

Remote work does take some adjustment. Here are some habits and strategies drawn from my own experience in working from home for nearly a decade now.

## **1. Work regular hours**

Try to start your day at a set time, whether it's 8 a.m. or 9 a.m. Get into work mode during working hours.

## **2. Stay in touch with co-workers**

There is such a thing as the "hive mind." You do miss out on internal communications by working remotely. That means you have to make an effort to stay in touch.

Even under normal circumstances, no one sends you a memo on "Key Office Gossip for March 17, 2020." Not every formal decision gets put into writing and then sent by email to you. In the current situation, when your office has suddenly gone virtual, be sure check in with your colleagues frequently. Also, make sure your manager knows what you're doing and when. There are plenty of platforms that provide free conference call services.

## **3. Make plans and lists**

Working from home involves some self-motivation and discipline. Every Monday, I make a list of projects I'll be working on, including new story ideas I'm going to pitch and ideas that have been on the backburner that I don't want to forget about. Then, each day I make a mental list of projects I'm going to be working on — sending out interview requests for Project A, writing Project B, doing the reading for Project C, etc.

## **4. Be realistic, especially now**

I try to break big projects into increments so that starting and working on them seems less daunting. If something's going to take a week or a month, I try mostly only to think about what needs to get done today.

These are bizarre circumstances. On the one hand, you're likely to have less-structured time for the foreseeable future. There's a chance to think big — maybe there is some big dream project you can finally get done.

But all these tweets going around about how Shakespeare took advantage of a plague quarantine to write *King Lear* set the bar a little high. Especially this week, maybe just getting adjusted is all you can do.

Depending on how much you collaborate, you're likely going to be thrown off your game because your co-workers are adjusting also. People need to be realistic that a lot of workers will

have to deal with kids. Your pace at the end of the month will likely be different than it is now. For now, take things you accomplish under trying circumstances as a win.

## **5. Take breaks**

It's good to get up and walk around, especially in the afternoon. But don't take lots and lots of breaks throughout the day. Internet browsing is one thing, turning on the TV is something else entirely. Stay in a work rhythm and then get out of it occasionally. If you have a dog, the walk will provide a break and a chance to leave the confines of your house.

## **6. Skip the chores**

Sorry, spouses. It's easy to throw in a load of laundry, but don't try to vacuum or multitask with housework too much. Your work and home lives are about to get hopelessly tangled, so try to keep them separate and stay on task. Errands can be a distraction, too, but for the most part those won't be happening for a while.

At the moment, disinfecting is a good idea anytime.

## **7. Dealing with kids**

Not just working from home but also having children home from school is challenging. Still, the usual advice probably holds. When you're with your kids, be with them, playing or coloring or sharing other activities. When you're working, ask your kids to be patient. Many people will be easing household rules regarding screen time.

If you hope to be productive, don't let them bug you every five minutes. How successful you'll be will vary, depending on their age. But if you normally work in an office, you already have strategies for dealing with pesky people who try to interrupt you.

## **8. Touch base with friends**

I like to send a note or a news link to a friend — a friend, not a social media account — once a day or so. People are not great about responding, but it's nice to think of your friends once a day. This helps at normal times with feeling isolated. It's going to be crucial in the days ahead.

## **9. Dress for the door, not for success**

The stereotype about remote workers is that we sit around in pajamas all day. That doesn't happen, in my experience. For me, there doesn't seem to be much point in putting on the type of clothes that have to be dry cleaned. If someone knocks on the door, I'm dressed appropriately, if casually.

If it helps you get into work mode to dress like you're going to the office, go for it, but I doubt you'll want to keep this up too long. The point of dressing professionally is to show respect to the people you encounter, but if you're not encountering anyone, why bother? Video meetings are different.

## **10. Work hard, then turn it off**

Everyone I know who works from home works more than they did at the office. There are fewer interruptions. It's also harder to "leave it at the office" when your computer is right there. You are spared the commute, but you also don't have that transition from work to home. It's easy to keep going, writing just one more email or completing one more task you just remembered.

Learn to shut it off. If you started at a regular time, end at a regular time. If you need to keep working, that's fine, but once you stop, try to be done. Treat it like caffeine, something you stop at some point in the day. Some people with kids will end up working most productively after dinner, but otherwise try not to work or check email in the evening. Write down the things you know you'll need to take care of the next day and then trust the piece of paper or your electronic notes to remember them, so you don't turn them over your head.