



STAY MOTIVATED BE PRODUCTIVE GET CONNECTED

A GUIDE TO WORKING FROM HOME

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Introduction

Are you new to working from home?

Because of Covid 19 many people have been thrown in at the deep end, turfed out of offices and told to work from home without much notice or support.

It's all a bit different and can be very challenging to make the adjustment.

This guide explores the key things that can help you work effectively from home, both in times of crisis and if you want the option of remote working in the future.

Here we share our top tips from small business owners and self-employed people who have been working from home for years; and recommendations for tools and strategies to increase your productivity and keep you in the loop with colleagues, customers and associates.

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The pros and cons of working from home

Working from home has its pros and cons. On the one hand it can help you achieve better work-life balance, on the other it can be an isolating experience.

Of course, the current situation means many of us don't have a choice. We just have to make the most of it. However, if you're thinking that perhaps you might like to work from home on a regular basis, even once things return to normal, here are a few pros and cons to weigh up:

Commuting

Pros: Commuting can be tiring, stressful, time consuming and expensive.

Without the commute you'll have more free time and money in your pocket.

Cons: Travelling to an office can help you make the mental transition from home to work as well as the physical one.

Staggering from bed to home office doesn't put you in the right mindset.

Flexibility

Pros: Whether you're a night owl or up with the larks, you can work at your most productive times and fit in other commitments around your working day.

Cons: If you're not a self-disciplined person you may find that you haven't got enough structure to your day and it's hard to motivate yourself.

The pros and cons of working from home

Distractions

Pros: Although this might not be true if your family are in lockdown with you, in normal circumstances working from home means there are fewer distractions compared to the office.

Every time you're disturbed by a colleague it takes 20 minutes to get back up to speed with what you were doing.

Cons: Without distractions (within reason) we can lose focus and our productivity declines.

Sometimes we need an excuse to stop for a bit or do something else, and then revisit our work re-energised.

Isolation

Pros: If you prefer to work alone or your job demands huge amounts of concentration, working from home may be the best environment for you.

Cons: But we're social beings and so it can be a very lonely experience, especially if you thrive in a busy and active office environment.

Productivity

Pros: Many surveys show that working from home increases productivity and people get more done.

Cons: However, it can be harder to shutdown and often home workers find themselves working longer hours into their evenings and weekends because work is always there.



10 positive behaviours for successful remote working

1. Get up at a normal time

Don't be tempted to stagger from bed to desk as you won't be in the right frame of mind to get work done. Try to replicate your normal mornings by getting up at a similar time and going through the motions of going to work.

"Get up with the sun and exercise first thing whether it's a 10 minute walk round the block or a 5 km run in the woods accompanied by birdsong. I'm currently homeschooling two 9 and 10 year boys and exercise is key to us all staying sane and happy with each other!"
Naomi Aylott

2. Take exercise

If you don't normally exercise before work, replace your normal commute with a walk, cycle ride or online exercise class. This will give you a boost of energy.

3. Get dressed to your shoes!

Whilst working in your dressing gown or PJs is tempting, the novelty soon wears thin. Getting fully dressed helps you to take the day seriously and ensures you realise that even though you're working from home, you are still working and being productive. It gives you a sense of self-respect to be dressed and up facing the world, even if you cannot leave your home.

Also, you're likely to be using video conferencing a lot more than you have in the past, so make sure you look and feel presentable.

4. Have a specific place to work

It may be challenging, especially if you have children or a partner who's also working from home, but try to designate a specific place to work. This will help you separate work from home life and vice versa.

"Make sure your seating is comfortable and ergonomically set up otherwise you'll get a backache or worse."
Stu Morrison

10 positive behaviours for successful remote working

5. Get the rest of the household onside

Set some ground rules for other members of your household to minimise disturbances. With children, and with partners who want to chat, it can be useful to agree breaks during the day when they can speak to you: such as all having lunch together. Then you're less likely to be interrupted at other times.

"If you're working in a shared space, wear a hat or specific piece of clothing to visually signal that your "office door" is shut! A red cap, or scarf, or a brightly coloured jumper would work well."

