Tips for working from home

This is an unusual time in our history and as we exercise social distancing, some of us are working from home for the first time. Below are some best practices to help make your time at home productive and manageable.

Establish structure

- Create a designated workspace and establish boundaries with family members to minimize interruptions.
- In order to avoid back and lower neck pain, it is best to work at a desk or table and sit on a chair or stool. Try and place your screen at eye level.

Maintain a schedule

- Create a routine for first thing in the morning to keep you on track for the remainder of the day. Get up and get dressed, you are still working, it helps establish the proper state of mind. Be mindful if you participate in video chats not to get too casual.
- Establish work hours and stick to them. It may be helpful to chunk time into 1 to 2-hour blocks with small breaks in between.
- If you have children at home, chances are it may become a challenge to keep them busy while you focus on work. Include them in creating a daily schedule complete with family lunch and breaks for stretching and outside time if that is an option. Set them up with tasks for a couple of hours at a time and make breaktime a time for sharing results. There are many online resources with ideas to help keep your children engaged.

Take regular breaks

- Stand up and stretch – move!
- Get fresh air - go outside and take a walk if it makes sense in your location.
- Schedule time for lunch and enjoy it away from your computer.
- If you regularly work out during the day find a way to do this at home. While you may not be able to get to the gym, check their website, many fitness clubs are offering online programs free of charge.

Check in regularly with colleagues and bosses

- Make a point of scheduling time with colleagues, clients, and work peers, even if it's a quick 10 minutes to brainstorm an issue you're struggling with on a shared project.
- Schedule regular updates to share progress on projects you're working on together. Gently push to see if there are issues that would be helpful to discuss as a group. Offering this up on the phone can replace that hallway chat you might take back with the group when in the office.
- Use online networking sites, like LinkedIn, to maintain connections.

Celebrate your wins

- Focus on what you've accomplished at the end of each day to keep yourself motivated.
- If you manage a project or team, schedule calls to share progress and celebrate milestones.

Managing remote teams

Leaders managing remote teams for the first-time face far different challenges than working in a traditional office environment. Below are some best practices to help make it through these challenging times.

- Communicate a clear measurement process and critical success factors on all projects. Continually review them to ensure they are attainable, or too easy, and tweak as necessary.
- Check-in regularly to brainstorm ideas or help troubleshoot unexpected roadblocks. This helps establish the lines of communication or "open door policy".
- Schedule regular meetings and guidelines for communication so that work moves forward as needed. Set specific turnaround times for emails, phone calls, etc.
- To keep meetings effective, encourage use of video and call-on people to participate. This can minimize multitasking and help keep everyone focused. Remember to check what is visible in your screen to others and make any necessary adjustments.
- Be mindful of small things like different time zones and travel so the entire team can participate in virtual gatherings. If you live near a colleague, schedule an occasional in-person meeting to mix things up.
- Create a Virtual Water Cooler - take a moment at the beginning or end of calls to establish common ground. Lighten the mood with a fun/interesting topic, ex., an appropriate news item, sports rivalry or movie. Make sure you balance these topics to include everyone.

Resources

If you don't currently have audio/videoconferencing service, the following companies offer free versions of their service:

- GoToMeeting
- Pexip
- TeamViewer
- ezTalks meetings
- Cisco Webex

- Skype
- Zoom
- Apache OpenMeetings
- Join.me
- Google Hangouts

Here are some additional resources you may find helpful.

- > The 10 Best Free Web Video Conferencing and Screenshare Apps of 2020: VOIPReview.org
- > The Best Videoconferencing Software for 2020: PC Magazine
- > Leading Remote Workers: The Coronavirus' Impact on Effective Management: Forbes
- > Making Virtual Teams Work: Ten Basic Principles: Harvard Business Review
- > 101+ Ideas to Keep Your Kid Busy During Coronavirus Closures: Forbes
- > 5 tips for effectively working from home when you have kids: CNBC

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