

Working From Home

Some tips to make home-working a more enjoyable and successful experience.

By Jonathan Broadhurst

More and more, people are being asked to work from home. It was already a trend, but with the Coronavirus outbreak, it's becoming almost a necessity. In the past, working from home was code for taking the day off and sadly, some employers still see it that way. In reality, working from home can be far more productive than commuting to your daily place of work – no commuting for a start, but it's not quite as easy as it sounds. There are plenty of traps and barriers that need to be managed to get the best from what is a great opportunity to be more productive in less time. Here are a few things to think about and some tips to help you make the most of working from home.

1. Technology

Workplace computers aren't always that powerful, but business makes up for that with a commercial grade infrastructure that (mostly) makes up for the lack of raw computing power. Home computers and laptops can be quicker, but they will be hampered by other things especially the internet. Your home broadband, however fast is limited by bandwidth – the number of people using the internet at the same time. Think of all the traffic being diverted off the motorway onto an A road. Business class internet is the motorway, your home connection is an A road.

Another issue will be your company's IT security. Gaining access to internal networks and storage may be excluded by default. Some companies internal networks can be accessed via a remote access app. Your IT dept. will have to enable access and give you the login credentials, but once you are set up, your screen will be identical to the one you see at work and you will have access to all the files and apps you would normally use. If you are accessing sensitive data, you might want to think about a VPN – virtual private network. They are easy to set up and stop undesirables breaking into your network connection.

2. The home environment

The big advantage of workplace environments is that they are set up to help people work. That's not the case at home. Sitting on the sofa with your laptop on your knees and daytime tv playing in the background is not going to cut it. Find a space where you can sit comfortably with no distractions - you can't expect to work from home and look after small children without a drastic impact on your work output. The opposite can also be true. Working from home can create tension in the family – are you at work or at home and how would they know? Working from home requires everyone's involvement and agreement in setting the boundaries

Furniture at work is designed to be used for long periods and specific activities without causing pain. While you may not want or be able to have ergonomically correct chairs and desks in your home, think about how you can create the next best thing.

Coffee and tea are of course free and easy at home, but be careful how much you drink. 10 cups of coffees a day will not do you or your loved one much good as they try to bring you down from the ceiling. Drink plenty of water and take regular breaks – something not everyone feels comfortable doing in the regular work environment. And stop for lunch – nothing too grand though, or you'll be wanting an afternoon nap to sleep it off.

3. Staying engaged

The frustrations of technology aside, staying engaged is probably the biggest problem for people. There are four common issues that prevent people from maintaining focus and delivering on objectives.

I. **Changing habits**

Making the change to working from home requires more than leaving the car in the garage. Day one is an exciting and maybe a little nervy challenge. But just doing more of the same things you do in the workplace will lead to disappointment and disillusionment. Working from home requires a different mindset, which is why creating a work environment at home plays an important part. Creating structure and boundaries keeps the focus on work and prevents it bleeding into personal time. Making business calls first thing can get you into the workday mindset, as can dressing for work.

- II. **Lack of resources.** This is often related to technology and lack of access. Forward planning is the key to this. Talk to the relevant people and organise the things you need in advance. Taking time out to plan is one thing people can find difficult, but it's actually an important key to success.
- III. **Communication.** At work it's easy to pop your head round the corner, get the team together for a quick briefing, or fire off an email, but at home that isn't e-other possible or productive. A WhatsApp group is a simple way of holding group chats and keeping to touch; and it's far more personal than email. If you need to share files, consider something like Slack. It's a bit like Facebook for business but easier to share files, create separate topics of conversation and it integrates with MS Office. If you want to have face to face meetings Zoom offers the capability to hold group meetings and share your screen, to show a presentation for example (Do remember to check what's behind you when using video!). There are plenty of alternatives out there offering similar capabilities and there's usually a free version that will probably meet your needs.
- IV. **Isolation.** This is probably the biggest barrier to staying engaged, focused and productive. Even in the workplace isolation is an issue and working from home increases the risk. It's also something that creeps up on you and can be hard to spot. Technology like slack and Zoom can definitely help, but it's important to look after your mental health and well being. Opportunities for social gatherings are extremely limited right now, but you can still go for a walk, do some exercise and ask other people to regularly check in with you - you'll both appreciate the time. Have a virtual coffee over Zoom, FaceTime or Skype. Take your laptop or notebook and pen outside and change the environment. If you find yourself thinking you're burdening others by contacting them, it's likely that you are feeling the effects of isolation. Like stress, isolation is a slippery slope and can lead to more serious illness.

Working from home is a great opportunity to build more flexibility and improve work life balance. It's something that is being forced upon us, but it can change your life for the better in the long run.

Jonathan Broadhurst

Jonathan is a coach and mentor and has been running his own business from home for over 20 years. He has worked on projects including company restructures, culture change programmes, performance management and leadership development.

In 2017, Jonathan embarked on a life changing experience with his wife Jane, spending six months backpacking around Australasia. Jonathan moved to Badsworth in October 2019 and has become actively involved in Village life. He manages the Village website and is a member of the Village Plan Committee. Jonathan can be contacted at www.ignite-me.com or through the village website. Alternatively you can post a note through his door at Village View, Main Street.