

Success Series Guide to **WORKING REMOTELY**

HOW CAN I KEEP MY HOME OFFICE ORGANIZED?

It helps to realize that you can treat your work day just like you did in the office, with a bit more flexibility. This time is an opportunity for you to implement those different time management and organization ideas that you've never had time to try. If they work, great. If not, try something else. Here are some basic ideas to help you get started:

- ⇒ **Do things you would do if you were going into the office.**
Set your alarm. Get your coffee. Change out of your pajamas. Use these or any other actions that help signal your brain that it's time to be productive.
- ⇒ **Create a daily to-do list.**
Try posting it on a bulletin board or calendar. Remember that things that were automatic in the office are not habits yet, so put those on your list too. Tackle thing #1. And now you're on a roll...
- ⇒ **Recognize your most productive times.**
Use your sharpest periods for tasks that require the most creative or analytical thinking. Schedule repetitive tasks for times when your mind is not as sharp. (Yes, we know that usually means right after lunch.) And consider your team's sharpest times for meetings. Many people will tell you that meetings first thing in the morning are more problematic than productive, especially if video is involved.
- ⇒ **Create a dedicated work space, but allow yourself "field trips" too.**
You need an area that is reserved for your work, but you should enjoy the flexibility to be able to go and work in your back yard if you can. Or perhaps you just want to move to the kitchen table for a change of scenery. You're the office manager. You decide.
- ⇒ **Minimize clutter.**
You want to take this opportunity to design your workspace for increased productivity. Create zones. Zone 1 is closest to your computer. It includes only the things you use multiple times each day, like your planner, pen, and coffee cup. Zone 2 is a nearby surface for the current project that you're working on. Zone 3 is a filing system, whether it's folders, filing cabinet, or any other system that allows you to have materials close by, but out of eyesight so that you don't get distracted by them.
- ⇒ **Find your own dress code.**
Admit it. You've complained about the dress code before. Now you can create a professional, but comfortable style that works for you. Yes, tennis shoes are now allowed! (And we realize this new dress code probably means your top half is ready for meetings, while you're wearing shorts offscreen.)

⇒ **Adapt items around the house to become office tools.**

Sure, you're missing that cute inbox you have at the office. But have you realized that a big cereal box is about the same size? You can even cover it with wrapping paper. Consider tools like rolling file carts converted from craft or bar carts. And a holder for silverware can be a holder for your office supplies. Start looking around with your specific need in mind and you'll be surprised how many household items can become valuable work accessories.

⇒ **Use a single calendar.**

If your calendar only includes your work events, you've got potential challenges that can occur. If the kids have a scheduled Zoom class at the same time that you decide to meet with a coworker, you're going to have a tech-conflict. Be sure to put all family events on your calendar so you can schedule accordingly.

⇒ **Create a filing system.**

These could mirror the system you have back in the office, or this could be an opportunity to upgrade to a system that is more suited to the way you'll need to work at home. It could be simply project files that will be able to transfer back into office filing, or it could be a day/date deadline system. It could even be a system that duplicates the files on your computer.

⇒ **Put things away at the end of the day.**

This can be part of your end-of-day ritual that marks the transition to "you" time. Put things in their files so nothing is readily visible. That's important because if you walk back into that space and see something from a project, your mind can stray back to work.

⇒ **Get the files you need by using the vpn at off-hours.**

Vpn systems can slow down with the number of people working on it right now, so how about making use of those off-hours to transfer files you need to your computer. Then you can work on those directly without any lag time. Just be sure to back them up to avoid a loss of work.

WHAT TECHNIQUES CAN HELP ME MANAGE MY TIME AND STAY FOCUSED?

You've used methods in the office to manage your time that are still valid in the home office. However, you have more flexibility to address any issues that have affected your ability to focus on the work at hand. Here are a select group of tips that can make a difference to your productivity.

