

7 May 2020

Allison Partners has compiled the following list of suggestions for effective remote work based on our own experience, suggestions from clients, and various articles. As always, individual people and the requirements for their work are different, so some tips may resonate with one person more than others. Take time to consider what you're doing now and what one or two new things you'd like to try.

**Start by setting yourself up for success.**

- Create a workspace in your home. Be sure you have what you need to be comfortable and work efficiently including high-speed internet, a good chair, all necessary files, and any other essential items to recreate your office environment as much as is practical at home.
- As much as reasonable, dedicate this space as only or primarily for work, even if this is as simple as taping off a side of the dining room table to mark it as your “workspace.”
- Whenever possible, create separate spaces for each person in your home. This will help with everyone's productivity and provide employers with confidentiality.
- Be sure you have decent lighting, both task lighting for work as well as general lighting for when you are on video calls (i.e. try to avoid backlight and face a window).
- Think about what additional supplies would be helpful to make things easier and get them, even if it feels silly or extravagant.

**Don't forget to establish boundaries between home and work.**

- Get dressed at the beginning of your day; don't stay in your pajamas. This is an important way to transition from “home” to “work” and can help signal to others in your household that your workday has started.
- If you have small children who need care or school-aged children who need help with online learning or other activities during the day, talk with your employer proactively about how you can balance achieving your work and meeting the needs of others in your home.
- Don't let the workday bleed into the evening; establish clear boundaries between “work time” and “home time.”
- If some of your clients are in a different time zone and you need to be able to talk with them live at times that would not normally be part of your work day, be deliberate about re-arranging your schedule to accommodate this. Consider having some days start with early mornings and end earlier in the afternoon or by taking a more deliberate midday break to accommodate the additional work during non-traditional hours.
- Establish clear boundaries with family, roommates, and others, but also try to have grace and patience with each other. Interruptions will happen (especially if you have young children). Try to maintain consistent practices to minimize interruptions as much as possible.
- Have a wrap-up routine that you use to conclude your work day each day. This can help with the transition from “work” to “home.”
- Do what you can to differentiate between the work week and the weekend.

**Maintain clear communication and stay connected with your colleagues.**

- Don't default to email for everything. If you would have ordinarily had a conversation about something rather than emailing, do that now. Also be aware that video conferencing isn't the

answer to everything. Be deliberate about how you choose to communicate, whether that is over email, video chat, or a traditional phone call.

- Remember that COVID-19 is affecting all of us and our workloads in different ways. Some people might be absolutely swamped while others have a lot of their responsibilities on hold, so it's important to be considerate when communicating.
- If you are the boss, schedule regular team meetings so your team still feels connected to each other. In addition to doing the necessary work, create time at the beginning of meetings to ask people how they are doing. Even if your team doesn't have shared work, it's important to build a routine of staying connected and sharing common information.
- Bosses should also schedule regular 1:1 video calls with direct reports. The weekly, scheduled [15-minute meeting](#) (adopted from [Bruce Tulgan's \*It's Okay to Be the Boss: The Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming the Manager Your Employees Need\*](#)) is more important than ever.
- Peer relationships matter and are supportive; stay connected with your team, including the people who you don't necessarily "need" anything from. This not only helps the day feel more normal, but in sharing ideas, you may come across a project or task that you want to work on or could help one another with. Since there are no opportunities for impromptu conversations in the office, it's important to schedule connections with your colleagues.
- While people often find themselves needing a break from video calls now that they've become so prevalent and there are reasons why these technologies actually [decrease our sense of connection](#), it's still important to make sure everyone is "seen" both in team meetings and one-on-one each week by a boss, direct reports, and at least one peer.

### **Tips to maintain your productivity.**

- Make a plan for your day at the start of each day, even if it is somewhat loose. If there is a time of day you consistently find yourself losing steam, try to schedule a task that you look forward to around that time, as it could help you refocus and stay on track.
- Consider a better way to start your day rather than immediately checking email, the news, or social media. Some people like [freewriting](#), others take a walk or have a family breakfast ritual.
- Don't multi-task, focus on one thing at a time.
- Remember to continue to do both urgent and important tasks, and to not focus on only one or the other.
- Talk with your boss and employees about how to adapt productivity tools like those recommended in [Getting Things Done](#) so they maintain their effectiveness when you aren't working in the same space. Everyone is likely feeling more scattered and uncertain about each other's workload, so it's important to maintain open communication and provide updates about shared tasks and individual project work so everyone is on the same page about prioritization and progress toward completion of assignments.
- If your workload is lighter, review what you can do to help fill in the gaps and discuss those tasks with your boss. This could include finding some online classes, independent learning and reading, or looking at what you might be able to do to 'prepare' for return to regular business (such as reorganizing and updating files, creating templates, etc.). This is also a great time to volunteer for new projects or cross training.