Stu Morrison

6. Have a routine

Having a "shape" to your day prevents you from wasting time and just frittering the day away. It's no good just hoping that you will get your work done, so set an alarm for when you should be in work and set alarms for when to take breaks and eat. It can be fun to challenge yourself to get a specific small goal done before a certain time, this gives you short-term daily goals to achieve and thus help you keep your productivity high.

"Working from home requires a schedule just as if you were going to work. I found I use the drive to work to do household chores as I can't concentrate knowing the house is a mess. Once done I can start work. I still use a diary for telephone calls or meetings. My working day is the same as if I was in the office except I have virtual meetings which are more productive."

Lorraine Elizabeth

7. Be realistic

It can be difficult to be as productive in an unfamiliar environment, even if that is your home. So make sure you set goals that you can achieve when working in a sub-optimal place. At first, you may not get much done, but monitoring where and when you feel most productive will help you understand what you can and cannot achieve whilst settling-in to your new work routine.

8. Turn phone notifications off

Only keep notifications on for the apps you use for work. You can snooze or mute notifications from specific WhatsApp and Facebook groups if you have some for work and others for friends and family. It may also be a good idea to disable notifications from work apps at times, especially as these are probably quite busy as everyone settles into this new way of working.

10 positive behaviours for successful remote working

9. Schedule breaks

Conversely, without colleagues to interrupt you and to chat to, you may find that the hours go by without any break from work. Your employer might think this is a good thing, but actually your productivity levels will have dropped. Regular breaks should be encouraged to allow you to re-energise and refocus.

“Drink plenty of water, so it forces you to go and answer the call of nature regularly and that’s your cue to take a brief break.”

Stu Morrison

10. Set a home time

It’s easy to allow work to cross over into personal time when you work from home, so aim to finish work at a specific time every day. A notification or alarm to remind you that now’s the time to start winding down is a good idea. Try to tidy up any loose ends so that you’re not tempted to continue working or even to return to work later in the evening. Switch off laptops and devices if you don’t need them for personal use, and physically leave your workspace.

“Set up a new playlist(s) on YouTube (or your music provider of choice) When you come across something new, or old, that you like, add it to the requisite playlist and you will have yourself a veritable smorgasbord of musical choices come May.....”

Chris Hunter, RHW Solicitors

And a bonus tip...

11. Plan a virtual after-work drinks

When the novelty of working from home begins to wear off, you may find you feel quite isolated and lonely. It’s not surprising if you’re used to a busy office and enjoy spending time with your colleagues. A virtual meet up for social reasons, not work, is a good way to stay in touch and give each other support during these very challenging times.

You could initiate a virtual meeting to catch up on Teams or other video conferencing tools, or even go ‘out’ as a group. In recent weeks lots of virtual events have sprung up such as Virtual Pub Quizzes, Virtual Choirs, Virtual Discos and more! Have a look on websites like Eventbrite, MeetUp or search through Facebook events to find something you can do together, or set up something yourself!

Technology for productivity, collaboration and isolation



If you're employed your company should have provided you with cloud computing tools like Office 365 and Microsoft Teams so you can access corporate systems and communicate with colleagues.

If they haven't, we advise you to check with your IT department that you can use the technology listed below for work. They should have remote working policies to ensure that business IP and data is secure.

However, if you're working for yourself or own a business that is usually based in an office, the tools below can help you boost productivity, increase opportunities for collaboration and beat the isolation blues.

- **Office 365:** Free online versions of Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook etc. are available with office.com, or you can pay for a family or personal licence, or an Office 365 Business account to get online and desktop options and sync file sharing.
- **Microsoft Teams:** One of the most useful tools for remote workers is Teams, a free version of this is currently available. Teams can be a one-stop-shop for collaborating with colleagues, employees and suppliers with options to store and share files, chat, and set up video and voice calls.
- **G Suite:** Online file sharing, chat, video conferencing and storage is available from Google if you have a gmail account. This provides plenty of functionality for the self-employed and small businesses and a generous free storage allowance.
- **Slack:** Another tool to collaborate with colleagues and coworkers. Use it to send messages and share files in workspaces. Like Teams you can set up different channels to help manage communications by projects or teams or objectives.