⇒ **Limit distractions by making it harder to access social media during work hours.**

Yes, it is nice to be able to check in with family and friends at any time. It's also distracting. If this is an issue for you, practice focus by logging out of social media during working hours so that you are more conscious of how often you stray to Facebook or Instagram. Set specific times of day to visit those sites.

⇒ **Match your music to the work you're doing.**

Got analytical thinking to do? Try instrumentals or sounds like binaural beats. In a slump or feeling down? Crank up your tunes from school days. You can use a radio app or one of the many free music services if you don't mind a few commercials. Or you can create your own soundtrack on YouTube or other entertainment services.

⇒ **Try using your laundry, a kitchen timer, or even Alexa as an alarm.**

A fun idea is finding ways to combine tasks. For example, put laundry in the washer or lunch in the oven and when you hear the buzzer it signals the time to change to a new task. Or maybe it's a reminder to take a break. If you haven't thrown Alexa out the window yet, she can be useful in this way too. It's just another way to use tools around you to help you stay focused.

⇒ **Set boundaries with others in the house.**

Create a signal that shows when you are not to be disturbed. A simple sign on the door or a closed door can work just fine. Create household “quiet times” to parallel with your online meetings and phone calls.

⇒ **Take breaks away from your desk.**

Some of us take a break by changing from computer tasks for work to doing computer tasks for fun. The problem with this is that your brain doesn’t recognize the difference. As far as it’s concerned, you’re still working. Practice real breaks by getting up. Moving around. Talking to someone. Do something different to give yourself a physical and mental break from that screen and chair.

⇒ **Prepare meals the night before.**

If you stop to prepare food during the work day, you’ll be tempted to do “fast” or “ready-made” meals that will probably not be the healthiest fare. Consider creating your meal the night before when you can be a little more leisurely and prepare foods that are better for your body than your clock.

⇒ **Create rituals.**

Try using a morning coffee break as a signal to switch from one task to another. Perhaps you can turn one break into an exercise break that prepares you for a routine task that usually causes you to feel sluggish.

WHAT TOOLS MAY BE HELPFUL WHEN WORKING FROM HOME?

The basics that you took for granted in the office aren’t always available at home, but you can do a quick assessment of the ones you consider most important and find ways to ensure the same level of service and work production while you’re a home.

⇒ **Audio/video tools.**

Headphones can be useful for noise-canceling, playing music, or as a signal to the family that you are not to be disturbed. You might consider a headset with microphone attached for online communications. Also, you’ll want to see if your computer is equipped with a webcam, so you can make the most of online video meetings.

⇒ **A stable internet connection.**

Take the time to review your internet. Perhaps your signal strength is weak in your home office. You might need a router that will address this issue. Is it time to upgrade your modem? This review can help you avoid frustration and protect your connection during the many online meetings you’re sure to be attending at this time.

⇒ **Scanner.**

Nope, you don’t have to have a dedicated scanner. Consider one of the phone apps that allow you to photograph a document and then converts it to a pdf for easy emailing.

⇒ **Surge protector.**

This is one of those things you don’t know you need until you’ve experience a power surge that damages some your tech tools. Be sure that protection is still working.

⇒ **A good chair.**

Don’t think it makes a difference? Work in one of your dining room chairs for a day and see how you feel about it.

⇒ **A quiet area.**

Chances are you can't soundproof a room for your conference calls and online sessions, but you can minimize extraneous noise by relocating to a designated quiet area for these meetings. In some cases, the best quiet area is a walk-in closet, as long as you arrange the background so it doesn't give your location away.

HOW SHOULD I COMMUNICATE WITH MY COWORKERS?

Communication has always been important in our workplaces, but now it's even more vital. Since we're missing out on that social aspect of work, our normal connections can suffer. Without the nonverbal communication we're used to, small issues can become inflated. Luckily, we're in a time where increased technology allows us more methods to communicate than ever before. If you've hesitated about using these tools in the past, now is the time to adopt them and see what a difference they can make for you in your work life and in personal communications.

