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How to successfully punch the clock at home

~~A LITTLE PLANNING AND DISCIPLINE WILL KEEP YOU PRODUCTIVE AND FOCUSED~~

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A state of emergency has been declared for several provinces including Manitoba. Everyone is hunkering down to help flatten the illness curve caused by the coronavirus. Thankfully, every organization in the province has quickly put together a pandemic plan including offering employees the ability to work from home where possible.

While some employees may look forward to the idea and see it as a luxury, others are not comfortable working from home. In some cases, the "at-home" employee doesn't have the proper work space in their home and recognizes that balancing on the ironing board just won't do. With schools closed and children now at home with assignments and expectations of parents turned teachers, an employee's time for family responsibilities will be in more demand making it difficult to get work done.



Then again, there's that darn television set blasting "breaking news" and carrying more frightening news about the spread of the virus. Believe me, when the experts start to worry, it causes much more worry in one's mind and certainly causes more mental distraction no matter where one's work station is.

On the other hand, I'm confident everyone is doing their best to manage their assignment to work at home. I recognize there are different personalities, characteristics and personal challenges that make or break the success of working at home but I know from experience the following suggestions will apply to most employees who are now working at home.

Identify a dedicated workspace

Avoid working in home spaces such as the couch in your rec room that are associated with leisure and relaxation.

Guillermo Munro / Dallas Morning News

Find a spot you can use consistently without having to "tear down" the workspace every day. Get yourself a work lamp so you can see clearly without eye strain and find the best chair that supports your back. As the days go by, keep your workspace as clean and tidy as you can. Clutter is distracting.

Maintain your morning routine

Avoid treating work at home as you would your Saturday morning routine. In other words, get up at the same time and carry out your normal morning self-care process. This includes those regular morning exercises. Get dressed in something clean and comfortable and avoid those sloppy sweatpants or lounge outfits. You need to feel like you are at work, so try to create that sense of personal presence and demeanour. It will put you in the right frame of mind.

Stick to the work schedule

Plan to keep the same work schedule and routine as much as possible, including taking your breaks and lunch at the normal time. Perhaps use this time to connect with colleagues, checking in to see how they are doing. Or give your children some of this break time. Get up and walk around the house or consider going for a walk outside over your lunch hour to get refreshed. If you like music, play some comforting music during your breaks as a way to get relaxed.

Readjust the work schedule to fit

On the other hand, some employees, especially those early-risers, would rather start their work day earlier as they are more productive early in the morning. This schedule is acceptable as long as the same number of work hours is completed. Be sure to stay in touch with the management by arranging a time to connect. With children at home, you will need to adjust your schedule to give them some time.

Set limits with family

Make sure family members know when you're working and when you will take a break. Ask that you not be disturbed during this time but "keep an ear to the ground" to listen if anything at home is going awry and needs your attention. Try using headphones to keep out normal household noise, if necessary, and use them as a signal for when you are working and don't want to be disturbed.

Avoid social media and television

There is so much going on with news media you can get hooked into listening all day and not get much work done! Schedule quick hits of news during lunch and breaks. Sometimes no news is good news in terms of avoiding personal anxiety.

Create a work plan

Another challenge of working at home is keeping focused. Therefore, it is important to create a work plan with specific items on your to-do list. At the end of every day, evaluate your accomplishments and set a goal for the next day. Feeling good about achievements sets you in a good frame of mind to enjoy the evening and family activities and prepares you up for a restful sleep in preparation for the following day.

Maintain meal preps

Most employees plan their meals and might make lunch for the next day during their evening time. Some plan for family meals day by day or week by week. It is important that you keep this routine where possible. Look for energizing lunch soups or other foods that are easy to prepare and don't take too much time to reheat and serve.

Stay connected with colleagues

One of the challenges for employees that are thrust into working from home is the issue of loneliness and isolation. After the first week, employees might feel a sense of disconnect. Contact colleagues during your breaks and work with your manager to set up a time for group connection using various technology tools. And don't forget to stay connected with family members in other locations.

Practise positive self-talk

If you haven't done this already, search out a couple of positive statements that resonate with you and create positive thoughts. Find a poster and use it as your face page on the computer. When you are sending email messages, add a positive emoji to your message as a way to help keep the positive attitude for both yourself and others.

Plan the day's end

One of the challenges of working at home is that you might end up working longer hours because time slips away. Working beyond normal working hours will only tire you out. After a few days, you might be hitting the burnout zone which isn't healthy. End your day and spend time getting refreshed and relaxed.

Create a closure routine

Employees typically have a closure routine at work. Apply this same technique at home. Shut down your computer, leave the workspace and get into your normal home routine. This will signal the end of your day and will help you transition back to a normal end of the work day.

Be easy on yourself

Moving to working at home will take adjustment and so you may not be as productive as you normally are. Don't be hard on yourself — cut yourself some slack. Moving from an external workspace to home is a major change and will cause some psychological dilemma before you are fully adapted. Open up and talk about your anxiety or challenges with family, friends and work colleagues. Seek out advice and provide advice to others when you can.

Being suddenly thrust into this challenging situation with the coronavirus is difficult for everyone and then being forced to work at home adds another level of challenge. Take it slow. Be kind to yourself. Put a structure in place that will help you to succeed.

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