

How to Work From Home: 20 Tips From People Who Do It Successfully

Working from home is awesome ... right up until the cat throws up on your computer. And your neighbor, who you can only assume is building a time machine, starts firing up all sorts of power tools and noisy machinery across the street.

For many modern professionals, working from home every once in a while is a luxury that our respective companies afford us. But which environment actually allows us to be more productive: the home office or the *office office*?

In the *office office*, your coworkers often pose the greatest threat to keeping you from getting some real, heads-down work done. They drop by your desk, engage you in conversation, and invite you to lunch. The social benefits of a workplace are definitely nice to have, but they can become a challenge if you're easily distracted. At the home office, however, I find that it's easy for *you* to become your own worst enemy. Because when you're not surrounded by coworkers, you're free to drop those pesky inhibitions. At the home office, no one's watching. You don't necessarily feel that same peer pressure or communal obligation to get stuff done. (Also: You don't have to wear pants.)

Below, I've compiled a bunch of great work-at-home tips and tricks from some of my awesome coworkers.

How to Work From Home: 20 Tips for Telecommuters

1. Get started early.

When working in an office, your morning commute can help you wake up and feel ready to work by the time you get to your desk. At home, however, the transition from your pillow to your computer can be much more jarring.

Believe it or not, one way to work from home productively is to dive into your to-do list as soon as you wake up. Simply getting a project *started* first thing in the morning can be the key to making progress on it gradually throughout the day. Otherwise, you'll prolong breakfast and let the morning sluggishness wear away your motivation.

2. Pretend like you *are* going into the office.

The mental association you make between work and an office can make you more productive, and there's no reason that feeling should be lost when telecommuting.

3. Structure your day like you would in the office.

When working from home, you're your own personal manager. Without things like an in-person meeting schedule to break up your day, you can be quick to lose focus or burn out.

To stay on schedule, segment what you'll do and *when* over the course of the day. If you have an online calendar, create personal events and reminders that tell you when to shift gears and start on new tasks. Use the same schedule at home. While you probably will get tasks done faster at home than at work, this structure will help keep you focused and productive.

4. Choose a dedicated work space.

Just because you're not working at an office doesn't mean you can't, well, have an office. Rather than cooping yourself up in your room or on the couch -- spaces that are associated with leisure time -- dedicate a specific room or surface in your home to work.

A place that's consistently your 'work space.' It helps you get into the right frame of mind.

5. Don't stay at home.

This step may not be ideal in your current situation. Most of us are working from home are in a temporary stasis. The concept of not staying at home to work may be beneficial to your productivity and state of mind. Perhaps you are feeling claustrophobic or shut-in at home. Maybe going to a public place, with social distancing in mind, would motivate you. Go to the park. Go to places that have Wi-Fi services or if you have a personal Wi-Fi device, go somewhere that stimulates you to be more productive.

6. Make it harder for yourself to mess around on social media.

Social media is designed to make it easy for you to open and browse quickly. At work, though, this convenience can be the detriment of your productivity.

To counteract your social networks' ease of use during work hours, remove them from your browser shortcuts and, according to Fast Company, **log out of every account**. You might even consider working primarily in a private or, if you're using Chrome, an "Incognito" browser window. This ensures you stay signed out of all your accounts and each web search you conduct doesn't autocomplete the word you're typing. It's a guarantee that you won't be tempted into taking too many social breaks during the day.

7. Commit to doing more.

Projects always take longer than you initially think they will. For that reason, you'll frequently get done less than you set out to do. So, just as you're encouraged to overestimate how much time you'll spent doing one thing, you should also overestimate how many things you'll do during the day. Even if you come up short of your goal, you'll still come out of that day with a solid list of tasks filed under 'complete.'

8. Work when you're at your most productive.

Nobody sprints through their work from morning to evening -- your motivation will naturally ebb and flow throughout the day. When you're working from home, however, it's all the more important to know when those ebbs and flows will take place and plan your schedule around it.

To capitalize on your most productive periods, save your harder tasks for when you know you'll be in the right headspace for them. Use slower points of the day to knock out the easier, logistical tasks that are also on your plate. **Verily Magazine** calls these tasks "small acts of success," and they can help build your momentum for the heavier projects that are waiting for you later on.

