

Success Series Guide to HOME OFFICE BEST PRACTICES

Working with Others in the House

It's one thing to be working at home. But, it's a completely different set of challenges when more than one person is working from that same house or apartment. By now, you've already experienced some difficulties. Recognizing those is where you start in determining how to avoid future challenges.

- ◆ Create a set of guidelines just like those you use with coworkers. Come up with strategies to handle some of those situations before they happen again.
- ◆ Consider creating quiet times and deciding who handles interruptions during those quiet times, how to handle disputes over internet, computer, or equipment sharing, silent signals for help during meetings, animal care shifts, etc.
- ◆ Work out your schedules and go over them each morning so you have an idea of what will be going on with the other person throughout the day. This may prevent any lapses in the guidelines during scheduled events.
- ◆ Designate your workspaces and what can be moved if needed. Even more importantly, note what cannot be moved so that you know your vital documents will be there and your technology will be working the way you need it to.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to think differently when it comes to scheduling to accommodate using some of the same equipment. If one of you is a night owl, this might be a great time to come up with "shifts" for using the computer, tying up lots of broadband, or other equipment-related issues.

Working with Children in the House

If we think this is a big upheaval in our lives, imagine what children are going through at this time. They were taken away from their friends. They missed out on some of the holiday events. Worse, their parents have turned into their teachers! Any one of these would be upsetting enough, but all together makes a situation that can be hard to handle. Here are some ideas you might want to consider.

- ◆ Consider setting up a desk for your child close to yours so that they can do schoolwork at the same time you do work. It's their own little office and it might make it easier for them to stick with their work a little longer if they see the example you set.

- ◆ Check with your child’s teacher or online resources to confirm how much time he or she should be spending on schoolwork.
- ◆ Schedule Zoom, Skype, or Facetime meetings with family or friends in the evening so that your children get the added stimulation of other persons “visiting.”
- ◆ Online sites have some great recommendations for how to word discussions with your children about what is going on in the world right now. Review some of these to find key phrases and good questions to ask them to see how this challenge is affecting them.
- ◆ Fastcompany.com shared these ideas: communicate expectations and set boundaries, assess resources who can help, plan activities that don’t require supervision when you’re on a call (movie, educational games, apps), reward good behavior, and prioritize your schedule.
- ◆ Parents.com recommended created a schedule and reminded us we need to be kind to ourselves and our children during this difficult time.
- ◆ Muse.com noted the importance of keeping a schedule and letting the children make some of the choices on their schedules.

Working with Pets in the House

Our pets are a great comfort at a time like this. They can also be a big pain! Finding ways to work effectively and professionally while surrounded by four-legged friends can be a challenge, but there are some techniques that can help.

- ◆ Create a no-pets-allowed office space. If work and playtime are getting confused too much, you can set up your home office in a room, but still leave a way for you to keep an eye on them through a glass door or pet gate. Create a space close to your desk for those “needy” pets. This can be a way of keeping them from barking, running around, or working to get your attention.
- ◆ Try synching your pets’ schedules with yours. For example, if you know you need them to be quiet during a meeting, you could arrange that as their meal time or put play time before it so they’ll be worn out and calmer during the meeting. If you notice when your cats enjoy some of their many, many nap times during the day, you can use those times to schedule online meetings.
- ◆ Provide stimulation with some new toys that keep them busy and discourage destructive behaviors.
- ◆ There are “licks” treats that can actually calm your pet. These are not medication, just herbal remedies that may help them handle those times when work requires complete attention.
- ◆ Alert others on the line at the beginning of your meetings that there might be noise, such as barking at the time your mail carrier comes by.
- ◆ Have that finger ready to click the “mute” button as needed.

Dealing with Tech Issues

At home we're having to find new ways to do processes we could do in seconds with the equipment at the office. We asked people what technology adjustments have helped them in the transition to their home office.

