

Tips to increase effectiveness (and preserve sanity): WORKING FROM HOME



Boundaries

Time

Set a schedule and stick to it. I like to use a loose version of “blocking.” When it comes to work, I’m a sprinter, not a marathoner. I find I can sustain high productivity in a task or task type for at most a few hours, and then I go off a productivity cliff. If I don’t switch to something else, I tend to start making mental errors in addition to the productivity lag. Prolonged periods start to have negative mental health impacts as well. With this in mind, I establish 2-4-hour work blocks throughout the day and set aside some time for something totally different in between those blocks. I’m fortunate that I have a lot of flexibility in my schedule, so I can have a work block early in the morning, take a break to do something with my kids or tackle some chores around the house, come back to another work block, and then continue that pattern throughout the workday. If you don’t have that flexibility but find you work similarly, pull together a task list and build blocks around different task types.

Location

I’ve been working from home for years, so I’ve been able to set up a permanent office space with a door at home. This is great since my younger kids don’t always understand when I need to focus. If you can set a dedicated workspace away from the distractions of home, do it! For those who don’t have that luxury, find a place with minimal distractions and set up there. Avoid the temptation to carry the laptop to different locations around the house; you’ll have a harder time focusing and may find it challenging to maintain any work-life balance. Pro tip: headphones can be a great way to create focus. I’m sure it’s a Pavlovian response at this point, but I’ve been using over-the-ear noise-cancelling headphones for years of remote work and work travel. When I put them on, I find I focus right in on the task at hand.

Dress for Success

Mirror the office

Mirror the office - You’ve probably heard about the importance of maintaining your pre-work preparations. Like me and my headphones, these preparation rituals help you mentally prepare for work. As comfy as sweatpants may be, chances are you’ll struggle with maintaining productivity and boundaries if you’re not dressed in something you’d be OK with being seen wearing in public.

Work - Life Balance

Leave work at work(ish)

Leave work at work(ish) - Setting up your “office” at home is great for cutting down on the commute but not so great for keeping you from taking care of “just one more thing.” I’m terrible about “just one more” until I look at the clock and realize it’s after 10 p.m. To combat this, I instituted a rule that unless something is critical, I don’t do work after dinner.

Don’t worry about “looking busy”

Don’t worry about “looking busy” - Remote work looks a lot different than work in an office setting. Some managers or supervisors may resort to using communication tools to determine productivity. I worked with one who would call if you showed unavailable on Slack for more than five minutes. Don’t be that guy. Depending on your role, remote work comes down to productivity and/or availability. Either way, the best thing you can do here is meet your requirements and communicate to your team and management if you run the risk of missing a deliverable or are going to be unavailable for a period of time. Just like in the office, have solutions and alternatives ready to present along with that.

Stay Active

Physically

You may be amazed to see the number of steps you take throughout a regular workday at the office. Moving to the home office will naturally curtail that as it’s far easier to slip into a sedentary lifestyle when you just have to walk down the hall to get to “the office,” lunch is only a few steps away in the kitchen, you can’t wander over to say hi to a co-worker and your gym is closed. Finding ways to stay physically active will help your mental acuity as well as battle stress and anxiety. Right now, the Nike Training Club (NTC) app is offering free premium memberships. Before all this started, NTC was my go-to tool for workouts whether at home or in a hotel far from home. My wife has daily (or more frequent) socially distanced walks with a neighbor since she joined me in working from home. Having someone or a community to help with accountability helps, too. I just wrapped up my second Apple Watch competition with a friend. Nothing helps motivate me to get moving than the prospect of bragging rights.

Socially

Even the most introverted of us Gen Xers will start to miss touching base with people who aren’t in our quarantine group. A lot of us have tightly interwoven work and social circles; it stands to reason that we form relationships with those whom we spend eight or more hours a day for the bulk of the week. You may even find you start to miss that annoying or frustrating co-worker the longer this goes. Make the time to call people and use collaboration tools like Google Hangouts, FaceTime, Zoom and Teams to stay connected to your communities.



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