

Adjusting to the New Normal: Teleworking

Career Development





Many companies around the globe have instituted mandatory work from home policies in efforts to reduce the spread of the coronavirus and limit their employees’ risk of exposure.

While remote work has become more popular in recent years, the sudden mandate can be jarring for employees who have never had the opportunity (or desire) to telework for an extended period. Working from home during a global pandemic may bring up feelings of stress, isolation, or depression. Establishing healthy habits and caring for your mental well-being should be a priority during this time.

Here are a few tips to help you adjust to your new situation with a productive and positive mindset.

Establish a morning routine

In the absence of your morning commute, it can be tempting to sleep in, roll out of (or stay in) bed, and get on your computer. Unfortunately, the lack of a morning ritual can disintegrate the distinction between your work and personal life and cause mental fatigue.

Stick to your normal routine as much as possible. Wake up at the same time, make breakfast, and get dressed in something other than pajamas. These simple actions help you prepare mentally for the workday. With the extra time you have left from not commuting, decide if you want to start your workday earlier or add a new component to your routine.

This could be the opportunity to fit in time to meditate, journal, work out, take care of quick chore, or spend extra time with family. Alternatively, if you feel ready to start the workday early, aim to finish your day earlier than usual. You can incorporate any of these activities into your evening ritual if that works better for you.

Have a dedicated office space

Maintaining a separation between work and home can be difficult when you are working from home. Designating a specific location as your workspace can help. Whether it’s a home office or a spot on the kitchen counter — carve out a space that you can associate with work. Keep it free from non-work-related clutter to help you focus.
Having a dedicated workstation that you can “leave” at the end of the workday will help you transition from work-mode to homelife.

Make a schedule

Your day can feel unmoored without the structure of an office setting, making it essential that you establish a schedule for yourself. From your start time to your end time, and your breaks in between, split your day into productive chunks. Ask yourself: What deadlines do I need to meet today? What projects do I plan to devote time to? Do I have meetings to prepare for? Keeping a list of deliverables and priorities will help you stay on track and allow you to easily communicate to your team what you are working on.

Use your scheduled breaks to relax, take care of personal errands, or get fresh air. Directing your attention away from work in an intentional manner can help you recharge and be more productive during your busy blocks.

Set expectations

Even with a schedule for your day, you can feel pressure to constantly be available to your colleagues. Feeling like you have to answer every message or email instantly can cause stress and burnout. To combat this, communicate realistic expectations to your team. Make sure your calendar is up to date with any meetings and block out time for your lunch and breaks. Update your chat status settings to match the occasion — busy, in a meeting, on a call, at lunch, away, etc.

Schedule set times to check-in. Being proactive with communication during these calls and regularly updating your organization's project management platforms will encourage your teams to use these mediums to seek information that isn't urgent.

Most importantly, sign off at the end of your workday. If you leave your devices on, it can be hard to ignore notifications, and if you respond, it will tell your colleagues you're still available. A few extra minutes could easily turn into another hour of work. Unplug, and have your offline status signal to others that you are indeed offline.

Interact virtually with others

One of the hardest things about working from home can be the lack of social interaction. With many countries recommending social distancing in response to COVID-19, common reprieves like getting lunch with a friend or working in a coffee shop are not plausible options. Luckily, technology offers myriad solutions.

When collaborating with colleagues, ask if you can call them instead of chatting your questions. Schedule one of your breaks at the same time as a coworker's and have a video-chat where you talk about anything other than work. Also use your breaks to call or video chat with friends and family members. Connecting with others can offer a sense of normalcy and support.

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