



Top Tips for Staying Productive and Sane While Working From Home

Stick to a Corporate Mentality: The problem with many people who work at home is that they are hung up on the idea of being their own bosses and therefore forget that they need to work! They often fall out of the rigid, but still productive corporate structure by not keeping to a schedule, or by spending too much free time. If you are working at home, think as though you were still at the office. Success begins with the right mindset, so don't scrimp on being a corporate person even if you are working in a home office.

Begin forming diligent work habits from Day 1: if you allow yourself to lay on the couch and watch TV instead of working, this will become your habit. Instead, develop a routine that will find a balance between getting the work done and enjoying your home office. Your individual routine will vary depending on your style and needs, but the key is to have a routine and make it a habit.

Separate it from the rest of your life – This advice works two ways:

1. It's difficult to be productive if you're in the middle of everything else going on at home, the vacuuming, the kids playing, etc. Make sure you can isolate yourself from anything else going on at home.
2. When it's time to take a break from work, don't have it sitting where you can see it. You will be distracted by the thought of uncompleted work. If your home office space needs to do double duty, have some way of closing off your work when you are done for the day.

Working from home has both benefits and drawbacks. When working from home, you can obviously enjoy homely comforts such as your luxury bathroom during a break and preparing food in your own kitchen during lunch. However, drawbacks include interruptions and social isolation.

Define your spaces; separate work from home. Have a room dedicated to working. Don't do it wherever you happen to be. Set aside some space, preferably a room (it doesn't have to be big) to be your workspace. That way, when you enter it, you know consciously what you're there to do: go to work. It changes the state of mind from "I'm at home" to "I'm at work".

Set regular hours, and stick to the schedule: True, this sounds very rigid and boring, but if you have a definite time for waking up, doing work, eating meals, and going to bed, you will not suffer from long hours of guiltily playing games, or overextended work hours. Remember, you need to have a corporate mentality, so don't think that your time is all your own: you need to set boundaries on when you should work and when you should stop.

Start the day properly: Have a good breakfast, spend some time alone to just sit and do whatever. Relax, let your mind wander. Pray. Just make sure

that your mind isn't in the "I hate working" frame of mind. **Don't stay unshaved in pajamas**

Keep three lists of three: The first list has three things you will do today. The second is three things you'd like to get done, but aren't essential. The third is three things that need to be done at some point. That way, when you've trogged through your days work, you don't end up sitting twiddling your thumbs.

Close the door: It'll be very easy to leave the door to whatever room or space you set apart to be your workplace open. Don't do it. If the door is open, that represents something to you, and to your family. To you, it represents the idea that if it's a bit tough, or you don't feel like working today, you don't have to. To your family, it represents the idea that Dad is around, and I can go and talk to him.

Security risks: Data security may be at risk if you use a personal computer, so your employer may provide you with one. You will have to make sure that any visitors to your house don't see any sensitive material you are working with.

Keep your desk and general work area tidy: A tidy workspace helps keep a tidy mind, which helps make your day more productive.

Turn off the telephone when you need to work without distraction: Turn off IM and email notifications too. In fact, if possible, shut off the Internet.

Checking email twice a day: This can be a very big time saver for some people. It doesn't work for me personally because most of the work I do for clients is over email. However I have learned to stop checking email when it is a distraction.

Don't stop working if it's a hard day: There'll be times when you haven't got any ideas, or just don't feel productive. Train yourself to do some work anyway. It's a short fall from "It's just not happening at the moment" to "It's a bit tough, I'll stop for the day". Next thing you know, you never seem to get anything done.

Have a good chair: Mesh backed ones, or good comfy leather perhaps. It's worth spending some money on.

Left or Right Handed?: be sure to take whether you're right or left handed into account. Your orientation will impact where vital components are situated from your lighting to file location to monitor & keyboard location. If you have a desk light it should not cast a shadow on your work over your writing hand. Thus, lefties should have a desk light in the upper right corner of their desktop and visa versa for righties. Your keyboard and monitor should be positioned so that you can put paper and pen on your natural writing side. I've worked with clients that have to continually reach over their keyboard to write. It's a slow and uncomfortable position.

Give yourself breaks: Don't be locked in the room all the time. For every hour you work, have a 15-30 minute break. Give your mind time to digest

what it's just done, then come back. You'll improve the quality of what you produce a hundredfold.

Don't go back to work when you've finished: Had a great idea for a post? Fantastic, write down the basics on a note, and pin it up. Don't go back to work when you've finished.

Have a pint of water by your desk all the time: Try and work up to drinking a few pints a day, if you don't already.

Be careful what music you listen to while you work: Music, TV, the weather... Just about everything will influence your mood. Some you can't change, some you can. Make sure that you surround yourself with things that will give you the best frame of mind for whatever you're about to do.

No turning on the computer for a quick email check or to do 1 little thing until you've gotten "ready for work" as mentioned above: The nuance is if you have nowhere to be, that 1 little thing leads to showering at 2 in the afternoon with a splitting headache because you've forgotten to eat etc.

Know when to stop: Don't work late into the night. Set defined times when you're going to work, and then when it passes, stop. You can have a bit of leeway here, but make sure that you don't end up letting work run your life.

Designate certain days for certain work: For example: file everything on Friday afternoon, no later than Saturday morning. This allows you to walk out of your office for your "weekend" without feeling like you left work unfinished.

Set boundaries for those around you as well: Schedule your work time and make sure the kids and spouse know that you are unavailable for playing, chores, etc. during this time.

Have a good lunch: One readers suggested that something with good carb content works best. Puts you in the mood for the second half of the day.

Don't allow work to consume your life: Easier said than done when working from home. Make sure you set limits for the amount of time you will work.

Avoid feeling isolated: isolation is one of the factors most likely to make homeworking fail. As a result, it's important to put formal systems in place to ensure people feel part of the team. For example:

- frequent two-way feedback sessions about work and work-related issues
- regular scheduled visits to the workplace
- inclusion in social activities
- clear procedures to follow and people to contact if things go wrong

Be grateful you're working from home and not in some cubicle! That gratitude will motivate you to work harder, so you can continue to work from home.

Reward Yourself. Met that goal yet? Reinforce your good work habits by rewarding yourself. Rewards can be as simple as a cone of your favorite ice cream.

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