
SHOW NOTES

5 Tips on Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Why focus on this topic?

- Working from home is not easy! During this time of social distancing, we need to learn and apply tips to help us be productive and effective while we work remotely.

Tip #1: Set a morning routine

- Wake-up when you normally would and **drink a big glass of water** right away. Rehydrating your brain is a great productivity tip to make a habit first thing in the morning, even before a morning cup of coffee.
- If you've got the ability to wake-up 15-20 minutes before others in the house, practice some simple habits that will set the tone for your morning
 - **Write down 3 things you're grateful for this morning.**
 - Examples could include, "I'm grateful for my health that allows me to work as I do." "I'm grateful for good coffee." "I'm grateful for the unconditional love of my pet."
 - **Take about 3-5 minutes and do some mindfulness meditation.**
 - You can use any number of apps to guide you.
 - Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>
 - Calm: <https://www.calm.com/>
 - Meditation Studio: <https://meditationstudioapp.com/>
 - Or search online for "5 Minute Mindfulness Meditation" and use one of those.
 - This is not anything difficult, it is basically a way to train your attention so that you can focus your attention on one thing (often the act of breathing because that's typically always happening).
 - Working to develop your ability to focus your attention helps you delve more deeply into anything you're doing. With daily practice, in as few as two weeks, you'll have a noticeable difference in your ability to focus and your sense of calm. It's likely others will notice too, even virtually!
 - **Plan your day** or, better yet, review the plan for your day that you jotted-down the evening before (as part of a brief evening routine)
 - Think about the things you need to get done over the upcoming week.
 - Identify your highest priority project and jot down one thing that you can actually take action on today that will allow you to make progress on that project. Make that your **MIT (Most Important Task)** for the day.
 - Identify up to two more tasks that would be good to get done today and the next actual action step you can take to make progress on that today.
 - Try to get your MIT accomplished early in the day, ideally before you do anything else distracting, like delving into email or any other possible time sink.

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- If you do these 3 things in about 15-20 minutes each morning, you'll be doing better than about 90% of people and well on your way to a more productive, focused and calm day, no matter what life might present.

Tip #2: Minimize distractions

- There are enough distractions in your life, many of which you may not be able to control. To the extent possible, set-up your workspace to minimize distractions. Set-up your schedule to allow yourself some blocks of time in which to do work.
- If you've got children at home, only you know what you can and can't do with them to allow yourself some time to work. Quiet time can be a precious privilege. If there is another adult in your household, see if you can divide and conquer with respect to creating some space for each other to get some work done while the other occupies the kids.
 - Set a schedule and know when your kids are having lunch, working on assignments that don't require your direct involvement, or are on screen time that you authorize.
 - Plan to get your blocks of work time done during these periods
 - I'll include a link in the Show Notes to an article about how to work at home with your kids during the pandemic: <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/16/how-to-work-from-home-with-your-kids-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak.html>
- If you're able to get about 25 minutes of time to focus on your work, that's great! Delving into work for periods of 25 minutes with a 5-minute physical and mental break is a recommended way to get through the workday even if you weren't at home.
 - Using a timer will enhance your ability to get work done because you don't have to keep looking at the clock, you can just delve into focusing on your work.
 - This is called the **Pomodoro technique**, named after a tomato timer. There are apps and websites for this that can help.
 - Using some **good headphones to block out noise** (if you can safely do this while having kids around) will also facilitate getting more productive. Using an app such as [Focus at Will](#) or [Brain.fm](#) (my favorite) will let you have some background music going that also includes a timer so you know when to stop and take that 5 minute break.
- Control what you can!
 - **Turn off the thousands of notifications that are a part of your smartphone's apps** - you don't need those notifications literally stealing away your attention, focus, and productivity. If you don't know how to get to your notifications and turn them off, just search for your phone's name and model online and "how to turn off notifications" and you'll find out how to do it.
 - Likewise, **turn off the notifications on your computer**. A big distractor is your email and social media apps on your computer. You do not need to have those notifications pop-up on your screen all of the time, stealing away your focus and attention. Every time you get distracted, it can take you up to 20+ minutes to get re-engaged in whatever it was you were working on. Again, if you don't know how to turn off these attention-stealer, just search online for your email program or social media app and "how to turn off notifications". You will be amazed how much more focused and less stressed you become without these attention-thieves!!!

