

WORK IN PROGRESS

COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO BEING PRODUCTIVE WHILE WORKING REMOTE

META: It's not uncommon for employees to struggle when working remotely for the first time. Read on to learn more about how you can stay productive while working from home or another location.

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Outside the cubicles, dress codes, and formal schedules of traditional jobs, a change is taking place that's reshaping the way people think about work. Telecommuting isn't new, but its sudden rise to prominence is a startling reminder of how quickly things can change.

A Pew Research Study revealed that out of 10,000 employees surveyed, only 20% had worked from home before the pandemic. By mid-October of 2020, over 70% of those same employees had made the switch to remote work. With more companies than ever exploring the advantages of working remotely, today's employees need to be comfortable with the idea of leaving the traditional office behind.

While health concerns definitely accelerated this positive trend in remote work, there are other reasons people seem to be moving away from the office. Working remotely offers employees unprecedented

flexibility, freedom, and autonomy. Thanks to cloud computing software and team-building apps, it's possible to collaborate with greater efficiency than ever before, no matter where you or your coworkers prefer to work. Meanwhile, employers benefit from the arrangement by enjoying reductions in overhead costs like air conditioning, electricity, and leasing expenses.

The option to work remotely is exciting, but it can also be challenging to remain motivated and focused at home. Whether it's Netflix, a text message, or the fridge calling your name, there will always be more reasons to be distracted when working from home. You're also in charge of how you spend your time, and without a boss around, you can easily get sidetracked. Fortunately, there are numerous ways you can keep yourself from veering too far off course. Here are some helpful tips for being productive while working remote.





DEDICATE A SPACE TO WORK, AND ONLY WORK

It's not always easy to strike a balance between the job and family while working from home. To help establish boundaries for yourself and others, consider creating a dedicated office space where you can get things done. Ideally, your home office should be a quiet place where you can concentrate on work and nothing else. Convert a guest room into a cozy office or invest in a collapsible partition to create a private space for yourself.

If extra space is limited, turn a walk-in closet into a "cloffice" and simply lock it up when the workday is over. Avoid distractions in your work area, such as private phone calls, video games, or TV shows that may pull your attention away from your work. When the lines between your job and personal life begin to blur, it's easy to fall into the habit of procrastinating. Establish a few ground rules for family members so they know when it's okay to visit, and when it may be best to let you concentrate on your work.



TAKE A BREAK AND GO FOR A WALK OUTSIDE

Just as in a conventional office environment, remote workers need to set time aside for periodic breaks throughout the day. An occasional walk around the neighborhood can do wonders for improving mental wellbeing and alleviating stress. If you need to, set a timer to indicate when it's time to stand up or walk around for a while.

Many companies today are beginning to encourage microbreaks for their employees and this approach works well for those who work remotely. If you start getting bogged down, take a few seconds to stretch or step outside for some fresh air. Designate some water-cooler time for yourself away from the computer and try to maintain a consistent schedule. Eventually, you'll fall into a steady routine and improve your time management skills, ultimately making you a more efficient employee.

STAY AWAY FROM THE KITCHEN

Remote workers can easily lose track of time while searching the shelves and fridge for something to snack on. With all your favorite foods a few steps away, the temptation to sneak away to the kitchen can be hard to ignore. You can get around this problem by preparing grab-and-go meals ahead of time like sandwiches or snack trays.

After work, take advantage of your full-service kitchen by making nutritious lunches for the week ahead. Think simple dishes like spaghetti, chicken, or beans and rice. You can also make a few extra servings of dinner and store the leftovers for the next afternoon. No matter how you choose to save time on work meals, be sure to store the food in zipper bags or reusable containers to keep them fresh for longer.

It's nice to think that working remotely means you'll be cooking all the time, but reality often has different plans. You may want to prepare for those long days when you just don't feel like cooking anything. Buy some TV dinners or other frozen meals that can be ready after just a few minutes in the microwave. Be sure to get some variety or you may find yourself staring at the same Salisbury steak every other night.



SPEND TIME (AND MONEY) MAKING YOUR SPACE COMFORTABLE

It's difficult to get things done with a broken chair or blurry computer monitor. Try to create a space where you can see yourself working every day. Talk with your employer about buying new office equipment like an adjustable standing desk or an ergonomic office chair. Other office components like a footrest or keyboard pad can further reduce fatigue or discomfort throughout the workday. Even if you have to spend your own money on upgrading your home office, the potential payoff in productivity is well worth the investment.

