Article
Fabian Haupt · Jul 22, 2020 5m read

Working from home. Thoughts of a perpetual home-dweller.

If you found your way here you ' re one of the people who ' ve been asked to work from home for the time being. At this point we don ' t know how long the crisis is going to last or even how the situation is going to look in a few weeks. Nevertheless you need to get your work done. You rarely worked from home before and now you are faced with a number of challenges. Let ' s talk a bit about what ' s going to keep you sane on the home front.

Who am I and why should you care about what I have to say?

You shouldn ' t. You can. Nobody is forcing you. I ' ve worked from home on and off for more than a decade, in different jobs and varying accommodations. Sometimes working from home means working on a cramped dining room table with a 14' ' laptop screen. And sometimes it also means working on your spacious standing desk with multiple 34' ' screens giving you plenty of room to put windows everywhere. I ' ve been through all of these and I ' m hoping that maybe some of the experiences I ' ve made will be helpful to get you through this pandemic.

Who are you?

More or less there are going to be two big groups of people in this situation, there ' s the natural work-from-home-rs (tending to be the introverts), and there are people who really can ' t stand it in the long run. Welcome to you both! Sometimes who we are depends on our mood, but the type of project, and our colleagues also have a big impact on where you fall. For either group the tools available to you have improved tremendously over the last few years, I ' ll talk about some further down.

Office space

When you start google-ing for tips for home office work, most of the articles you find will point out how important a separate office space is going to be for you. However, not all of us live in great mansions with spare bedrooms that can be converted to an office for this situation. Let ' s recognize this recommendation for what it really is: a tool. Having a separate room is a tool for you to switch your mind into ' work mode ' . Some people don ' t need a tool for that at all, other ' s have a hard time to switch work off. Having a separate room isn ' t a guarantee for having a good, yet alone healthy work-life balance. What good is the office doing you, if you still think about your work project at the dinner table? Or how does it help when you ' re in there but you are still worried about your kid playing on the street?

Office space really is just a mind space you find yourself in when you are " working from home " . Putting in in quotes, because in the end, you might not even be working from home. (well, in the current situation you most likely are;))

To be efficient at working from home, you have to know what helps you switch your mind into ' office space ' . Try to find a small ritual that works for you to clear your mind. Various examples gathered from colleagues: * take a walk around the block. (might not be applicable with all the lock downs) * go through a couple of yoga poses * log out of your computer and log back in with a fresh start of your work space * or switch to your work computer (not all of us have the luxury of having a separate work machine) * tell the rest of your family that you ' re working now, try to minimize interruptions

Strategies to get through your day

Planning

A technique not necessarily limited to working from home, but a general good practise, is to make a rough sketch of your day. What are going to focus on today? Pick three big things you want to achieve on this day. Pick a couple of minor tasks you can work on to have a break from the big ones. For me most often this looks something like this:

- Major: Jira tickets: ABC-23, ABC-42, ABC-72
- Minor: finish HR training tasks, file expense report, finish project writeup for XY, tickets: 3,46

If you finish your three major items before noon, great job! (those probably should have been small ones ;)). Over time you will get a feeling for what your most productive hours are going to be. Try to move the bigger and more complex tasks into that time slot. For me, that usually means the first 3–4 hours after starting work. I postpone the email and slack checking to after that time. This is probably an outcome of my own preferences, just as much as it is a owed to the fact the most of the rest of my team works on the west coast (I ' m in the east). Either way, find your own rhythm and get to know yourself.

Getting unstuck

Sometimes we just can ' t make any headway on something. There are various techniques to help free yourself. You probably heard of rubber duck debugging, obviously your favourite feline (or canine) friend is also going to be very happy if you explain your program to them ;) You ' re at home, take advantage of all the benefits this gives you.

Get a coffee, have a chat with your family. Coming back after a few minutes to the task at hand let ' s you view the problem from a different angle and quite often you ' ll see a completely new approach (no pun intended).

Listen to some music to take your mind off.

Or if you want to be more productive while still taking your mind of the current problem (see above), go back to your todo list from the morning and check of one of those minor items.

Distractions

This one also comes down to knowing yourself. Are you easily distracted by social media, news, stock market? Then it ' s probably a good idea to close those windows and don ' t open them until you ' re done with your work. If you find yourself having a hard time following through with that, there are tools you can configure to prevent yourself from reaching any of those sites :)

Put your phone on ' DnD ' mode (unless of course you need to be reachable immediately by phone). Let ' s face it: most of the time your smartphone is not being used to actually make phone calls, but rather to check a whole range of different things: reddit, facebook, imgur, email …. None of these are really helping you to get your work done (yeah,yeah, unless you work there…;))

Staying healthy

It ' s not a big secret that sitting motionless for hours on end isn ' t very good for your body. Maybe you have the luxury of having a standing desk at home, or you can improvise one (kitchen counter!). Another good approach is using one of the gym balls to sit on, it keeps your body active (just trying to not fall off). Side note, after a few years you ' ll be able to sit on one of them cross legged in the middle of the room with your laptop on your legs ;)

Take a break, get that Yoga session in you always wanted to try;)

Manage your mood

We all have ups and downs during our week. A great tool in helping with that is knowing how different music affects your mood. Need to be energetic and pumped up, pull up your workout playlist. Need to calm down a bit? Maybe

some Handel is going to help with that. We all have our own tastes, so also be mindful of your co-quarantine-ers ;)

Final thoughts

A lot of these approaches are going to work slightly different for all of us. Experiment and find your own optimum. Keeping notes on what works and what doesn ’ t work is good way to keep track and optimize.

Stay healthy and sane everybody, good luck!

Note, I've previously posted this article here: https://medium.com/@kazamatzuri/working-from-home-thoughts-of-a-perpetual-home-dweller-720d4639edf4

#Other

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