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6 BEST PRACTICES FOR
**WORKING
FROM HOME**

2020

AS A PUBLIC SECTOR HR PROFESSIONAL, the COVID-19 pandemic presents its own unique set of challenges. Between keeping your employees safe, providing them with up-to-date information, and providing the resources they need to work remotely, it can seem overwhelming. This guide is designed to relieve some of that burden by sharing the top tips for transitioning from working in an office to working from home. Pass it along to your department heads and individual contributors to help instill best practices for maintaining productivity and a healthy mindset when working remotely.

TIP 1

TAKE STOCK OF ALL THE ITEMS YOU NEED AT HOME TO DO YOUR JOB

If you haven't already moved to your home office, take a moment to make a list of all the things you're going to need at home, including laptops or desktops, charging cables, headsets, software access, login credentials, and any other things essential to your job.

Work with IT on getting VPN access (if necessary), learn how to forward calls from your work landline to your mobile phone, and make sure you know how to contact everyone you work with on a daily basis – perhaps there's an approved instant messaging app the organization has chosen. In some cases, it may make sense to collect the mobile numbers of your workmates.

In the event that something goes wrong technologically, make sure you have the information for the appropriate IT person to get it resolved.

TIP 2

OBSERVE GOOD HABITS FOR SHARED SPACES

If you're in quarantine with a spouse, partner, roommates, or other family members, discuss ground rules before you start working from home.

To ensure that you can be productive, make sure you each have your own established "office" space. If there isn't a room you can claim as your own, try to come up with a way to denote when you're busy and not available to chat or do other activities. Try to view it as a co-working space – you wouldn't interrupt a stranger doing work and you shouldn't do it to your partner, either.

Restrict your shared time to planned lunches, break times, and after work. Designating boundaries will help maintain the peace as well, since being together in such close quarters for prolonged periods of time can result in strained relationships.

Having kids in the house is an even bigger challenge. Make sure they understand how to best approach you while you're working, and that they are occupied with plenty of things to do like schoolwork, games, crafts, and approved shows during limited screen time. To supplement your kids' education, there's an assortment of free online resources for homeschooling.

TIP 3

MAINTAIN A SIMILAR ROUTINE TO NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES

When working from home, resist the temptation to roll out of bed five minutes before you're supposed to start working. Instead, prepare for your day as if you were commuting to work to ensure you're in the right mindset to be productive. That means getting dressed and making coffee or eating breakfast, if that's what you'd normally do to get going.

Try to keep consistent work hours as much as possible. Discuss the schedule that works best for your manager and members of your team. Start and end at the same time every day and take lunch and breaks consistently. Once you've established what time you'll start and end your day, communicate to others about the hours you'll be available. Ask the same of others so you know when you can set meetings and expect responses to emails or chats.

TIP 4

SET EXPECTATIONS

Set expectations for what you can accomplish and keep a healthy work-life balance in mind. While working from home, you're more likely to be judged by your output of work rather than the hours you spend in the office, which can create a feeling of paranoia that you aren't accomplishing enough. To avoid placing undue pressure on yourself while still delivering on the expectations of your role, create a list every morning of what you intend to spend time on and at the end of the day, review it to see what you've accomplished.

If you know that you'll be tempted to stretch your break periods when you're at home, set a timer to keep yourself on track. Conversely, if you find that you never take breaks, set a timer to remind yourself to do so. It's important to have regular check-ins with your manager and larger team to help everyone stay accountable, but also be reasonable about what can get done.

Lastly, save your breaks and before/after work hours for yourself – resist the urge to keep your laptop open or respond to emails after your day has ended.

TIP 5

STAY CONNECTED

Remain connected to your coworkers. Spending time in quarantine, particularly if you live by yourself, can be very lonely. Even if you live with others, you may find yourself feeling disconnected and alienated from your colleagues. To collaborate and touch base on projects that you would have normally discussed in person, conduct video calls to see each other's faces and body language.

Video chatting using apps like Zoom, GoToMeeting, or Google Hangouts can foster both teamwork and meaningful connection. It's also a great opportunity for "virtual watercooler" moments – if you were in the office, you'd find moments to check in with your coworkers on a personal level, so don't forget to make time for that now.

TIP 6

STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Social distancing doesn't have to mean complete isolation and engaging in non-work activities during the workday doesn't have to impact productivity. In fact, getting a taste of the "outside world" might actually improve your focus while you're working. Schedule breaks where you go outside to stretch your legs or consider having lunch on your patio to break up the day. Take a stroll or jog around your neighborhood outside of work hours to combat feelings of claustrophobia. Stay connected with family and friends after work – consider getting creative with a "virtual happy hour" or try apps like Houseparty where you can invite up to 8 friends to play games over video chat.

Look at working from home as honing a new skill. It will take time to get into a rhythm, but these tips are a great first step toward becoming as productive at home as you were in the office for however long you are required to work remotely.

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