

7 Ways To Be More Productive When Working From Home

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There can be a lot of advantages to working from home, but that might not be the case for those of us coping with the stress, inconvenience, and even chaos brought on by the coronavirus. Many of us are working from home for unwanted reasons or under less-than-ideal circumstances. And even at the best of times, working on a virtual team can be a mixed bag.

So as someone who works from home permanently, I'd like to share some tips to help you get into a groove and make the most out of working virtually.

Create a private space. If it's available to you, designate a room in your home as "the office." If that's not an option, make sure you at least have a place you can go when you need a quiet, private place for phone calls, meetings, and other virtual appointments. This is important for a couple reasons:

- It will help you physically organize any work-related items or documents and keep them separate from personal ones. If you have children or other family members in the home, this is especially important.
- Mentally, having a separate space can really help you get into a "working" mindset. Since self-discipline and motivation is a huge part of being productive at home, giving yourself the space you need (literally!) is invaluable.

Add personal touches. Once you have your space carved out, add your own flare to it. Ask yourself, in what kind of environment you feel most comfortable and productive? Do you prefer to sit or stand? Do you enjoy burning candles or incense in your space? Does it help you focus to work silence or with background music?

Personally, I spend a lot of time writing, and I don't always want to be sitting or standing at a desk. In my home office, I have a very cushy armchair, and often times I brew a cup of tea, sit under a big blanket, write by hand on my notepad. Likewise, for you to be most productive in your space, make sure that the space reflects your work needs and individual style.

Set daily goals. Setting goals is a best practice in general, but it's especially important when you don't have colleagues or supervisors around to hold you accountable. To keep from feeling overwhelmed or sinking into a rut, it helps me stay focused and motivated to set between 2-5 clear, attainable goals each day. Things are bound to get derailed occasionally, of course, but starting the day with a clear sense of plan and purpose can help you stay engaged, organized, and productive when working remotely.

Don't isolate yourself. One of the major challenges of working remotely from home is that you are on your own the majority of the time. There is no friendly face next to you or across the hall to whom you can ask a quick question or share an idea. This can feel very isolating and have a negative effect on your work, especially if you are relatively new to working remotely.

To combat this, it's important to make a deliberate effort to stay in touch with colleagues. Check in with team members about work-related events, or send a quick message even if it's just to ask, "What do you think of this idea?". Team, department, or company group chats can also be an easy, casual way to keep in touch, so don't forget to participate in the conversation. Given that stress levels are generally higher right now, you can also use this platform to show support and stay updated on how people are coping, physically or emotionally.

Choose your mode of communication wisely. When you don't have colleagues in your immediate vicinity, figuring out how and when to communicate becomes more difficult. Schedules don't always align, and it's easy for messages to be misconstrued over email or text.

When you decide between a video conference, phone call, email, or text, it's important to consider what will be most efficient. If you are brainstorming or having a more nuanced conversation, text or email will probably be inefficient and even a bit confusing. If you just need a couple of questions answered, it may be best to type out the necessary context and pose your inquiries in written form. When in doubt, I usually ask myself what would be most clear to me if I were the one receiving the message.

Don't Be Afraid To Ask Questions. Miscommunication is bound to happen in any work environment, but especially so when part or all of your team is virtual. This makes it all the more important to ask questions and clarify important information. If a process is unclear, if you need clarification of top priorities, or if you forget what deadline was agreed upon, just ask!

Remember, You're Still Human! I think there is a tendency when an employee works from home to pressure yourself to be completely focused for the entire workday. When I first started working remotely, I definitely felt guilty about taking breaks because it seemed like cheating. Over time, I came to 2 realizations:

If you imagine a typical office environment, there is a lot of downtime you might not even realize is happening. You get up to reheat your coffee and stretch, or a coworker stops by to ask how you're doing. In an office setting, this seems natural and even positive because it makes the atmosphere friendlier and more relaxed. Your home office should be held to the same standard.

Taking breaks makes me (and a lot of people) more productive! Research shows that after 25 minutes to an hour of work, the most productive employees take 5-17 minute breaks because it helps them come back to work feeling refreshed and ready to refocus. In your home office, don't be afraid to take breaks when they feel necessary!