you don't have access to dedicated equipment, you can log out of all your social media during work hours or use an app such as Cold Turkey to actively block

virtual distractions while you're working.

8. **Set boundaries.** Make it clear to family members, roommates, and potential callers or visitors that your scheduled work time is for *working*. Set parameters and share your work schedule so they know when to catch you on a break or when it's okay to interrupt when necessary.

9. **Don't be afraid to get creative.** Maybe music pumps up your creativity. Perhaps leaving the TV on in the background in another room provides ambient noise that mimics the hum of the office. Maybe you like to use your laundry cycle as a work timer (e.g., "I can send x number of emails and complete y number of tasks before I need to load the dryer!"). Whatever the case, working at home offers you some unique perks and opportunities to motivate yourself that might not fly if you were still at your desk at corporate HQ.

Finding ways to get, and stay, pumped up for the workday is a healthy and happy way to keep burnout at bay.

10. **For Team Leaders: Practice Proactivity**

As anyone who's ever been a project manager or team leader knows, it can be tough to get everyone up to speed and working effectively toward a shared goal even when you all share the same physical workspace.

Trade a conference room for a Zoom call spanning five time zones, and the difficulty increases exponentially.

You can increase your team's odds for success by following best practices for remote leadership, including prioritizing communication, collaboration, and personal connections.

Be ready to bring your team together regularly on conference calls (both audio and video calls), virtual meet-ups, etc. to encourage interpersonal bonding and also ensure everyone feels engaged and heard. Take the initiative to ensure everyone's schedules are accommodated, and don't forget to engage one-on-one, too.

In addition, make sure everyone on your team has the technology they need not just to perform their daily duties, but communicate effectively, including video conferencing. Standardize the hardware and software your team uses, and make

sure everyone's been trained on their safe and effective use.

Investing in a centralized, mobile-friendly software solution such as PLANERGY makes it easy to centralize your data management, provide real-time, role-appropriate access, and ensure everyone has the information they need to connect, collaborate and create in an intuitive way.

Don't overlook the importance of cybersecurity best practices, either; remote teams working over the Internet are more susceptible to hacking and data theft. Discourage the use of unsecured or public Wi-Fi. Set firm policies, enforce them, and take advantage of both virtual (e.g., anti-virus software, firewalls, and strong data encryption across all applications) as well as physical (e.g. privacy screens, USB keys for logins) security tools.

Stay Connected and Productive While Working from Home

Whether you're working from home as a team member or managing a team of remote workers, tackling the challenges that come with telecommuting doesn't have to be an exercise in frustration.

Invest in the right tools and tech, plan your days so you can stay connected, informed, and productive, and take a proactive approach to work-life balance, and you'll be ready to get down to business wherever you are.

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