- ◆ Try some adjustments to make your virtual meetings more comfortable. Look in the settings and you'll often find settings for virtual backgrounds, screen sharing, and even settings to touch up your appearance.
- ◆ Some folks have noted that a headphone and microphone have been good additions to their tech tools because of the number of online meetings they're now attending.
- ◆ Clear out old photos and files on your computer. You might even want to consider a duplicate remover software to help you organize your files.
- ◆ Organize your browser bookmarks. Consider organizing them by topic, project, or frequency of use.
- ◆ Try organizing tabs on your browser so that the ones you use most are all in the most convenient location.
- ◆ Empty your email folder so that when you start your day there's nothing in your inbox except new messages. Create folders for continuing threads such as projects, coworkers, and employee info.
- ◆ Clear your phone. Empty some memory since you're probably using it more for business than ever before. Close apps when you're not using them. Restart it to refresh your phone's operation.
- ◆ Learn some new things that you can do on your phone. Delete apps that you don't use anymore.

Self Care

A 2019 survey by Digital Ocean reported that 82% of remote tech workers in the U.S. felt burnt out, 52% said that they work longer hours than those in the office, and 40% felt as though they needed to contribute more than their in-office colleagues. Keep these statistics in mind during your remote work time and do not feel compelled to work longer hours to prove that your work time at home is productive. Realize that work-life balance will be harder to maintain in our current crisis. Don't be so hard on yourself.

- ◆ Try using the Pomodoro method, an excellent time management technique that helps you stay focused and avoid burnout. To do this, set a timer to work for 25 minutes and then take a 5-minute break. After four 25-minute sessions, take a longer break — 15 to 30 minutes. Continue these intervals throughout the day.
- ◆ Appreciate the benefits of working remotely. It can improve productivity, reduce stress, improve work satisfaction, remove commuting time and expenses, and give you greater sense of control over your workday.
- ◆ Try to get outside at least once a day. The benefits of sunshine and fresh air will help your mood and your physical wellbeing.
- ◆ Try a digital detox in the evenings. Trade screen time for family time, reading, journaling, puzzles, needlework, or other non-electronic leisure activities.

Give yourself a little breathing space and some extra care during this time. Accept that you might also need some help.

The National Disaster Distress Helpline is available to anyone experiencing emotional distress related to COVID-19. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to speak to counselor. If you're experiencing emotional distress related to COVID-19, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) or your local crisis line.



RESOURCES

Unfortunately, at times like these, there's a lot of misinformation going around. You'll want to stick with reputable sources to help you avoid the rumors. This section features some resources you'll want to bookmark.

- ◆ Excellent information and updates can be found at the Louisiana Department of Health's website: <http://ldh.la.gov/coronavirus/>
- ◆ Don't forget that, as part of your Louisiana state employee healthcare plan, you have access to the BlueCare app for telehealth doctor visits. Additionally, visit <https://www.bcbsla.com/landing/covid19> for a range of health information and resources.
- ◆ CDC has excellent resources online, include a quick questionnaire to determine if it's time to go to the hospital. Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>
- ◆ WHO (World Health Organization) has an abundance of resources at <https://www.who.int/> and has developed an app called "WHO COVID-19" that presents facts and tips about how to protect yourself during the coronavirus pandemic. This app will soon be available for Windows and iOS users.
- ◆ WHO has also created a list of Myth Busters. Here are some examples:
 - ◆ 5G mobile networks DO NOT spread COVID-19. Exposing yourself to the sun or to temperatures higher than 77 degrees DOES NOT prevent COVID-19.
 - ◆ You can recover from COVID-19. Catching the new coronavirus DOES NOT mean you will have it for life.
 - ◆ Being able to hold your breath for 10 seconds or more without coughing or feeling discomfort DOES NOT mean you are free from COVID-19 or any other lung disease.
 - ◆ Cold weather and snow CANNOT kill the new coronavirus.
 - ◆ Taking a hot bath WILL NOT prevent you from catching COVID-19.
 - ◆ COVID-19 CANNOT be transmitted through mosquito bites. (This is good news for those of us in Louisiana.)

Thank you for your service to the State of Louisiana during this difficult time. It is because of you and your team that the State has been able to continue serving its citizens even in the face of this overwhelming challenge.