

# Working Remotely?

## Use These Tips to Jumpstart Success

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Designing a plan for remote work is more important than ever. Even before the current calls to work from home, many organizations offered work-from-home and flexible working arrangements for their employees.

Today, remote work is mainstream—and those who are working or joining a meeting from outside a room are as important as those inside the room.

But whether you're at home or on the road, virtual work requires planning to bring the rigor of a structured office into an offsite setting. This is especially true if you are transitioning into remote work when you've never done it before. You'll need to factor in your physical setting, your use of technology, and the managing of priorities to ensure "business as usual"—regardless of where that work is happening.

### Before You Begin



**Plan Ahead for Logistics.** Envision what you'll need when not sitting at your desk in the office. Are there lengthy documents you should download/print or login passwords that you might need? Also think

about the tech supplies you'd bring on a business trip—these are what you'll need wherever your remote workspace will be. Gather cords, chargers, headset, mouse and extra batteries. Ask IT about best practices for logging in securely from offsite, and download needed software before you head out. If you anticipate a long-term timeframe, ask about the feasibility of transporting your desktop monitor, favorite office lamp, and perhaps even your desk chair!



**Be Creative with Your Priorities.** Meet with your manager to set expectations and agree on a game plan. Can your current assignments be handled from afar? If not, consider what can be done virtually

during your time working offsite. Flexible work strategist Cali Williams Yost, CEO and Founder of Flex+Strategy Group, suggests listing backburner projects that could be completed during this time—like updating client lists or researching new product lines. Confirming these plans helps you prioritize and underscores the fact that while your specific tasks might be different, productivity will remain high.

### Getting Started



**Consider Your Physical Setting.** Designate a space where you'll "set up shop." That could be two different places: one for your nitty gritty work, and one for conducting virtual meetings when privacy matters. Yost suggests that you identify the place

with the least number of distractions, but also to make peace with the fact that it may not be perfect. Choose an ergonomic (or your most comfortable) chair but remember that switching chairs and/or taking standing breaks throughout the day will be important; or, set up a standing height desk if that's your preferred setup. Think about lighting: it should be balanced for your video-based work and abundant to highlight your tasks. Workplace researcher and strategist Kate Lister, President of Global Workplace Analytics, notes that a dual monitor can increase your productivity by 50%—so if it's feasible within your setup, add a larger monitor to your laptop or pair it with a digital device to serve as a second screen. Check to see if additional power strips might be needed.



**Test Your Technology.** On day one, test all hardware and software. As Lister notes, your computer becomes your means of transportation to work, so you want to make sure it gets you

there. Practice using your company's preferred "power tools" such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and/or Slack. These can make virtual meetings more engaging. Depending on the application, features could include "raising your hand," commenting with emojis, and utilizing chat boxes and break-out groups. Part of your "site test" might include identifying the location that affords the best WiFi or cellular signal if that can be an issue in your area; be ready to call into a meeting using your phone if WiFi or audio quality is spotty. Practice signing in from your laptop, tablet, and phone, just in case—and know how to activate/deactivate your web cam and the all-important mute button!

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**Prepare for Virtual Meetings.** When you work remotely, you meet with your colleagues and clients on a monitor, not across the conference table—so lighting is important. Avoid locations that have a window or other direct lighting behind you, as it will obscure your face. Use good posture and look directly into the camera lens, which is above your laptop screen. Knoll Workplace Research Manager Carolyn Cirillo suggests that if you're sensitive about your setting, you can upload a photo as a virtual backdrop (Favorites from her team's weekly Zoom calls range from iconic product photos, to hometown locations and vacation shots.)

And remind yourself that your colleagues can't see the documents in front of you—so you'll need to be specific with references. Rather than saying "as you can see in this report," offer the actual page and paragraph numbers. In addition, plan to utilize screen sharing and video chatting technology to help keep the whole team connected and engaged.

## Making the Transition



**Structure Your Day.** Wherever you'll be working from, your workday should be generally the same as if you were onsite. While you may benefit from some flexible timing—such as starting your day an hour or two earlier to allow for a midday exercise break—be mindful of working hours and time zones before you call or text your colleagues. Communication is critical—but unless it is urgent, keep interactions and meeting times within the confines of working hours. Consider designating yourself as "available" using Slack, Skype, or your calendar app, and make sure key colleagues are in agreement about expectations of availability and standing "check in" times. But as you schedule your day, also plan to take a walk or bring your laptop out into the fresh air for a "dose of nature" to keep productivity and creativity high.



**Consider Your Rituals.** Even though you aren't commuting to the office, you are still going to work. But Lister notes that for some, this can be challenging without the typical "social cues" and routines. So, do whatever it takes to "be at work" and

to transition in and out of the work day. Get dressed in working attire or grab your morning coffee if that puts you into business mode. Take consistent mini-breaks throughout the day: stand up, walk around, and eat lunch at a specific time. Lean on your coworkers, too—replace traditional water-cooler meetups with short video chats.

*Through research, Knoll explores the connection between workspace design and human behavior, health and performance, and the quality of the user experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their work environments.*

*To learn more about this topic or other research resources Knoll can provide, visit [www.knoll.com/research](http://www.knoll.com/research).*

## Moving Forward



**Promote Team Communication.** Use technology to bridge the gap of face-to-face collaboration and drop-bys. Lister suggests that you and your colleagues determine protocol for which situations require you to email, text, or pick up the phone. And Yost stresses that it's important to set up regular "touch-base" sessions to maintain the collaborative cadence. Learning to communicate remotely can be hard or easy, depending on whether you're an introvert or an extrovert. But whatever your personality, being available and responsive keeps the teamwork going strong!



**Forgive Distractions.** In an ideal world, remote workers communicate from soundproof rooms with ideal lighting and seamless WiFi. But in reality, not everyone can "close the door" when working from home. Tracy Wymer, VP of Workplace Strategy at Knoll affirms that there will be disruptions—from roommates, spouses, children, pets, or even the doorbell. But he says that with remote workplaces, work lives are blending, and it's okay to accept it. But that being said, Wymer recommends setting ground rules when necessary/possible. Lister agrees, noting that just because you are home doesn't mean you are free. So consider a "do not disturb" sign on your front door and a silent signal for your family to recognize.



**Above all: Learn and Grow!** Use the current increased transition to remote work to test flexibility and inform the long-term framework for remote work. Keeping track of how the experience is going can help you, your colleagues, and your manager improve productivity and communication. As Yost notes, it all comes back to being more "intentional" in your efforts to collaborate and integrate remote work into your life. When you remove the physical aspect of the office, replacing it with proper planning and flexibility will help to ensure your offsite success.

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### For further reading:

Lister, Kate and Harnish, Tom. *Undress for Success: The Naked Truth about Making Money at Home*: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2009

Yost, Cali Williams. *Tweak It: Make What Matters to You Happen Every Day*: Hachette Book Group, 2013.

Yost, Cali Williams. *Work + Life*: Penguin Group, 2004.