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23 Essential Tips for Working Remotely

Follow these tips to keep your whole team's productivity and morale high.

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Many organizations have asked employees to [work remotely](#) during the coronavirus outbreak. If you've never worked from home, this can be a challenge.

My assistant Eileen and I have [worked as a remote team](#) for more than five years -- Eileen is in North Carolina and I'm in New York City. Eileen and her colleagues at [Delegate Solutions](#) are a fully remote team assisting clients like me with strategic and consultative administrative support.

For those new to remote working, Eileen and I wanted to share some tips on how we make it work. We asked some of our other [remote team](#) members and partners for their best advice as well. If you have tips to add, please share in the comments below.

Self-Care

1. **Cut yourself some slack.** Working from home can be a big transition. You might feel any combination of lonely, isolated, stressed, frustrated, anxious, unmotivated, or -- on the other hand -- relieved, relaxed, energized, or productive. It's all OK and normal. Any transition takes time to get used to, so try to be easy on yourself.
2. **Take scheduled breaks.** Try setting an alarm to get up and stretch every hour or so. (Standing desks, which at home may mean perching your laptop on top of a bookshelf, also pay large dividends for overall health.) Walk around your home while chatting on the phone with a friend. Move to a separate area -- away from your email -- to eat lunch for 30 minutes. Breaking up the day and moving your body enables you to refresh and can increase your productivity when you return to your work. When the weather is nice, I like to do conference calls while taking a walk outside.
3. **Protect your time.** The concern many managers have about their employees working from home is that remote workers are really just doing laundry and bingeing Netflix. In my experience and observation, the opposite is usually true -- people tend to work more from home because it's harder to "leave" work. I worked from home for many years before moving into an office, and I definitely logged more hours when my job was in my home. Set "in office" hours and communicate these with both colleagues and family.
4. **Protect your workspace.** Talk to family members or roommates about the hours you are working from home and the ground rules during those hours. Assume that anything that can interrupt you will interrupt you -- like a UPS delivery during a critical negotiation call or a dog barking in the background of a client video chat. Be as proactive as you can about avoiding these kinds of incidents. (We all remember that [BBC interview interrupted by a toddler](#).) I'm a fan of the scribbled "Do Not Disturb!" sign taped to my door.
5. **Turn on a white noise machine or app.** This really helps to reduce noise distractions around your work area.
6. **Pay attention to ergonomics.** Use the most comfortable chair you can with back support. Also consider investing in a hands-free headset. At the very least, pop in your earbuds for long phone calls. I learned the hard way that sitting in a wooden chair balancing a landline phone between my chin and shoulder was not a sustainable situation.

Communication

1. **Overcommunicate.** This is my default advice on communication in general -- especially in multigenerational teams -- but it's even more important when you are working remotely. As my communications consultant Amanda Schumacher says, "If you question whether your colleague will want to know something, share it."
2. **Know your employer's remote work policies.** Your HR department probably has a handbook or some guidelines on working during a crisis, including remote work policies, procedures, and expectations. Now would be a really good time to read this. [Here](#) is a good example from Jaime Klein and Inspire Human Resources.
3. **Managers, tell your team how they can reach you.** If you manage people, be clear with them about any new or different communication and productivity expectations you have now that your team is working remotely. Most important is telling your team specifically how you want them to communicate with you now that they can't pop into your office or run into you in the halls. Should they call, email, text, IM, Skype, Slack, Zoom, WebEx, WeChat? Don't assume they know.
4. **Tell your team when they can reach you.** Do you want people to check in with you first thing in the morning? Send a daily or weekly update on what they've been working on? The more guidance and boundaries you provide, the fewer misunderstandings will occur and the more smoothly work can stay on track. This is particularly important if you and your team work in different time zones.
5. **Make sure to clarify expectations for your team.** Connect with key colleagues around communication, work priorities, and success metrics. Will everyone be expected to work the same hours? Will all of the same projects and plans be moving forward? Don't let people make assumptions about anything that's unclear -- answer those questions.
6. **Note your project progress.** Remote workers need to be especially proactive and alert colleagues to progress on longer-term goals. For instance, you might send a daily email with a list of projects that have advanced that day.
7. **Resolve issues quickly with a phone call.** Email, text, IM, Slack, and other written methods of communication are prone to misunderstandings. When you sense this is happening, be quick to pick up the phone to resolve issues.
8. **Promptly return emails, calls, and voice mails.** Keep in mind that people tend to be more aware of time when working remotely. Fair or not, a colleague might find a four-hour response time to an email much too delayed when he or she is picturing