Consider buying peripherals you may need as well, such as a printer, scanner, or fax machine. If your home computer isn't up to par, think about upgrading some hardware components or buying a new system altogether. Depending on your work, it may also help to buy a second monitor to create a dual-screen setup on your desk. With two monitors, you'll have an easier time being productive while working remote.

You'll also want to spend some time personalizing the décor and ambiance of your workspace. Think about subtle details like lighting, color schemes, wallpaper, and furniture. Your ideal home office should match your aesthetic tastes by balancing utility and function with beauty and form.





BUY SOME TOP-SHELF HEADPHONES

It can be challenging to get work done if you're constantly bothered by background noises. Between pets, kids, and the neighbor's lawn mower, remote workers have no shortage of distractions. One of the best investments for someone working from home is a set of high-quality, noise-canceling headphones.

There's some scientific evidence to suggest that listening to music while at work can help boost productivity, so play a few soft songs on low volume when things get a little noisy. Find some instrumental tunes or classical music to compliment your desk work and create a playlist of your favorite songs. For some remote workers, energetic music helps to keep them focused, while others prefer diving into a podcast or audiobook. Alternatively, you can just turn the headphones off and use them like earmuffs to block out any ambient sound.

If Zoom meetings or phone calls are a big part of your workday, investing in a decent headset can drastically improve the audio quality of your discussions. Using a headset will also reduce fatigue during long business conversations when taking a break just isn't an option.



DON'T AVOID FAMILY AT WORK, EMBRACE THEM

The best part about working from home is being closer to your loved ones. However, it's essential to lay some basic ground rules regarding when the office is off-limits and when it's okay to visit. If it's unclear to loved ones when work stops and family time begins, you may end up having trouble separating the two.

Schedule a day to bring your family into your office and give them a snapshot of your daily responsibilities. After seeing what you do first-hand, your family will develop a much greater appreciation for your job and how it's done. Finding the right work-life balance can take time, but it often comes down to setting and enforcing solid boundaries early. For instance, explain to your kids that if the door is shut, it probably means you're in a meeting and need some privacy.

It's easy to bring your work home with you when working remotely, especially if your office is down the hall from your bedroom. Turn the light off to the office and lock the door when you've wrapped things up for the day. Putting in overtime during off-hours may be inevitable, but making it a habit can turn your whole house into a 24/7 office environment.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

There are many software apps and tools on the market today that can make working remotely much less hectic. Look into downloading a digital planner to book appointments or schedule virtual meetings with colleagues and clients. Microsoft Teams is a useful platform for collaborative remote conferencing while online storage solutions like iCloud or Dropbox can make sharing data with coworkers a breeze.

Another excellent program is Brain.fm, a music platform that uses proprietary technology to deliver soothing, mind-enriching music. Brain.fm works by facilitating neural phase-locking, a neurological process that encourages greater mental coordination and clarity.

To create more engaging presentations, use an iPad with your Zoom calls so you can share your screen with the rest of your team. This way you can use your iPad as a kind of digital whiteboard to help illustrate complex information or map out certain ideas in a visual format.

Finally, use Chrome Remote Desktop to connect your home office to your cubicle computer. Instead of physically visiting your job every time you want to access documents, project files, or data, you can log in to your remote desktop account and instantly grab anything you need.



GET READY FOR THE DAY

Try to follow the same daily routine you'd use in a traditional office environment. Set aside some clothes just for work instead of hitting the emails in your pajamas. Find a few comfortable but professional outfits to help you get into the right mindset each morning. If there's ever a surprise video call with colleagues or clients, you'll feel dressed for the occasion and ready to impress.

Remember that your home office is essentially an extension of your company's workplace, so take the time to get into a professional frame of mind before starting your day. If you can, try to take care of any obligations around the home before diving into your daily duties. It's much more challenging to remain a focused and productive employee when you start getting sidetracked by various family responsibilities.

You can also limit your distractions by creating a workspace in your home that's self-contained. Think about buying a coffee maker or a minifridge for the office to prevent you from constantly stepping away for snacks or refreshments. The more you can compartmentalize your office space and the communal areas in your home, the better.