⇒ **Set aside time each week to check in with others to talk about non-work issues.**

Consider implementing a virtual 'coffee break', where you invite everyone to participate. This will allow everyone to see each other and discuss things not related to work.

⇒ **Write well. Use Grammarly if you need to.**

This period will be one that depends on the written word more than ever. If you're not sure about your spelling or grammar, it could be a good time to install the free Grammarly extension on your browser or Outlook.

⇒ **Know when you need to call.**

Just like when we're in the office, you know there are some times that you need to have a real conversation. Know when the subject is one that shouldn't be discussed over email. Or use the 3-email rule. If it goes back and forth three times, pick up the phone.

⇒ **Use as much face-to-face interaction online as possible.**

You'll be losing a lot of that nonverbal communication that helps get your messages understood. Be willing to use online tools to communicate face-to-face whenever possible to share facial expressions, tone, and gestures.

⇒ **Don't be all business.**

Just like in the workplace, recognize that many of the personalities you deal with need a little interaction that isn't just business. Take the time to check in with coworkers to have those discussions you would have in the break room or cafeteria in the office.

⇒ **Determine which channels will be used for official messages, which are for fun, etc.**

If your group determines that it wants to use one of the many different apps or programs for interoffice communication, consider setting guidelines. When to post. Where to post humor vs information. How often to post. Come up with your team rules so that no one has to feel uncomfortable or unsure of what is acceptable.

⇒ **Practice with the different online methods of communication.**

Try some of the different methods to communicate. For some teams, Skype might still work. WebMail has its own chat feature. Apps such as GroupMe and Slack can fulfill the need for real-time connections during this time of isolation.

⇒ **Know what your background looks like.**

Remember that your coworkers are seeing everything around you. Make sure your background is not distracting or inappropriate for workplace conversations.

HOW CAN I KEEP BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND PERSONAL TIME?

Your office is now in your house. How is it possible to keep work and home separate? How can you keep balance knowing that everything you need to work on tomorrow is right there close at hand? Here are some of the top tips to help keep work “at work” and home time distraction-free.

⇒ **Turn off phone alerts for office notifications after hours.**

Unless your work requires you to be on-call, consider turning off all phone alerts and notifications related to work. If you’re being an example of work-life balance to others in your household, you don’t want to respond to that notification sound during dinner or important activities.

⇒ **Create an end of day routine.**

Just like you’d do at work. Close up your folders. Turn off your computer. Turn the page on your calendar. If you have a separate room you’re using for an office, leave your work behind and close your office door.

⇒ **Take advantage of found time.**

You no longer have that commute to deal with. Why not take this time to reconnect with family over breakfast? How about calling someone who might be struggling to brighten their day? Or taking a little time for meditation or a short exercise session to get the blood flowing? Whatever you consider a reward for all that you’re going through, give it to yourself in this time.

⇒ **Hold discussions with your children about what’s going on.**

Google “Talking to kids about corona virus” and you’ll find articles with advice and ways to address the many questions children may be having during this extended time away from their friends and school.

⇒ **Keep up regular routines with the family.**

Try to keep as many practices in place as possible. Dinner together. Regular family shows or game night. Find ways to replace group gatherings. How about piling the kids in the car and going Bear Hunting? Across the nation, people are putting stuffed bears in their windows so people driving around can see how many they can spot. It’s a fun way to get out and stay safe at the same time.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MANAGE THE STRESS AND ANXIETY OF LIFE IN THIS COVID-19 WORLD?

Keeping perspective and a positive outlook is a challenge during this period in our history. Sometimes it helps just to know that you’re not alone in your concerns. There are small actions—things we can take control of—that can make a big difference in our stress level. Here are some recommendations that employees across the state and nation have found to be helpful.

⇒ **Take breaks from news, social media, and other places where you hear reports about the virus.**

You take this pandemic seriously enough. You don’t need to keep up with the daily count. You don’t need to hear people telling horror stories. Pick one or two objective sources and use those for your updates. Then avoid sensationalized reports and political arguments about the current crisis. Your mood, your sleep patterns, and your family will thank you.