- If you are taking online classes or doing other professional development activities to supplement your work, making that learning feel like “work” is important. Give yourself permission for your work during this time to take a different form and be just as disciplined about doing it.
- Tap into your [creativity](#) to start thinking about how you can do work you believed you had to do in-person in a whole new way.
- Make sure to build breaks into your schedule (i.e. take time for lunch).
- Change positions frequently and stretch periodically throughout the day to keep your body loose and your blood flowing.

### **Help for managing your emotions.**

- Use more positive [self-talk](#) by talking to yourself as you would talk to a close friend. Be honest, but don’t beat yourself up. This can help change your perspective.
- Try to reframe your thoughts if you find yourself focused on negative thinking or unable to stop worrying about something.
- Set reasonable expectations about what you can achieve personally and professionally during this time. An [article](#) from one of our clients put it nicely: “To survive quarantine, you need to change your metrics.”
- Practice mindfulness through deep breathing when you feel yourself getting anxious or upset. Focusing on making your exhale slightly longer than your inhale helps calm anxiety. Also, try [this breathing exercise](#) or [this one](#) to both relax yourself and adjust your internal self-talk.
- Be deliberate about how much attention you give to the news; there is a fine line between staying informed and information overload. Be mindful of where that line is for you.
- Take time to find the bright spots and silver linings in your days and hold onto them.
- Remind yourself that these times are rough on everyone—yourself included—and try to extend a little grace and patience.

### **Things to remember for your overall mental health and wellbeing.**

- If you’re an extravert and accustomed to a lot of contact and collaboration with others, make sure that still happens. If you’re an introvert and need to have time alone, make sure you are finding time for that as well.
- Aim to fit in some type of exercise a few days a week, even if it is just a short walk. This [recent article](#) might give you added inspiration.
- Try to keep a consistent sleep schedule and get up at the same time every day. If you’re [struggling to sleep](#), consider making some [sleep hygiene](#) changes.
- Spend some time outside each day if you can, particularly on sunny days.
- Make sure you are drinking plenty of water and eating regular meals.
- Give yourself space to [grieve](#). Everyone has lost something during this time, and many have suffered the worst grief of losing a loved one or managing our own or others’ illnesses. It is appropriate to put your losses in perspective, but it can be helpful to acknowledge them no matter how big or small they might feel.
- If you try all the above ideas and are still having a hard time maintaining your overall [mental health](#), remember that this time presents new challenges for most of us and may stir up old anxieties and depression. Consider reconnecting with a therapist or finding a new one. Many

are learning to provide their services via telemedicine and some programs are getting funded to make this more affordable.

Finally, the following articles and resources were referenced in some of our suggestions above and others may provide you with additional ideas. This is a small sampling of the numerous recommendations that are currently circulating on this subject. All links were effective as of 30 April 2020 but are subject to change at the publishers' discretion.

#### Sources:

- [3 Tips to Avoid WFH Burnout](#) by Laura M. Giurge and Vanessa K. Bohns (Harvard Business Review)
- [9 Tips for Dealing with Uncertainty and Anxiety Right Now](#) by Katya Fernandez (Center for Creative Leadership)
- [15 Questions About Remote Work Answered](#) by Tsedal Neeley (Harvard Business Review)
- [A Guide for Working \(From Home\) Parents](#) by Avni Patel Thompson (Harvard Business Review)
- [Ergonomic Tips and Considerations While Working from Home](#) by Stefanie Nobriga (Bolton and Company blog)
- [Exercise May Protect Against Deadly COVID-19 Complication, Research Suggests](#) by Josh Barney (UVA Today)
- [Guidelines for Managing People Remotely](#) (Bruce Tulgan)
- [How to Transition Between Work Time and Personal Time](#) by Elizabeth Grace Saunders (Harvard Business Review)
- [Is your Organization Coronavirus Agile? 10 Tips](#) by Joseph W. Harder (Darden Ideas to Action)
- [Managing Remotely Webinar](#) (Bruce Tulgan)
- [Sleep Hygiene Tips](#) (American Sleep Association)
- [The Power of Positive Self-Talk When Leading Through Difficult Times](#) by Cathleen Clerkin (Center for Creative Leadership)
- [Why Zoom is Terrible](#) by Kate Murphy (New York Times)
- [Working from Home Advice: 10 Tips to Produce Productivity](#) (Center for Creative Leadership)
- [Your Only Goal Is to Arrive](#) by Paul Ollinger (Forge)
- [Your Work-From-Home Survival Guide for Self-Care](#) by Elizabeth Millard (Everyday Health)