REMOTE WORKING - BEST PRACTISE AND TOP TIPS

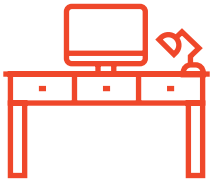
What is your work style?

Working from home (WFH), like any form of remote work, presents new challenges and opportunities that require you to approach work differently. The great news is that you have more freedom and control over how you work, but to make that more impactful you need to align how you work from home to your workstyle.

Does your creativity and productivity peak in the morning or the afternoon? Are you a lark or an owl? Do you work better with your head hunkered down in silence or do you thrive with music and background noise? By figuring all that out and planning your WFH experience and environment around it, you'll be more productive and more satisfied.

Take some time to sit down, understand your work-style better and use those insights to plan your approach.

Create your workspace



A big part of effective WFH is making it feel like work and the physical workspace you choose is central to this. You don't need a home office or make any big investment, just a bit of planning. And maybe moving some furniture around.

What kind of workspace best suits your workstyle? Is the kitchen table going to do the trick or will you need something bigger? Will having other people around help you or will you need to work in a separate room? Does a window looking out on the world inspire you or distract you? Do you want to be near a wall so you can put up some Post-its? Will you need somewhere to store documents? Position your workspace in such a way that you can concentrate and have the resources you need. One of those critical resources is a good internet connection, so find out where in your home gets the best Wi-Fi reception. If you are doing many video calls, you

may need to make one small investment in an ethernet cable. Wi-Fi can be unreliable, and a wired connection will lead to better call quality.

Think about how your workspace will look and sound on an audio or video call. Will there be a lot of background noise? More importantly, what will everyone else on the video call be seeing behind you? Do they see a messy kitchen behind you, a pile of laundry or do they see a tidy, professional background?

Get into the right Mindset

It's not just a matter of opening your laptop and sitting at the kitchen table all day in your pyjamas. Try to make it feel like work, which can be a challenge when surrounded by your home, family or pets. But making that mental shift to "work" will help your focus and productivity. If you've set up your workspace in the right way, you're already halfway there.

One simple trick to make that mental shift is to dress in such a way that it feels like work, which likely doesn't mean jogging bottoms. You don't need to go formal, but dressing like you do at work, will remind you that you're in work-mode now. If you're going to be doing video calls, you should be doing this to give the right professional impression to your colleagues and clients.

Finally, make sure to start and end each workday at around your usual time. While there is a natural and admirable tendency to start earlier or work later because your commute time is now zero, try to stick to your regular work schedule to make it feel like work.

Routines will keep you focused and motivated

You'll likely have fewer meetings and distractions from colleagues. While that can lead to the challenge of social isolation, it gives you a chance to be more in control of your schedule, focus more on a few big tasks and dive into them for a few hours.

To build your workday focus, plot out what you want to accomplish each day and chunk out time for each of your tasks. Schedule creative tasks to the times when you're most innovative and routine work to the times that you're not. Build in time for daily rituals and routines, like the morning email check, team call or administrative tasks.

Pay attention to your well being

Working from home has some unique stresses, and social isolation is top. We're social animals and working at home all day can affect our physical and psychological health. But you can fight it. Keeping in touch with your colleagues is vital, and email isn't enough.

Find the time for virtual water cooler chats with your colleagues, even to make small talk. Set a dedicated time at the start of each call to do this, whether they're also working at home or are at the office and make it a video call to strengthen that social bond. It keeps your team strong and you mentally fit, with the added benefit of helping you keep up with what's going on in the company. Don't feel bad about suggesting meetings by video through Skype or MS Teams—you may not be the only one who prefers live communication to solely relying on email and chat.

If you work at home with your family or loved ones, get an emotional recharge and inspiration from them when you need it. Take advantage of being at home. Look after your physical health. Stand once an hour. Do some stretches.

Go for a morning walk or run to start the day or when you finish up. Exercise, even a short walk, has been proven to boost your creativity and mood.

VIDEO CONFERENCING TOP TIPS

1. Use video – at least at the start of the call

- To make people feel like they're all at the "same" meeting, use video conferencing rather than traditional conference dial-ins. Technology — such as Skype, MS Teams and GoTo Meeting — helps to personalize the conversation and to keep participants engaged.
- We know that using video may put our office and home networks under strain, so look for the red signal bars in the top right of your screen, but start the call using video and wave to colleagues to say hello, even if you later switch to audio only.

2. That said, always provide an audio dial-in option

- Video conferencing can work very well, but it relies on a strong internet connection that may not always be available. People need the ability to participate via audio but make it clear that video-first is the new norm.

3. Test the technology ahead of time

- Nothing kills momentum at the start of a meeting like a 15- minute delay because people need to download software, can't get the video to work, etc. Prior to a virtual meeting, all participants should test the technology and make sure they are comfortable with the major features. And remember, supplier or customer conversations may require your team to familiarize themselves with different software packages.

4. Make sure faces are visible

- Video conferences are more effective when people can see each other's facial expressions and body language. Ask individuals to sit close to their webcam to help to recreate the intimacy of an in-person meeting.

5. Stick to meeting basics

- Prior to the conversation, set clear objectives, and send a pre-read if appropriate. During the session, use an agenda, set meeting ground rules, take breaks, and clearly outline next steps (including timing and accountabilities) after each section and at the end of the meeting.

6. Minimize presentation length

- The only thing worse than a long presentation in person is a long presentation during a virtual meeting. Meetings should be discussions. Background information should be provided beforehand. If someone needs to present, use screen sharing to guide the con versation, so attendees can literally "be on the same page." But prioritize conversation to maximize the time people are looking at each other.

7. Use an icebreaker

- Although we're not big fans of them, it's important to use every tool to reinforce interpersonal relationships when people may be feeling isolated.

8. Assign a facilitator

- It's usually harder to manage a virtual discussion than an in-person one. It can be helpful to assign one individual to guide the conversation, allowing the other participants to focus on the content. The facilitator can also use a polling system to "take the pulse" of the group on certain questions and ensure that all voices are heard. The facilitator should also be able to resolve basic questions on the technology being used.

9. Call on people

- Getting everyone to participate without talking over each other is one of the more challenging aspects of running a virtual meeting. To forestall this, we recommend periodically calling on individuals to speak, even by virtually "going around the table" before a decision is finalized.
- Some software packages even allow attendees to "raise a hand" if they want to. This can help the facilitator drive closure without the risk of excluding an introverted participant's views.

10. Capture real-time feedback

- Gathering and processing high-quality input during a virtual meeting can be challenging, especially since visual cues are harder to read. Use a phone-based survey tool like menti to collect on-demand feedback from attendees on specific topics in real time. Keep the polling open, separate from the videoconference to avoid disrupting the conversation.
- Participants will need clear instructions on how to use the system and practices, but groups get the hang of it very quickly and it's well worth the effort.

11. Practice once or twice while you're still together

- Hold your next staff meeting virtually, with each person in the office and hooking into the meeting with no assistance. After the meeting concludes, gather and debrief about the experience. What went well, and what didn't? How can you evolve your virtual meetings to make them as productive as when you meet in person?
- Not being able to work together in the same room with colleagues may become a major challenge in the next few weeks. To make virtual meetings work, you might need to adjust how your team conducts them. But a small investment in preparedness now could have a huge impact if that time comes.

12. Effective meetings e-learning

If you want to find out how to run a great meeting – consider taking the 15-minute e-learning on our L&D Sharepoint HERE