⇒ **Use natural lighting if possible.**

Your home office can make use of a window to ensure you’re getting natural lighting. If that’s not available, use your breaks to walk outside so that you can take advantage of the mood-altering affects of natural sunlight.

⇒ **Stretch. Walk. Do activities that help your body.**

You are isolated, but not trapped. Take the time to move around, whether it's stretching, yoga, walking, or even online exercise classes. There are many great ones being offered on YouTube and Facebook at this time and most are free sessions.

⇒ **Communicate with others.**

You need communication with others to keep you from feeling isolated and distant. Replace that morning commute with a call. Coffee breaks can become Facetime chats. Some offices are still eating lunch together via Zoom or Skype. Find ways to keep those connections for you and others in your life.

⇒ **Distinguish between what you can control and what you can't.**

You know that many of the things you worry about with the pandemic are out of your control. The more of your time you spend thinking about those matters, the more frustration you'll experience. Instead, practice focusing on things that are in your control. You can review and improve your protective measures. You can use this time to find ways to improve your health. You can make your home environment a place of renewal, fun, and retreat. Focusing on these types of actions will reduce negative feelings and benefit you even after this crisis has passed.

⇒ **Get outside.**

There's a peace about nature that can be some of the best therapy you can experience. And right now, there's less pollution due to the reduced auto emissions. Enjoy the world outside as a way to appreciate this positive development and remind you that increased peace of mind may be right outside your door.

⇒ **Practice mindfulness.**

Meditate. Read. Breathe. Pay attention so that you are able to realize that this one moment is all yours. Your decision to treat it as a positive moment makes all the difference in your outlook on the future.

⇒ **Accept that you will worry.**

Allow yourself moments of worry. They're natural in a situation such as the one you're in now. Find others with whom you can share your concerns. Just make sure you have a definitive positive ending to those sessions. End them by sharing something you for which you are grateful. Clap your hands. Smile. Do whatever it takes to signal your brain that "worry time" is over.

⇒ **Be a role model.**

By setting an uplifting example for others, you're not only helping them see ways to cope with this crisis, but you're creating a positive outlook for yourself. We used to call it "Fake it till you make it." Now it's "Project it until you perfect it."

⇒ **Ask for help.**

Don't be afraid to reach out to others if you need help. There are numerous hotlines set up for mental health assistance. There are online groups and social media outlets to help. There are even groups that are starting letter-writing campaigns to connect in an old-fashioned way. Know that you are not alone.

⇒ **Practice random acts of kindness.**

Mister Rogers' mother said "Look for the helpers" when there is a crisis. Perhaps this is your chance to be one of the helpers. That might mean a phone call to a neighbor, delivering groceries, sewing masks, or sending a surprise letter or gift to someone who you know is alone. The smallest act can be huge for someone who is alone and struggling.

⇒ **Practice gratitude.**

Every night write down five things you are grateful for. Think through your day. Consider past joys. Think about times you've smiled. Think about people who make your world better. Make this the last thing you do at night and watch the improvement in your sleep.

⇒ **Subscribe to an uplifting resource.**

There are a plethora of resources, newsletters, and email lists that send out good news, ideas, and positive inspiration on a regular basis. Take the time to search out some of these such as greatergood.berkeley.edu and goodnet.org for activities and information that will raise your spirits.

⇒ **Make this a time of development.**

Check out some of the many free webinars, online classes, articles, and resources. If you missed the list we shared in our Continuous Learning Webinar, check it out on the Success Series handouts page. You'll find free resources for classes and training that will help you use this time as a time to develop skills for your personal and professional life.

We hope these ideas give you some techniques that will help during your new method of working and we ask that you continue to share ideas that are working for you.

Thank you for all that you're doing in this challenging time. The Talent Development Team wishes you health and happiness as you continue to serve Louisiana and shine as a positive influence to every citizen you encounter.