

Remote Ready Employee Guide

For people who haven't worked from home (or any other location of their choosing) before, it can sometimes be more of a shock than they imagined it might be. Potential issues to working from home (or remotely in general) include:

- ✓ The extra time and freedom can be a burden if not used and self-managed wisely,
- ✓ There is a risk of working too much, with the lines (geographic, time, and mental) between work and life being blurred or erased,
- ✓ Social isolation and loneliness (and possibly going stir crazy),
- ✓ Needing high levels of self-motivation and self-accountability, and
- ✓ Sources of distractions (family/Netflix/etc.) could be problems with lower level of supervision.

But, on the flip side, remote work can be much more productive and creative than ever experienced in an office environment. It can also be better for health, stress levels, financially, feelings of freedom and autonomy, and for creating closer connections with people in *and* out of the workplace.

This **Remote Ready Employee Guide** document gives some of the top pieces of general advice on how to avoid the potential pitfalls and increase chances of working with high productivity, as well as benefit personally from extra time, energy and freedom.

1. Create boundaries between work and life

To combat the issues of having work and life spill over into each other, leaving you with a feeling that you're both always at work and never at work – not giving your full self to your work, and not able to fully relax when not working – it's good to have strong boundaries. These boundaries can be divided into the following:

Physical boundaries

- ✓ Create an office at home, which is separate from common living areas. A separate room dedicated to work is ideal.
- ✓ Try to use this office only during work times, ensuring you leave it during breaks and after hours (unless you need it for further study or other work afterwards). You'll get sick of that space pretty fast if you spend too much time there.
- ✓ Ensure your family (if home while you're working) know they're not supposed to be in your office during work times. You could put up a 'do not disturb' sign or similar so they know when you're working.

Temporal boundaries

- ✓ Create and stick to routine start and finish times (and breaks!) – even if your team has full freedom as to when they get their work done. The mind likes rhythm and patterns; and this

will remove some of the need for daily discipline and motivation, because you'll simply be sticking to a timetable.

- ✓ Use time blocking for deep, concentrated work. For some people dedicated time for uninterrupted work can be highly effective and produce great results. If you can, turn notifications off (e.g., for instant messaging or emails), while ensuring you can be reached for urgent matters.
- ✓ As with the first point on routine start and finish times, make sure there are definite times of the day (both before and after your workhours) when you are not working or looking at emails or doing any other work-related things. This is an important topic to discuss with the team when planning what the remote work trial will look like, so that ground rules can be set around times you'll be expected to be contactable etc.

Mental boundaries

- ✓ Do some sort of activity that helps define when the day has ended. Perhaps put on some music, take the dog for a walk, or anything else that helps transition your mind from work to home. (This is one benefit of the commute that home workers can miss out on – the physical journey home acts as a mental transition work to rest-of-life.)

2. Communicate, communicate, communicate

This is always the biggest recommendation from anyone who works in remote teams: communicate, a lot; especially if you and your team are new to working away from the office. Trust and a sense of dependability need to be built, and apart from just getting all your work done, this is a powerful way to become perceived as dependent and trustworthy. Exactly what this communication looks like depends on how you've planned it with your manager and team. It could be a daily catchup over Skype or Zoom, it could be Slack instant messages, or it could simply be emails to let people know what you're doing.

Your team and manager will need to get used to being transparent with information and sharing anything important online or over group video chats.

But here is an important tip: try to be purposeful and succinct with most communication. Although platforms such as Slack are helpful communication and collaboration tools, they are seekers of attention, like any other social media. It can be thoroughly addictive to hear the *ping* of notifications, which can draw colleagues into long and distracting back-and-forth messaging (each one disrupting your state of flow and deep work). If possible, as in the last point about boundaries, turn notifications off during certain times of the day, while letting people know how to contact you if they really need to talk (e.g., phone call).

3. Stick to agreed expectations and rules

Before anyone works remotely, we strongly suggest that teams develop 'protocols' that set them up for success when working remotely. Your team should have a discussion about how everyone will be working and communicating. In this discussion it is important to set expectations and ground rules – for example, everyone is to be contactable between 9am and 12pm; or if you're time blocking for focused work, set your Slack status to 'unavailable'; etc.

Then, ensure you stick to these expectations and ground rules, or be clear when you need to go outside these rules (e.g., attending a personal appointment). Again, trust is an enormous aspect of successful remote working, and it can be lost very quickly if you don't stick to what's expected and what everyone has agreed on. Importantly, this includes completing work to agreed deadlines, as this often becomes the only measure of productivity when working remotely.

4. Use extra time and energy with purpose

It can actually be quite daunting to have so much extra freedom and time in your day, and Parkinson's Law can come into play (work expanding to fill that available time, even if it could be done much faster) – which can result in large amounts of procrastination.

So it is important to incorporate other activities into your workday, or at the beginning or end of the day, such as taking a course, joining a dance class, meeting with friends, setting an exercise time for yourself, playing an instrument, going for a hike, etc.

Here is where remote work can have fantastic benefits for your health and general wellbeing. Using that extra time to do things which add to a full life, *during* a workday, creates a highly sustainable way of living.

5. Experiment, and give yourself time

Depending on your job, you will most likely find that you have more freedom to structure work in the ways that suit you best – ways that would be impractical or frowned upon in an office environment.

For example, doing 50 minutes of highly concentrated work, then stepping outside and doing yoga for 10 minutes before getting back into another burst of work. Or you could be someone who prefers to work six hours straight, then have lunch at 2pm, before finishing with a short, sharp one or two hours to prepare for the next day.

If you have freedom with start and finish times (e.g., results-only work environment), you may prefer to start work at 7am, stop for a few hours in the middle of the day to rejuvenate, and then work a little longer in the evening.

Also, test what works with background noise (e.g., types of music, silence, ocean sounds), self-accountability and methods of organisation (lists, diary, alerts, etc.), how often you need to socialise to not feel lonely and isolated, best times for meditation and exercise, etc.

It can take time to figure out what works, and you must give yourself space to fail, to have some terrible days. This is what you will have had a discussion with your manager about – being allowed to experiment and get used to a new way of living and working. But it's worth it to find those sweet spots where you'll do more in half a day than you would in a full day (or more!) in a normal office, *and* still be able to take care of your health and other needs in a sustainable way.