

Suddenly Working From Home?

Four ways to help you stay productive — and sane.



This article is part of our Steelcase 360 series Making Distance Work about working remotely

Working remotely is on a lot of people’s minds today especially in light of social distancing recommendations to slow the spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) health crisis and the desire to rethink travel as a means to reduce carbon footprints. For some people, this is a regular practice, but for many, it’s a new way of working — and presents new challenges if you are trying to manage in a small space while juggling family who are home as well.

People are all at once discovering the benefits and frustrations of remote work. And because no two people are alike, there’s no one-size-fits-all approach. But you can take cues from great workplaces. You’ll get more done and feel better when your technology, space and the ways you need to work come together. Working from home should be no different.

Here are some practical tips about how to improve the work from home experience.

Think About What You (*and Your Teammates*) Need First

1. STICK TO A SCHEDULE

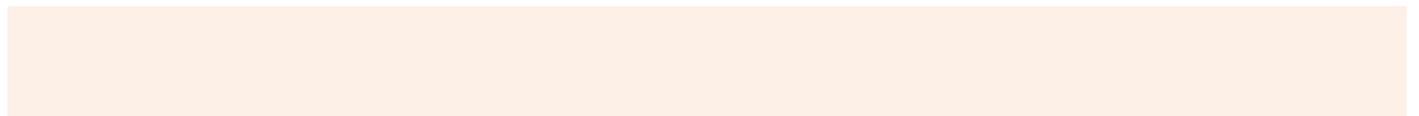
It's tempting to be "on" constantly when you work from home. Others find being home distracting and challenging to stay focused and productive. Identifying boundaries can help you maintain a healthy and productive balance. Keep in mind each person may have different boundaries depending on their life or the day. **Decide on your schedule each day and try to stick to it.**

2. BE TRANSPARENT

If you are not at your computer, be sure to communicate that with your colleagues. Make your calendar visible to your team, update your status in any team/collaboration software you use or even leverage your out-of-office auto reply. Let your team know when you're going to be away and when you'll be back, especially when you work in different time zones.

3. TEAM BUILD VIRTUALLY

Think about ways to keep relationships intact while working from home and practicing social distancing. Consider creating a group chat for social interactions - during stressful times, everybody loves a good meme. Set aside time for more informal conversations to foster team cohesion. Schedule coffee with a colleague over video to catch up. Remote workers need more of these checkpoints than those who are in the office.



Agree How You'll Work Together

4. CREATE CONSISTENT CONNECTIONS

It can be easy to slip into a siloed work experience when everyone is working on their own, especially during more socially isolating times. **Institute a quick daily virtual team connect to keep work moving forward.**

5. PROVIDE A VARIETY OF TOOLS

The tools available to distributed teams aren't perfect. No one technology does it all. **Pick some consistent tools for instant messaging, video conferencing, sharing documents, file transfers, etc. to keep your team connected virtually while social distancing.** But, don't stop searching for the next best thing. You may find a process that sticks around long after this uncertainty has ended.

6. MAKE WORK VISIBLE, VIRTUALLY

Take a lesson from agile teams and start a virtual project board. List your tasks, progress and deadlines to keep everyone on the same page. Plus, you get the added benefit of people knowing where to jump in and help when needed.

Look Beyond Your Laptop

7. TURN YOUR CAMERA ON

Conference calls invite participants to multi-task, or worse "zone out" — because you're hidden from view. **Video should be the default setting for any remote collaboration.** Seeing facial reactions and body language lets you "read the room," plus people are less likely to interrupt or speak over one another. [To do it well](#), keep the computer at eye level — put it on a stand or further back so it isn't looking up your nose. Look into the camera and use natural light, but avoid putting your back to a window or you'll look like a silhouette.

8. PREVENT DATA DISRUPTIONS

If possible use a cable/Ethernet connection, because Wi-Fi can be unreliable. **If you're on a video call, close any open applications to preserve computing resources for the video.** Video requires more bandwidth, so if you need to share a big file consider using a second device.

9. ELIMINATE BACKGROUND NOISE

Avoid rooms with lots of hard surfaces that echo (like a kitchen). Choose rooms with rugs or other softer materials (like a living room). Headphones provide a better experience than computer audio. And, if you switch from one video platform to another, close one before opening another because the software may grab hold of your microphone. Finally, if you're late to an online meeting or not speaking, mute your audio to avoid disrupting the conversation.

Pick Places that Work for You

10. FIND FOCUS

Not everyone has a home office, so think about establishing a territory that clearly signals "I'm at work." Discuss protocol with other members of your household to signal when you're "on at work," even if you're reading on the sofa. If you tend to be distracted by other household demands, find a way to create visual boundaries so you don't see the dirty dishes. And, if acoustics are an issue and you can't shut a door, headphones may be your new best friend.

11. VARY YOUR POSTURE

A risk of working from home is becoming more sedentary. **Look for ways to vary your posture and the spots where you work throughout the day.** Sit, stand, perch, go for a walk — activating the body, activates the brain and can keep you from going stir crazy.

12. CONSIDER PROXIMITY

Look at the physical distance between you, your furniture and your technology to make sure it's comfortable and effective. Residential furniture isn't always designed to be optimal for work. Is your laptop easy to reach? Can you avoid "text neck" and slouching over a coffee table? If you spend the day typing at your dining room table, for example, you may feel like your shoulders are in your ears.

13. SHOW PERSONALITY

Joy is one of our six primary emotions and research shows experiencing joy actually makes you more productive. Surround yourself with things that make you smile like a bright colored coffee cup, inspiring pictures or silly tchotchkes. It may seem trivial, but it's proven to make a difference and can ease the mundane feelings while social distancing at work.

If you or someone on your team suddenly needs to work from home, it will take time to establish new rhythms and practices. Working from home sounds simple enough, and even desirable. But when you've been working alone and social distancing for days or weeks at a time, it can feel isolating and be difficult to stay connected with your teammates and engaged in your work. **When you create a healthy routine, an effective place to work, and use technology to get work done and also maintain relationships, you'll be more productive and feel good while doing it.**

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