9. Save calls for the afternoon.

Sometimes, I'm so tired in the morning, I don't even want to hear my own voice -- let alone talk to others with it. You shouldn't have to give yourself too much time to become productive in the morning, but you *can* give yourself some extra time before working directly with others.

If you're struggling to come up with a reasonable work schedule for yourself as a telecommuter, start with the solitary tasks in the morning. Save phone calls, meetings, and other collaborative work for when you've officially "woken up."

10. Focus on one distraction ... like a baby!

There's an expression out there that says, "if you want something done, ask a busy person."

The bizarre but true rule of productivity is that the busier you are, the more you'll actually do. It's like Newton's law of inertia: If you're in motion, you'll stay in motion. If you're at rest, you'll stay at rest. And busy people are in fast-enough motion that they have the momentum to complete anything that comes across their desk.

Unfortunately, it's hard to find things to help you reach that level of busyness when you're at home -- your motivation can just swing so easily. HubSpot's principal marketing manager, Pam Vaughan, suggests focusing in on something that maintains your rhythm (in her case, it's her daughter).

It's the same idea for why some people work better when they have very busy schedules -- you learn how to manage your time VERY efficiently. The 'distraction' of my daughter (I mean that in the most loving way

possible) means I can't possibly succumb to some of the other common distractions of home -- putting in a load of laundry, turning on the TV, doing other household chores -- or else I'd never get any actual work done."

11. Plan out what you'll be working on ahead of time.

Spending time figuring out what you'll do today can take away from actually doing those things. And, you'll have planned your task list so recently that you can be tempted to change your schedule on the fly.

It's important to let your agenda change if you need it to, but it's equally as important to commit to an agenda that outlines every assignment before you begin. Try solidifying your schedule the day before, making it feel more official when you wake up the next day to get started on it.

12. Use technology to stay connected.

Working from home might help you focus on your work in the short term, but it can also make you feel cut off the larger operation happening in the office. Instant messaging and videoconferencing tools can make it easy to check in with coworkers and remind you how your work is contributing to the big picture.

Part of what enables us to work from home so much more often now is the array of apps and tools designed to help remove distance as a barrier between team members. Finding the right tools to keep you and your team connected is important for staying productive at home.

13. Match your music to the task at hand.

During the week, music is the soundtrack to your career (cheesy, but admit it, it's true). And at work, the best playlists are diverse playlists -- you can listen to music that matches the energy of the project you're working on. **Video game soundtracks** are excellent at this. In the game itself, this lyric-free music is designed to help you focus; it only makes sense that it would help you focus on your work as well.

14. Use laundry as a work timer.

You might have heard listening to just two or three songs in the shower can help you save water. And it's true; hearing a few of your favorite songs start and end, one after another, can remind you how long you've been in the bathroom and shorten your wash time.

Why bring this up? Because the same general principle can help you stay on task when working from home. But instead of three songs off your music playlist, run your laundry instead.

Doing your laundry is a built-in timer for your home. So, use the time to start and finish something from your to-do list before changing the load. Committing to one assignment during the wash cycle and another during the dry cycle can train you to work smarter on tasks that you might technically have all day to tinker with.

"It's already been said, but waking up early and getting things done before other people get online works for me. I also usually do laundry when I work from home and I set mini deadlines for myself corresponding to when I have to go downstairs to switch loads. If I'm working on an article, I tell myself I'll get to a certain point before the wash cycle ends. Then I set another goal for the dryer."

15. Communicate expectations with anyone who will be home with you.

Of course, you might be working from home but still have "company." Make sure any roommates, siblings, parents, spouses, and dogs (well, maybe not dogs) respect your space during work hours. Just because you're working from home doesn't mean you're home.

16. Take clear breaks.

It can be so easy to get distracted as a telecommuter that you avoid breaks altogether. Don't let the guilt of working in the building you sleep in prevent you from taking five to relax. Rather than just opening YouTube and watching some comfort clips, however, use your breaks to get away from your desk. Go for a walk outside or spend time with others who might also be in the house.

