

Productivity Tips For Working At Home

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many companies are suggesting—even requiring—that more employees work from home. Working from home can be a lonely enterprise in this era of social distancing, but it doesn't have to be. For those who are not used to working at home or who don't have an organized work station, distractions can disrupt your productivity. After all, you're in your personal space, not your usual professional environment. Laundry needs to be done, dishes washed and the house cleaned. Plus, maybe you want to see *The View* since you're always at the office when it's on, or there's a good movie on Netflix you've been longing to watch. Your pooch needs to go for a walk or you want to snuggle with him. And your spouse keeps yelling questions from another room, causing you to keep losing your train of thought. Or on the flip side, maybe since being at home 24/7, you find yourself toiling overtime on the job long after you usually would have called it quits at the office. On top of it all, cabin fever could be sneaking up on you.

If you're not used to working at home, it can take some getting used to new challenges that you might not have at the office. It's important to have a defined schedule and stick to it. Avoid sleeping in or lingering over breakfast, and get to work just as if you're driving across town to your office, although you might be walking into the next room. You might think blasting Lady Gaga's latest hit is the most productive way for you to work. Or loud noises could be the worst thing for you to stay focused and get work done. Everybody is different. Some people work better in clutter while others can't concentrate unless their work space is tidy. Regardless of your personal style, here are some tips to facilitate adjusting to your new situation during the coronavirus outbreak:

1. Confine your work space to a specific area in your home so your job doesn't intrude into the lives of other household members and you can concentrate. Have a space that you designate as your workstation instead of checking emails, voicemails or texting in front of TV or spreading work out on the kitchen table. Make your space a stress-free zone of quiet and solitude where you can concentrate. If you don't have a separate room, find an area with minimum traffic flow or a corner of a room off from the main area.
2. Block the neighbor's barking mutt, excess noise from household members or ambient traffic with noise cancelling head phones or ear buds. Studies show that a delicate blend of soft music combined with soothing nature sounds—such as waterfalls, raindrops, a rushing brook or ocean waves—activates the calming part of your brain, helps you concentrate and lowers heart rate and blood pressure
3. Go to the same designated place on a regular basis so your mind doesn't wander, you can focus and increase your productivity. Establish water-tight psychological boundaries so you're not constantly reminded of temptations around you (there's chocolate cake in the fridge) or unfinished personal tasks—such as doing laundry, vacuuming or organizing your spice rack—that otherwise could compromise your productivity. And complete these personal activities outside of work hours as you normally would.
4. Set water-tight physical boundaries around your designated work space that is off limits for housemates. Treat it as if it's five miles across town, and ask house members to consider it as such (e.g. no interruptions from another room when you're engrossed in a project unless an emergency). If possible, only go to your designated space when you need to work. Stick to a

- regular schedule, and keep your work space at arm's-length after hours. Try to maintain the same hours you log in at the office so you don't get swallowed up by the workload.
5. After a reasonable day's work, put away your electronic devices and work tools just as you would store carpentry tools after building shelves or baking ingredients after making a cake. Keeping work reminders out of sight keeps them out of mind and helps you relax and recharge your batteries.
 6. Discourage personal intrusions. If you're a teacher or doctor, friends don't just stop by the office to chat, hang-out or interrupt your work. But sometimes well-intended friends, family members and neighbors think working at home is different. Interruptions and drop-ins can cause you to lose your focus, procrastinate or get behind on a deadline. It's important to prevent intrusions into your work space by informing others that although the location of your job has changed, it is no different from any other profession requiring privacy and concentration. Notify others that during at-home work hours you're unavailable and cannot be interrupted. And let them know the after-hours when you're available to connect.
 7. Employ your video communications perhaps more than you normally would, now that you're more isolated. Make sure you have your company's telecommuting devices—such as Zoom—hooked up and ready to go so you can stay connected with team members or office mates and you're available for video calls and teleconferencing. If you start to feel lonely, consider setting up a support group of friends and colleagues who are also working at home by satellite. Make plans to meet on a regular basis and share creative ways you've adjusted to the new situation.
 8. Avoid cabin fever. Now that you're spending a disproportionate amount of time at home, get outside as much as possible with gardening or walking around the block with respect to the social distancing mandates. Mounting research shows that spending time in nature lowers stress, helps you relax and clears your mind. After work hours, enjoy other areas of your home: watching a good movie, reading a book, or cooking a fun meal. And lead as much of a full social life as possible such as having non-symptomatic friends over for dinner. The new normal is not to limit social devices but to take advantage of them. Use Facetime, Facebook or Skype with friends and family members so you feel connected to the people in your life that you care about.
 9. Keep your attitude in check. Above all, be creative and don't let your confined circumstances dwarf your tranquility, happiness or productivity. Your greatest power is your perspective. It can victimize you or empower you. When you look for the upside in a downside situation and figure out what you can control and what you can't, it's easier to accept whatever is beyond your control. Your best ally is to find the opportunity in the difficulty during an uncontrollable situation instead of the difficulty in the opportunity. Take advantage of this restrictive time to clear clutter out of your basement, pull weeds in the garden or get caught up on fun hobbies you've neglected for a while.