you sitting at your desk at home all day. If a teammate is being too pushy when it comes to replies, have a direct conversation about expectations and timelines.

9. **Keep up more casual communication habits.** If you normally catch up with colleagues in person before a big meeting, do the same before dialing in to a group conference call when everyone is remote. If you normally chat with your admin assistant first thing in the morning, do the same remotely by IM. Even when at home, you should confirm receipt of messages and check in with people when you start your day and end your day. Try to follow the same rituals and habits to maintain relationships and a sense of normalcy.
10. **Create your video studio.** Videoconferences are commonplace for remote workers. Make sure to have a professional or plain background behind you and dress and groom professionally (at least the parts of you that others will see onscreen). Check that you have adequate lighting and a decent microphone (most earbuds work just fine).
11. **Create a system for sharing documents.** If you don't already, now would be a good time to consider Google Docs, Box, or Dropbox to share files. Don't scatter team files across email, Google Docs, and your personal hard drive. Consolidate.

Morale

1. **Stay aligned with company culture.** Do whatever you can to keep things aligned with your existing company culture. Even though working remotely does drastically change interactions since you're no longer together in person, you can still make sure that the little things you did in the office continue. This might include sending funny, work-appropriate GIFs over Slack, text, or email; chatting about sports or your family or anything else you would normally do by the water cooler; and volunteering together through an online charity project instead of an in-person event. These little things help reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety.
2. **Take time for "water cooler" chat.** Working from home, since you won't be bumping into your colleagues in the halls or cafeteria or elevator or parking lot, you won't have the same opportunity for chitchat and human connection, but it is so important to retain. Make time every day to text with colleagues, check in personally, share stories, ask how people are doing. If your company is using an instant messaging system, consider adding a "water cooler" channel to help encourage this element of communication across the team.

3. **Dress and groom professionally.** Your morning prep routine plays a large role in determining your mindset for the day. It's tempting, but don't make a habit of joining conference calls in bed in your pajamas. You'll find you're more productive when you dress for the day and brush your teeth. I remember reading that Muriel Siebert, the first woman to hold a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, worked from home at the beginning of her career and used to put on pantyhose every day so she felt more professional. (I would never force you to endure the pain and suffering of pantyhose, but you get the idea.)
4. **Use video, even if it's uncomfortable for you.** To avoid feeling isolated, use video technology to connect with your team and colleagues in a more intentional, human way. I know that video calls are not comfortable for everyone, but the slight discomfort can be worth the benefit of seeing people's faces. At Delegate Solutions, teammates rely heavily on videoconferencing because it provides us an easy pathway to build relationships and meaningful interactions. Human interaction, especially if remote work is new for you, can make all the difference in your productivity and your mental and emotional well-being. (Pro tip: When you're speaking, look up at the camera on your computer -- not at the screen -- so people can see your eyes!)
5. **Emphasize one-on-one check-ins.** Don't cancel your one-on-ones just because they can't be held in person. Even a two-minute IM chat, video call, or text message chain can make employees feel more connected.
6. **Ask for feedback on your remote situation.** Finally, and especially if you are new to working remotely, ask your colleagues for regular feedback on how the situation is working out. As Jaime Klein [advises](#), track what is easier and what is more difficult when working remotely -- this data will help you now and in the future if (or, more likely, when) you work from home again. Communicate, communicate, and then communicate some more.

Looping back to self-care, make adjustments as necessary and be kind to yourself if you're struggling with this new reality. Any change takes time to get used to, and everyone's specific work situation and team dynamics are different.

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