Technology for productivity, collaboration and isolation



- **Time Out:** To ensure you take a break from work on a regular basis use apps like Time Out (for Mac OS only) or Break Timer to remind you to stop, get up and move around.
- **Zoom:** This video conferencing tool has seen a huge increase in new users for both work and personal use. We host the SiGNAL BiZHUB sessions on it, using the paid webinar function for presentations, and the free video meeting option for interactive sessions.
- **Asana:** If you manage a team and want visibility on the status of different tasks, project management tools like Asana can help. The free version of Asana is available for teams of up to 15 people. It can be used for specific projects or as a way of keeping track of daily activities.
- **Teamviewer:** Are there files stored on your office desktop that you might need remote access to? Teamviewer enables you to access them remotely, provided that your office computer is turned on. Something to get the IT team to sort out, or a quick trip to the office to get set up and then you can access it remotely the rest of the time.
- **Timely:** to manage how much time you're spending on different activities, use apps like Timely. The calendar interface allows you to allocate time for particular projects or tasks, and if you charge on a hourly rate you can also keep track of billable hours.

Localisation: Want to work remotely all the time?

Many businesses are thinking about the possibility of extending remote working long term. People are becoming more familiar with the tools they need to be productive remotely, and teething problems are being resolved. It's leading companies to question why they would ever return to the office-based model.

For employers there are advantages in having a remote workforce. Studies have shown that remote workers are often more productive than employees based in an office, with fewer distractions and more autonomy over how they manage their time and workloads. Businesses can also recruit from a wider talent pool, attracting employees who live further afield than their geographic location.

There are also significant cost savings for both employer and employee: there's no need for a large office if most staff work remotely, and employees can reduce their travel expenses too.

We expect that the current crisis will result in some people rethinking how they want to work, and who for. Once you've experienced better work-life balance by removing the daily commute, being able to juggle family commitments around work and having more time to spend doing what you love to do; why would you want to return to long hours working in an office?

Job security is another factor. Even with the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, we've seen many employees being laid off rather than furloughed. There's also anxiety about what happens afterwards, will your company have to lay people off because of damage to the business caused by the lockdown?

For this reason we expect some people to explore the option of becoming self-employed instead, and take control over their carer and destiny. Of course, being self-employed or starting up your own limited company is not without risk and many micro and small business owners are finding it very tough at the moment. But if we've learned anything from this crisis it is that people are resilient, innovative and want to help each other be successful.



How SiGNAL can help remote workers and small businesses

Here at SiGNAL we're focused on helping local people build sustainable businesses and income in East Hampshire.

We do this by providing affordable workspaces, essential business services and award-winning business training. We also help remote workers by providing a free coworking space in the heart of Bordon.

So, if you're thinking that you might like to work remotely on a more permanent basis, or your employer would like to downsize its offices, SiGNAL provides a professional workspace for remote workers and self-employed people.

Come and visit when lockdown has ended to see for yourself!

Thinking about becoming self-employed?

For those people who want to take control over their work and career by becoming self-employed or starting a small business, we provide everything you need to be successful.

A great starting point is the SiGNAL BiZHUB which meets once a week (currently virtually) for business training and support.

Your first visit to the BiZHUB is free, so have a look at our events calendar to book > www.signalbordon.org/the-signal-biz-hub

We also offer desk hire, affordable office space and open access workshops for those individuals and businesses who do need a specific place to work.

At SiGNAL we provide workspaces to help you get your business off the ground and grow. From meeting rooms, offices and desk hire, we have workspaces for entrepreneurs, sole traders and micro businesses right in the heart of Bordon.

We also offer fantastic business networking events - because who you mix with matters!

Why not check out the BiZHUB for yourself. Simply go to our events page and book onto our next event!

Find out more about SiGNAL by visiting our website.

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