17. Interact with other humans.

Remember: You're working from home, not the moon. Interacting with other people during the day is allowed, even if they're not your coworkers. In fact, it's a good idea to see another face during the day when most of your work day is solitary.

Go outside and find a human to interact with -- ordering your coffee, running an errand, whatever. It keeps you sane.

18. Prepare your meals the night before.

When you're in your own home, it can be tempting to spend time preparing a really nice breakfast and lunch for yourself, chopping and cooking included. Don't use precious minutes making your food the day of work -- cook it the night before.

Preparing food ahead of time ensures you can actually use your meal times to eat, and that you aren't performing non-work tasks that spend energy better used at your desk.

19. Pick a definitive finishing time each day.

You might be under the impression that working from home establishes more work-life balance, but be careful with that assumption. Working from home can also feel like being at a casino -- you can get so caught up in your activity, in a relaxing environment, that you lose complete track of time.

In lieu of coworkers, whose packing up and leaving the office reminds you to do the same, set an alarm at the end of the day to indicate your normal work day is coming to an end. You don't have to stop at exactly that time, but knowing the work day is technically over can help you start the process of saving your work and calling it quits for the evening.

20. Keep the TV on in the background.

If music doesn't keep you motivated perhaps turning on the television. I personally work better with my TV going in the background. I guess it tricks my brain to think I'm in an office setting, hearing conversations from my coworkers. I put in a DVD, CSI seems to be my creative choice, and let it play on a low volume.

Extra Tip

Schedule Breaks

Know your company's policy on break times and take them. If you're self-employed, give yourself adequate time during the day to walk away from the computer screen and phone. A lunch hour and two 15-minute breaks seems to be the standard for full-time US employees.

Take Breaks in its Entirety

Don't short-change yourself during breaks, especially your lunch hour. You can use an app, such as [TimeOut for Mac](#) and [Smart Break for Windows](#), to lock yourself out of your computer for 60 minutes. Or you can just launch a simple clock or timer on the screen when you take a break. If you return to your desk after only 40 minutes, walk away for another 20.

For more on breaks, see [How to Take Better Breaks to Boost Your Productivity](#).

Make It Personal

Above all else, figure out what works best for you. Sometimes the answer is apparent, but other times you might need some inspiration from other people who are in the same boat. A supportive community of remote employees does exist, whether you find them in your organization's [Slack](#) channel or online through blogs or Twitter.

Work Life Balancing While Working From Home

Achieving a good work-life balance while [working from home](#) can be challenging. It takes careful thought and planning. Even more so when everyone has suddenly become a remote worker due to [coronavirus](#).

When we think of work-life balance, we often think of both being in perfect harmony, with equal hours spent on both sides. However, a view this literal is unrealistic and bad for our [mental health](#). It will only leave you feeling incredibly overwhelmed and unaccomplished. We need to redefine work-life balance while working from home.

The first thing you need to realize is that work-life balance while working from home is more of a juggle or a blending of both aspects of our life. It will look different for each of us and could change on a daily basis. It will contrast drastically if you are single, married, or have kids at home all day.

It varies so much between us because we lead such individual lives, and we all have our own unique priorities. And that's ok! We hope these tips to find your work-life balance while working from home can help.

1. Let go of perfection

We should always strive for excellence instead of perfection, this is even more important when striking a work-life balance while working from home. You will probably not have everything you need to do your job exactly as you would in the office. You won't have all your files, printer, scanner or potentially even the fax machine you only use once a month. It's time to adapt and do the best you can with what you have available. A small mental shift that makes a large difference.

2. Disconnect

When you are available all the time, your workday never ends. You need those times when you shut off. Give yourself a chance to separate from work. It can be as simple as not checking email in the evening or on the weekend. Allow yourself moments of calm instead of rushing to complete every task.

3. Exercise

Often the first to go when our routine is disrupted in such a big way, exercise should be the first thing we make time for. It reduces stress, pumps up endorphins, and lifts your mood. Don't have an hour to lift weights? Start with a 15-minute yoga stretch. It will give you the same benefits (on a smaller scale) with the added sense of accomplishment and self-care.