Tip 3#: Do something physical

- During this time of social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, you may still be able to **take a walk out in nature**. Do it if you're able and allowed!
- When you take your 5-minute breaks after periods of working for 25 minutes, stand up, walk around, stretch a little, take the dog for a brief walk, **just do something physical**. If you do this you'll add up more physical activity than you might otherwise have introduced into your days!
- **If you've got children at home, try to make this count twice!** Do something physical with them to engage and involve them in physical activity.
- If you don't yet have a physical activity habit, just begin by doing something small and simple. **Build your habit by making it easy to do**. Give yourself credit for having done something, anything!
 - Doing 1 jumping jack today is something. Doing one push-up or climbing a few steps is something. Doing something each day for several days will make that thing become easier and then you keep adding on to it every few days.
 - Soon, you'll be doing 10-20 push-ups each day or walking up and down a flight of stairs several times each day. The benefits to your mental outlook and physical health will compound and it's not difficult to do. That's the power of small actions that become habits.

Tip #4: Make your workspace work for you

- If at all possible **do not work in your bed**. Your bed should not become connected in your mind with work. That will lead to worse sleep and all of the resulting feelings of fatigue and restlessness, which will derail your effectiveness.
- **Work at a table or counter where you can sit in a chair with your back supported**.
- Pay attention to your computer screen and how your head has to be angled in order to see it.
- If you're not in a **comfortable position**, that's going to negatively impact your ability to work for longer periods of time.
- Try to have all of the supplies you need to get your work done within reach. Minimize the amount of time you have to search for things that you need to get your work done.
- **Consider how your "digital" workspace looks!**
 - If you're going to be involved in a lot of video meetings, consider what your background looks like. If you don't like displaying what's in your background, some tools allow you to have a virtual background or have you blur your background.

Tip #5: Create time boundaries

- Give yourself the grace to use the extra time you'd typically use when you commute to and from work to **do something that refreshes you**.
 - If you typically listen to the news, a podcast, or some music, do that for 10-20 minutes during the day (whatever you may have done on your commute).
 - You need to decompress your brain at points in time throughout the day so allow yourself to do so.
- **Bookend your day with an evening routine**
 - Take 5-10 minutes as you begin to wind down in the evening to think about what you accomplished throughout the day.
 - This is the **time to brag on yourself!** Count your "wins" and include things like, I was able to feed the kids lunch! I got my MIT done today! I moved my body twice today!

- **Consider what you've learned today.** Think about any key take-aways from things you worked on today.
- **Plan for tomorrow.** Consider your top priority project and what actual next action step you can accomplish tomorrow. Write it down so that it's not circling around in your mind as you head to bed. Jotting down other possible tasks that are on your mind is also a good idea. You can prioritize them tomorrow but this way you don't try to keep them in your temporary memory. This will allow you to unwind and head to bed more restfully.
- **Set a time boundary on your own use of screens.** The blue light that's emitted from various screens (tv, smartphones, computers) interferes with your body's production of melatonin. That affects your body's ability to respond to the chemicals that lets you know it's time to sleep.
 - **Begin shutting-off your various screens at least an hour before you want to head to bed.** If you must work on screens, consider using a blue-blocking filter, app or glasses. Anything that helps you sleep and get more restful sleep will allow you to focus and be more effective the next day.

As you transition into this working remotely situation, try applying one of more of these tips. If you like them, stick with them. Many of these tips are still very applicable once you're able to transition back into a non-remote work environment.