
Tips for Employees Being Asked to Work Remotely

Working remotely has suddenly gone from a nice perk to an essential way to manage business in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone is trying to create more separation to reduce the chances of spreading disease, so having and managing a mechanism for work to get done remotely has become of critical importance to the health and safety of all.

Before the pandemic, we all knew remote work was growing in popularity as an attractive option for employees and employers alike. For employers, it can boost their ability to attract and retain good employees and increase employee productivity and engagement. For employees, being able to work from the comfort of home while losing the headache of the daily commute and gaining greater flexibility to manage life's demands around work can be a huge benefit.

The challenge in today's environment is people who weren't necessarily asking to work from home are being forced to, and they may not be ready for the new normal.

Working remotely can feel wonderfully liberating, but it also can be challenging to keep the same focus and discipline at home that you have at the office. Additionally, relationships with peers and managers can be strained without regular face-to-face interactions. The challenges mean that maintaining teamwork and your personal productivity will require adjustments in how you approach your day.

Here are some tips.

1. Work Environment

Prep for the Day

We've all done the math. That drive – 25 minutes. Shower and dress? That's another 20 minutes. Oh, and breakfast and coffee? I can do that while I work. I'll just sleep in and go right to my computer and get to work when I wake up! Some people can keep their edge starting their day like this, but you'll likely be more successful if you treat the day like any other workday. Start it off the way you normally do – wake, exercise, shower, dress like you're leaving the house, eat, and complete other tasks, then go to work. But, do savor the time saved without the commute! Here's [an article on establishing a new morning routine](#) while working remotely.

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Create a Private Workspace

It's tempting to park your computer on the kitchen table or to grab the comfy corner of the couch and snuggle in. Hey why not grab a deck chair and work while catching some sunshine. The freedom to work anywhere can fuel the imagination, but the reality is that the environment you choose will have a big impact on your ability to stay focused. It's fine to make an occasional change of scenery, but your regular workspace should be free from distractions and noise so you can bring your professional best every day. [Here's an article](#) about getting the most out of your home workspace.

Watch for Safety

You might be surprised at how much thought goes into creating a safe work environment at the office. Do you have plenty of light? Access to daylight is ideal, but if you can't arrange that, make sure there is enough light in your work area to prevent eye strain. What about trip and other hazards? That pile of boxes and wad of chords might have been fine before you set up your office in the back storage room, but now that you're in there regularly, take some care to clear the risks. Finally, make sure you use electrical outlets and extension cords appropriately. Be sure you follow the instructions that accompany the equipment you use at home, especially if you are using company-provided devices. Here is an [exhaustive checklist](#) from the Federal Government.

Protect your Body

Office desks and chairs are often designed to help your body endure long periods of sitting while minimizing the risk of long-term injury. That cute chair you or your spouse bought at the flea market probably isn't. Working with ergonomics in mind will help keep your body in good working order. Try to find a good chair with adjustable back, arm, and lower lumbar support. If not, pay attention to how you sit and how you position your arms, wrists, and hands. Since you won't be forced to get up to go to meetings anymore, shift to standing, take frequent short breaks to move around, or even do bursts of calisthenics to avoid excessive sedentariness. Here is [a link to an article](#) with tips.

Organize Your Time

It's tempting to use this newfound flexibility to do things when you want to versus having to plan around your work and commute hours. Taking a quick break to feed the dog is one thing, but going to the grocery store is a major cut into your workday that can throw you off your rhythm and frustrate teammates who might need to reach you. Social media, television, the refrigerator – you'll feel the pull of distractions from the minute you start your day. For best results, you should keep your work hours and work habits similar to when you worked in the office. Use good judgment when breaking up your day to accomplish quick minor tasks and leave the bigger errands and tasks for before or after work or on weekends like you normally would. And, remember, if you're an hourly employee you need to keep accurate records of your work time and breaks. Here's [an article on creating structure](#) while working remotely.

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2. Communications and Teamwork

Adapt Your Communications

We like to think we have such healthy, trusting work relationships that in the unlikely event there is a misunderstanding it can get cleared up quickly. The problem is that so much of human relationships rely in physical interaction. We send and receive a myriad of physical signals that help us maneuver through relationships, something that changes dramatically when working remotely. Increase the frequency of your communications with coworkers and your manager. Extra care will need to be taken in crafting written communications to ensure they are received the way they are intended. You might ask to hop on a video call versus a phone call if you are navigating some tricky problems or relationship dynamics. Ask for help if you're having difficulty communicating with teammates. Try to always remember that everyone is challenged to communicate effectively without being able to do so in person, so having a forgiving mindset that assumes positive intent can go a long way. Here is [an article with specific examples](#) of how to improve remote communications.

Manage Your Relationship with Your Manager

Let's be honest. The biggest worry supervisors have is that productivity, quality, and commitment will slip when people work remotely. Managers are adapting to this new reality just like everyone else. Some are naturally skeptical, so they may assume their team members will slack off if they aren't under his or her watchful eye. This could lead to mistrust, micromanaging, and unusual demands for proof around work outputs. Others will assume that no news is good news and leave you to yourself. This might seem great, but it could lead to unwanted surprises if you don't change how you communicate to keep them informed while working remotely. The key is for both parties to adapt and manage expectations. For the employee, ask for regular check-in calls. Be proactive in communicating your work progress, including a daily summary. Notify your supervisor when you hit major milestones and be open about what worked and what might have gone better. The more transparent you can be and the more you can share the more trust can be maintained. Here is [an article for telecommuters](#) on demonstrating accountability to managers.

Keep Your Spirits Up

For some people, working from home is a dream. For others, it can create additional stress, especially in situations like we face now, when remote work isn't a choice, but a requirement for workplace safety. One of the major sources of stress is the social isolation that can come from regular remote work. When you layer on the effects of changes in public gatherings and social outlets being driven by quarantine practices along with regularly being away from coworkers, it can get very, very lonely for some.

Right now, the need is for physical distancing, but you don't need to feel socially isolated. When public restrictions are eased, it will be easier to find ways to get out of the home and be around people. In the meantime, technology will be your main tool for staying connected to others. Periodically opt for a phone call instead of an email for routine communications with co-workers. Host online social events with friends and colleagues. Participate in virtual volunteer or recreational activities with other like-minded people so you feel connected to something bigger. Finally, you can still go out for walks and interact with neighbors if you keep your distance. Seeing and interacting with others, even online or from six feet away, will provide important connections. [Here are some tips](#) to help you prevent loneliness.