Understandably when gyms and sports facilities are closed, it can be hard to find ways to exercise. Thankfully many trainers and gyms are offering online classes, or search YouTube for free classes. Exercise is an excellent way to achieve work-life balance while working from home.

4. Get rid of time wasters – both activities and people

If it doesn't reflect your true priorities, put it on your not-to-do list. Draw boundaries. Politely excuse yourself from conference calls that you don't need to be part of. It is not selfish to devote your attention to activities that are the best use of your time.

5. Eat a proper lunch

While eating snacks all day while a step away from your fridge sounds amazing, it does nothing for your productivity or sense of work-life balance while working from home. At work we may be more compelled to take a lunch break when your coworkers remind you to – this doesn't happen at home.

Make sure to set aside time in your day to take a proper break. Set a calendar or phone reminder. Even better do a virtual lunch break with your team so you can connect with each other and get a proper time-out.

6. “Go home” on time

It can be hard to get up and walk away when you no longer worry about getting stuck in traffic or picking children up on time. This doesn't mean you shouldn't still have a “go home” mentality. It means, decide what time you finish up for the day, and when the clock gets there stop working and leave your workspace.

Judge your productivity by your results, not the hours you put in – especially right now. Work-life balance while working at home is all about creating a new normal and sticking to it instead of working away until the wee hours. You will be much more efficient with the extra sleep anyway.

7. Build transitions into and out of work

Your commute not only gets you to and from work but also gives your brain time to prepare for your day and decompress after. Just because you don't have that commute, doesn't mean you shouldn't have an equivalent routine to ease into and out of your day.

We often take for granted our commute time and just wish we could get there faster. But we rarely identify the opportunity it gives us to mentally prepare. You are generally not signing off on a major project and going straight to making dinner. Give your brain time to hit the reset button. Have a signal at the beginning and end of your day to serve as a buffer.

If you listen to the radio or read, do the same. Or spend some extra time with a pet. Get in some exercise to equal your walk to work by walking around the block for an equal amount of time. For your evening commute, do it in reverse.

8. Don't forget to socialize

When the whole office starts working from home, you get cut off from a lot of casual daily interactions. If you're not used to working alone this can make you feel lonely. Those random social interactions help break up your day and make it feel unique, while isolation can make every day feel like Groundhog Day but one where all we are doing is working.

Combat this by talking to your work colleagues a couple of times throughout the day. Have a video coffee break, ask what they did on the weekend, catch up on their family news, reach out and share that joke or meme, or just discuss the shows your binge-watching. If you normally talk to them about a specific topic, keep it up. These little interactions go a long way to maintain your work-life balance when working from home.

9. Don't sweat the small stuff

As with every new undertaking, you will not be perfect the first time around. Give yourself a break. There isn't one tried and true rule to finding work-life balance, especially in this ever-changing situation. In fact, how you approach it will be as individual as you are.

No matter what this balancing act looks like, the most important part is that it works for both you and your family. If both your life and work are getting the attention they deserve, whatever you are doing is right for you.

Your definition of work-life balance while working from home is up to you

It might be more of a work-life juggle – sending emails while your kids do crafts or having a video call with the team in Singapore while you make dinner. You are fitting things in where they can, all while making sure it gets done the best way you can.

Or more of a work-life blend – you're already used to running a business out of your home, potentially with your partner, or with extended family. Your workday may already never have a hard end as your family and business life are intermingled. And have potentially gotten more intermingled if you are self-isolating together. Maybe you can still work-life segment – separating one from each other and ‘never the twain shall meet’. From 8-5 you are all work with no distractions, but after you are able to shut off and walk away.

However, you are dealing with managing your work-life balance while working from home will be unique to you. It can be really difficult even for those of us used to it. Be kind to yourself.

Cited Resources:

<https://www.pcmag.com/news/get-organized-20-tips-for-working-from-home>

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/productivity-tips-working-from-home#.Xqmauwbgqyg.mailto>

<https://energyresourcing.com/blog/work-life-balance-working-from-home/>