FIND SOMEWHERE TO WORK OUTSIDE OF THE HOUSE

A change of scenery is sometimes needed to break up the monotony of daily remote work. Finding a comfortable, quiet place to work outside the home is especially important if neighborhood noise or family matters are keeping you from concentrating. When you need some time away, take your laptop to a local café or spend a few hours at a nearby library.

Another growing trend among remote workers is the use of coworking spaces. These shared work environments bring together teleworkers from all backgrounds and occupations, allowing you to enjoy the camaraderie of traditional office work without the fuss of dress codes or strict work schedules. Most coworking spaces operate by collecting a nominal monthly fee from remote workers to pay for leasing the space. Monthly membership fees also go toward acquiring office supplies and any other overhead costs associated with keeping the lights on. For some remote workers, shared spaces offer a unique opportunity to save a considerable amount of money on business expenses.

In addition, working in a shared office space presents a unique opportunity to network with other like-minded individuals, potentially opening doors to new career paths down the road.

If you're looking for a professional coworking space in downtown Las Vegas, Work in Progress is the place to go. With private meeting areas, team rooms, and plenty of space to host events, Work in Progress has everything you need to get the job done.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand peeling a white sticker from a whiteboard. The hand is wearing a silver ring on the ring finger and a black beaded bracelet. The background is blurred, showing a whiteboard and a person's face in the distance. The right side of the image features a red vertical bar with white text.

MOUNT YOUR OWN WHITEBOARD

Although technology can make remote work a lot easier, sometimes the old-school way of doing things is the best approach. Purchase a whiteboard to hang in your home office and use it to map out intricate concepts or outline your weekly objectives. Unlike a digital whiteboard, the real thing provides a tactile experience that can help you become more effective at brainstorming and forging new ideas.

Write brief reminders on the whiteboard regarding upcoming deadlines or assignments and you'll instantly know what's next when you step into the office each morning. Having a tactile surface to write is also very handy when you need to jot down quick notes during a conference call. According to a study conducted in 2014, manually writing down information can improve memory retention of the material and boost learning comprehension.

HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR PERFORMANCE WHEN WORKING REMOTELY

Teleworking is a world away from the traditional 9 to 5 and some people adapt more efficiently than others. Successfully making the transition to remote work takes time and patience, but there are several ways to navigate this change without sacrificing performance. Here are some simple pointers that can help you stay on track.



Focus on Productivity

Set benchmarks for yourself to monitor your progress on various assignments. By keeping productivity as your central focus, you'll never lose sight of the goals you need to achieve. Set realistic weekly, monthly, and quarterly objectives so you always have a project to work on, even when business slows down.



Communicate Regularly

Remote work can get lonely after a while, so don't forget to touch base with colleagues and team members if you need advice or support. Just because you're working alone doesn't mean you need to dismiss collaboration and communication with your coworkers. Ask for input on a particular project and encourage your associates to reach out if they ever need assistance. If you're getting burnt out by all the emails and text messages, try holding virtual conversations over Zoom or Facetime instead.



Build Trust

While working remotely may make you feel like a one-person army, it's important to remember that you are part of a team effort with many moving parts. Commit to cultivating trust in your coworkers and don't be afraid to ask for help when obstacles arise. Being a remote worker also means you will likely receive less direct feedback on your efforts, so work on building trust with yourself as well. Adopting a sense of confidence in your abilities starts with disregarding negative, doubtful thoughts that get between you and the job.



Find Out What Motivates You

Procrastination is the number one enemy of remote workers. It's essential to be clear about exactly why you get out of bed each day and what you hope to accomplish with your career. Whether it's a higher income, helping your community, or building a better relationship with your boss, take some time to discover what keeps you moving forward and hold that motivation in the back of your mind.



Celebrate Achievements

Whether you closed a huge sale or simply finished up a monthly finance report, take pride in your achievements when working remotely. After all, maintaining the discipline needed to work independently every day is an impressive feat in itself. Treat yourself and your coworkers to dinner after meeting key objectives or arrange a weekend getaway with your significant other to celebrate all your recent hard work.

Transitioning to remote work is a significant change for anyone, but it doesn't mean your work performance needs to suffer. In fact, you may discover that being productive while working remote is much easier than you thought. Follow these tips to get started on the right foot and you will achieve your career goals no matter where you work. To learn more about teleworking resources like coworking spaces, contact our team at Work in Progress today.

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