

13 Tips to Be Your Most Productive While Working from Home

By Jendayi Harris, Senior Consultant

With COVID-19 topping the news, it's no wonder that employers are sending their most critical assets to work from home. Only working from home has its own can of productivity drainers, especially for the more extroverted personality type. Introverts – well, they've hit the jackpot!

Working from home has risen 175 percent since 2005. Closing cubicles and sending employees home is one way for employers to retain employees and helps us keep work flowing during times of public health concerns.

And we prefer to work from home, or to have the option. Studies show 82 percent of employees would like at least one day at home, and 57 percent at least three days from home each week. My colleagues and I join the 8 million who work from home full time, and for a little while, it may be just about all of us.

It's no surprise that working from home bumps up productivity. In one study, 86 percent of employees felt much more productive working from home than in the office. How do you join the 86 percent? I gathered tips from clients and colleagues on how you can manage the art of working from home.

Here they are, **13 Tips to Be Your Most Productive While Working from Home:**

Set Up Space – To work from home well, you'll need a dedicated workspace. One that's not shared by rowdy teens or spouses, but that's all yours. Ideally this space has everything you need: power plugs, good lighting, a larger monitor, and a door. We work much better when in an office or at a desk, than on the couch or in a multiuse room. You'll associate this place with work, so other areas are associated with breaks or non-work. Do you have a dedicated workspace?

Have a Clear Start and End Time – Start and end times can be blurred when working from home – after all your commute is only 10 seconds. Still, treat your day, like a workday. Make sure you have a clear start time routine of when you go to your workspace and a clear end time routine to signal "it's finished." A morning routine may be – get up, pray, read, work out, get kids ready, eat, shower, dress (putting on shoes helps to be more productive), go to work. An end of day routine may include cleaning up your space, triaging your inbox, and powering down. Do you have a start and end time routine?

Take Reward Breaks – Do you get a bit bitter when you see how beautiful it is outside, but you're stuck in the house doing work? Maybe it's just me. But we can get our blue-sky reward, by scheduling breaks. Complete a tough task, reward yourself with a walk, family connection, or high-knee exercises. (That last one may be just me too!) Our learning and

outreach director, Kelly, keeps a puzzle going so she can fit in few pieces during her rewarding brain breaks. What can you do at your break time that feels like a reward?

Make and Hit Daily Objectives – Whether you work from home or not, it's best to make a daily objective hit list the night before. This prevents you from the tragic aimless feeling that comes without a clear plan for the workday. Those who have a strong focus on execution, are likely to win the day. Haleema keeps her objectives written out in front of her for her daily success. If you have kids, have a plan for them too. Specifics matter. Do you know what you're specifically working on today?

Schedule Smart – Work your schedule to maximize the flow of your household and energy. Steve, our sales director, plans for his busy home traffic times. His teenager comes home from school at 3:30, so he doesn't schedule calls at that time. Charity, our finance and legal director, does her data-heavy work in the morning when her brain is freshest, and her meetings in the afternoon when she needs more extroverted interaction. And Mitch, does his project work in the afternoon when he feels the morning rush is settled. How can you make your work schedule work better for you and your household?

Establish Boundaries – Both home life and work life need boundaries. Boundaries are internally created guidelines that protect you from over or under-working. Once you figure out what would work for you, then, you need to establish them by communication. Be sure to sit down with your family or housemates and let them know your expectations while you're working from home. After much frustration, Cindy finally sat her family down and said, "Family, from now on when I work from home, I'll need your help. Please enter the house quietly when you come in. Don't shout my name around the house, as I may be on a call. And, please stay out of my workspace." They're happy to help you if you can connect the dots to their electronics and your paycheck. What boundaries do you need to create and communicate?

Manage Home Distractions – Besides establishing boundaries, use visual cues. If you don't have a door to send the hint that you're not open to the home front, then use headphones. Not just any headphones, big huge red ones that cover the ears to show you mean business. Or hang a sign that says – do not disturb/quiet please. What visual cue can help to reduce home distractions?

Mitigate Virtual Distractions – Virtual distractors can't bang your door down. They're a bit limited in their reach. To tune them out, set chats to "do not disturb." Or shut chat or email applications down altogether. Chuck uses his email automated responder to reduce his desire to immediately respond. He'll set it to deliver the message: Working on a project, will be back online at 4pm. Simple communication goes a long way. How can you reduce virtual distractions?

Do Power Hours – To get anything done, focus is required. If you can, allow yourself at least 2 to 3 power hours per day. A power hour is the same as focused work time, or what

we call SNA (Strategic Next Action) Work Time on the calendar, basically, uninterruptable time blocks to get stuff done. Be connection free to focus solely on your work at hand, no pings, dings, or cell phone rings. If you struggle with distractions, turn the Power hour into a Power 15, then build your focus biceps by setting a timer for 15 minutes, and restart it to work up to an hour. Check out – article You're Not ADD, You're Distracted. What are the best times for your power hours?

Enlist Help – If you're single, living the dream (or nightmare), with no dogs or kids like me, distractions are a cinch. But if you have a few teens or toddlers, it's a bit of circus some days – especially when school is canceled and we're on a "self-quarantine." With small children, don't feel bad about having a neighbor or family member come watch your children while you work. You can also send little Thumper to a doggie sitter or its kennel. Or get help with off-work duties to maximize time. What help do you need?

Switch Up Your Environment – On tough days, a change in scenery is needful. When it's nice outside, Brooke works from her patio which basks in sunshine to boost her productivity and her mood. I'll hang out in my living room or the dining room table. Extroverted workers get cabin fever every couple of days, so for us, we need a few nights to socialize or just get out of the house and work elsewhere. When the home environment feels stale hang out at Starbucks or your local internet café. Where is your backup workspace for tough days?

Eat and Move – One day I laughed hysterically by the fact that I had taken a total of 49 steps according to my cell phone. I immediately ordered a standing desk from Amazon. Working from home can ignite the sedentary lifestyle bulge with ease. Partly, because we don't move enough, and partly because we may eat more snacks. Keep your self-care top notch. Make it a point to get at least 5,000 steps in. Or at the top of the hour, do a one-minute high intensity workout like jumping jacks, high knees, or pushups. Just one minute is proven to burn fat, lower blood pressure, and increase task completion. Make sure you nourish your brain's efforts with health promoting foods. What self-care do you need to stick to?

Connect – When you're feeling isolated or disconnected, the obvious solution is to connect. Virtually, we can do this by being accountable to our teammates. I email a couple of my favorite work buddies. We ping about what we're working on at the start and what we got done at the end. Since, we advocate getting dressed for work you can do virtual meetings on camera to stay connected to other virtual staff. Once or twice a week, schedule one on ones with a local colleague or friend to come over for lunch or a walk. What ways can you connect?

Above all, remember how you are being. Because how you are being – affects everything and everyone around you. Don't let fear, or the desire to get things done, allow for irritation or impatient reactions with loved ones or furry friends. Your loved ones love you.

So, treat the spouse, kids, cat, and mom-in-law with love too. Come from a place of heart, gratitude, and love. For some, the work from home thing is temporary. It's best to look at the time together as a blessing for connection and recalibration of your most valuable resource, your family.