

How to Make Working from Home Work for You

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For most of us, what's happening in the workplace is unprecedented. Many of us, who are happy to still be employed, have been thrust into working from home with little to no preparation. As the situation evolves quickly, it's important to think outside the box to be able to continue servicing our clients.

In the legal industry it is time for a paradigm shift. Many firms have struggled with allowing people to work from home for a myriad of reasons. At this point, we have no choice. To help you get off on the right foot, the following are some best practices as we move forward into this new working environment.

Create your Spot

If you never thought about rooms in your apartment or house that could function as an office, it's time to take inventory of areas that are quiet, have great internet access and several outlets. If sharing the home with a spouse or a roommate(s), think about how to divide the space to accommodate everyone. One person might need to transform their bedroom into a temporary office while another gets the coffee table. You'll need to have the ability to close a door or find a quiet area to take calls, be on a video conference or simply just to think. As humans we like to "nest" which is why we have pictures in our work areas and our favorite coffee mug. Do the same at home.

Follow a Routine

Because you don't have to fight traffic or take a train, your inclination might be to sleep in to take advantage of this extra time. That's great for a couple of days but don't get sucked into doing it every day. It's important to create a routine that will get your juices flowing and prep you to start your workday. Set your alarm clock, go for a run, do an online yoga class or make a healthy breakfast. Decide to dress in business casual attire, then walk over to your work area and start working. Be sure to take a lunch break and stop working at your normal quitting time as if you were in the office.

Communicate and Communicate Some More

Since you are no longer able to walk down the hall to ask a colleague a question, schedule a time for a phone call or video conference. Talking to others on the phone will help you feel connected. Use FaceTime, Zoom or any tools that your firm approves so you can reach out and make connections. Talk with your supervising attorneys, your assistant and paralegals at the start of the day and throughout the day so that everyone is on track to do their best work.

Have the Right Tools

If you have been asked to work from home by your firm, they have or will provide you with a laptop and a headset. Consider what other items you need or want. Would a regular or standing desk be better for your back, how about your chair or maybe you need noise canceling headphones? Does your Wi-Fi and internet work consistently or does it drop? If so, ask your carrier to investigate it sooner rather than later. Without the proper tools you will get frustrated and have a tough time making remote work comfortable and productive.

Those Pesky Chores

You might be tempted to throw in a load of laundry or complete that refinishing project in between emails and calls but be realistic. You wouldn't do extra work at work so don't do it while you are working. Of course, checking your mailbox or taking out the garbage can get be a short break, but try not to commit to anything that eats into your productive work hours.

Find the Right Balance

When working from home it's easy to lose track of time and say to yourself, "just one more thing." At an office you must get up and leave to go home, so this means picking the time to log off for the night and just being at home. Without the commute home, it's tempting to work during that time. To not totally disrupt your routine, do the things you would normally do in the evening. If you normally check emails, then do so but be sure to communicate your boundaries so you do not end up working all day and night.

Stay Positive

Without contact from your colleagues, you may feel completely alone. No one is stopping by your office to chat, have an in-office meeting, or asking you to lunch. You can either excel with this new quiet becoming more productive or you can dip into loneliness that feeds into depression. What will be your choice? Self-confidence is the key to making this work not only in the short term but also as your career progresses. Thinking positive thoughts about this situation and allowing yourself to take advantage of this time to accomplish tasks that were lower on your to-do list would be productive and uplifting. Have you thought about writing that article or creating the slide deck for a CLE presentation?

We are in strange times, so we all need to stay focused on the goal of staying healthy and productive while managing our lives as close to normal as possible.

The Managing Partner Forum

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