Working from Home

Since the Coronavirus outbreak of 2019/2020, many people are working from home. For some people, this transition is a blessing and for others not so: On the one hand, some people are reporting feelings of anxiety, irritation, loneliness, stress, and demotivation, and on the other hand, some people are reporting feelings of relief, relaxation, energy, and motivation. For most people however, it is a big transition. Whilst some of us will stumble in adapting, some of us will sail through, yet we will all have self-care needs in dealing with the challenges of working remotely and, accordingly, in minding our own well-being.

We all need to discern what is best for ourselves; this might include, when to work, where to work, what equipment is needed, what training opportunities are needed or wanted, what boundaries to make and maintain, and how to connect and/or socialise with colleagues. Furthermore, presumably, lockdown will eventually end and so too, perhaps, your working remotely. So, there will be work habits worth maintaining for when we have to re-integrate ourselves to "Normal Society". For instance, the ability to exert effort during work hours, interacting with colleagues and clients, juggling work-life balance, and so on, might be important to maintain to be equipped for when we do have to return to pre-Covid working conditions.

Here are some thoughts and tips to consider to help get through these times well and to remain equipped for a possible eventual return.

1. Maintain Regular Hours: Having a set schedule can help with work-life balance and with maintaining boundaries with boss, colleagues, and clients. So it can be very healthy to have clear guidelines and set office hours; and besides, maintaining regular times, will help when/if you have to transition back to office working. Nonetheless, working remotely does offer flexibility with responsibilities of family life vs working life and reaching a broader client base, say, in other time zones. Be sure to balance things out if you are being flexible, e.g., if you start early to accommodate a client in another time zone, you also finish early to accommodate your own life, family, responsibilities.

Turn off work devices and restrain yourself from checking into work accounts when out of work hours. Protect your personal time; it is ok to "leave" work.

2. Getting Started Routine: Pre-lockdown, getting started in work meant getting there but other tasks might well have been performed, e.g., exercise, ablutions, feeding self, children, or animals. Routines help us to limber up for work, maintain boundaries, responsibilities, and self-care. It is therefore important to establish and maintain a routine to help with the work-life balance, to help with actually getting started in work, and to avoid work being all consuming—falling out of bed and into the work chair is definitely not the best strategy.

3. Dress and Groom Appropriately: Whether or not you're working via online video, dressing and grooming appropriately can help with own mental approaches to work, getting in the zone, self-care, and of course to keep an air of professionalism. As tempting as it might be to stay in the Pyjamas or skip some morning ablutions, it can slow productivity and could look unprofessional if seen by colleague or clients (I doubt I could take someone's advice seriously if they remain in their jimjams or have the remains of a jambon stuck in their teeth). Furthermore, staying in PJs could blur the boundaries between personal life and work life, and besides, when the work day is over, getting out of work zone is helped by changing out of work clothes.

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4. Ground Rules: People in your home will need to know the ways in which you are available and unavailable. When you are working can others interrupt, make noise, have certain expectations like prepare food, perform house chores, care for animals, etc. Just because you are there does not mean you are available. Can you exert more control on your own environment (especially if others are uncooperative or forgetful) like placing a "Do Not Disturb" sign on your door, lock your door, set up a white noise machine, and so on?

People you work with or work for will need to know the ways in which you are available and unavailable. What are you hours of contact? What modes of contact are acceptable? Just because you are working remotely doesn't mean you are always on.

5. Designate a Work Space: Ideally, when you work from home you would have a designated room, chair, desk, computer, phone, hands free headset, and so on. Such things help keep clear separations from work and home life. However, most of us don't live in an ideal world and could find it hard to accomplish these demarcations. But what can you do considering your own personal constraints? For example, partition your hard drive for work and personal accounts, get a second SIM card for your mobile phone (one for work and one for personal use), use your laptop at a desk for work and personal use on your lap on the settee, create a workspace in one small corner of the home for work only activities—perhaps this might need to be set up and dismantled each day to harness the work-life separation. Would your employer be willing to provide extra equipment? Are there tax breaks on purchasing some equipment?

6. Take Breaks: Establishing and taking regular breaks (in their entirety) helps with productivity and well-being. It also helps to avoid exhaustion and burn-out and resentment of work and employers. Know your company's policies and rules on work breaks within the working day and sick and holiday leave and allow yourself to have breaks. Likewise if self-employed, be a kind boss. Be aware of the point of diminishing returns; after a certain point of time and effort, extra work is not worth it and a break is needed.

What kind of breaks would suit you? For example, a walk outside, Chair yoga, a chat with friends or housemates, a cup of tea watching telly or a complete break from screen-time? If working with screens a lot, don't forget to blink and look away from monitors regularly.

There are perks of working from home. Maximise them.

7. Other Humans: Working from home can be very isolating and can therefore create a sense of loneliness (or relief) and the lack of interaction could make us less confident or competent in dealing with other people. Can you avail of opportunities to talk with or socialise with colleagues or other people? Perhaps in remote meetings, use your voice, speak up, even if that is just saying hello and goodbye. Maybe make more effort in talking with friends online or in making new ones.

8. Be Realistic: Consider what the real benefits and costs (Pros and Cons, Positives and Negatives) or working remotely are. Perhaps do a Cost/Benefit analysis. Maybe do a personal inventory and see where you are in work and life and see what you want to get from these unusual times. There are opportunities and perks in working from home so how can you maximise these? There are also costs so how can you avoid or minimise these?

9. Consumption: Working from home can present challenges to maintaining diets—many people are reporting increased weight or Coivd Kilos. Perhaps for some people standards and discipline are dropping for their intake of food and drinks...and social media. So whether its excessive crisps or chocolate or caffeine or fizzy pop or 3 hours a day (which is nearly a full day a week) or reading the news, going onto social media accounts, or watching TV, how much is too much? When do the distractions and nice treats become harmful? Keep an eye on your intake or foods, drinks, and media, perhaps set up routine for consumption of these incorporating with break times. Maybe prepare lunches and dinners after or before work to maintain healthy habits and diets.