



Working From Home

Creating a Routine

On the surface, it's easy to see how working from home is different from an office setting. First, there are the perks. No commute time allows for extra sleep, or a fulfilling breakfast. Shower-access enables midday workouts, which in turn extends personal time at the end of the workday. It's comfortable — working from the couch, a kitchen table.

There are some real advantages of remote work, and many virtual employees are able to utilize them in order to create an enjoyable and productive working life.

However, for every action, there is a reaction. What at first may seem like endless benefits of remote work could prove to be the calm before the storm.

Subconsciously, your remote work routine might be sabotaging creativity, productivity, and overall mental wellbeing. That is to say, commuting, office work environments, communal lunch hours, and a designated work space all provide inherent benefits that help employees work more efficiently and happily.

While the comforts of home can absolutely contribute to a better working-life, many work from home employees fail to recreate enough elements of an office environment to produce long term positive results.

Especially since many teams are making the switch to virtual offices, it's important to examine what makes for a good work from home routine, and how to balance nearly limitless freedom of movement with optimal productivity.

The basics of your work from home routine

There's no magic formula, and we're not pretending there is. In terms of what you should do to maintain a good balance of productivity and happiness when working from home, everybody is different.

Finding the right solution for you will take a little bit of introspection, not to mention trial and error. However, there are three main principles of creating a sustainable and productive work from home routine that expert and amateur productivity researchers alike will agree on.

Stay on schedule

People are creatures of habit. Whether we admit it or not, there's something about a routine that allows us to enter the "right" mindset for a given situation. An athlete might eat the same meal before every competition, and an actor might use a tried-and-true vocal warm up routine pre-performance.

The same is true for your workday. One of the first mistakes remote employees make is to treat working from home the same as a "working holiday." When you wake up at different times each morning, exercise sporadically, and don't have a defined schedule for breaks, your mind won't learn when it's time to buckle-down — not the same way it would if you had arrived to an office, gotten your caffeine fix per-usual, and sat down at your workstation. This isn't to say you must repeat each workday but there should be a generally outlined routine.

Minimally, you should wake up, begin work, and end your day according to a predetermined schedule. In addition to blocking time to cover the basics — emails, long-term projects, smaller assignments — it helps to outline workouts, breaks, and meals throughout the workweek.

Again, this type of time management won't work in exactly the same way for everyone, but anecdotally, some of the most successful people in business have well-defined routines.

Make breaks official

When you're in the zone, stay there. The concept of flow has been around for a while, but getting to that point isn't always easy.

Back in the day, common knowledge was that productivity was a result of heightened focus, fewer distractions, and "grinding it out." While this is still true in some regard, workplace psychology has had renaissance. It's now agreed upon that regular breaks can help in-office and remote workers improve efficiency.

Furthermore, small tasks may require an extra "push," but taking a break can actually help restore motivation for long-term projects as well.

In order to optimize your work-break potential, keep two things in mind

- First, schedule breaks into your daily routine. These can take the form of a 20-minute walk, an *actual* lunch break, a phone call with family/friends, or a midday trip to the gym (depending on proximity).

- Second, if you're in a state of flow and making great progress on your tasks and/or projects, don't stop, even if you're approaching a designated break period. These times of increased focus are what you should be aiming for each day, and cutting them short defeats the purpose of seeking them in the first place.

Pro tip: micro-breaking the hours of your workday is a great way to measure productivity and progress in between longer periods of "rest." In many workplaces and home-offices, the pomodoro technique has grown in popularity. Essentially, this is 25 minute periods of intense, "heads down" work followed by 5 minute breaks. Repeat three times for a full "set," and consider using a free meditation app, like Calm to really take advantage of those mini-breaks.

Remember to include face-time (virtually or in-person)

Zoom calls and Slack conversations are everywhere in virtual office setups. However, these virtual communication tools can only go so far in replicating the social interactions people want, and need, to feel part of a community.

Remote workers should make special effort to have both mundane and meaningful interactions with others on a daily basis. This can take the form of a lunch hour with friends, or even working a half-day at a local coffee shop or library.

If these measures can't be reasonably achieved in-person, a phone call with relatives or friends during a midday walk or after dinner can serve as a substitute.

Again, these recommendations will vary from person-to-person. Remote employees who work in sales or support roles may find what they need at the end of the day is to decompress and reflect in solitude.