

Coronavirus & Working from Home: Part 5

Creating and Maintaining a Routine An Employee's Guide to Maximizing Work-from-Home Productivity

by Lauren Stern

COVID-19 is creating a new frontier, with mass closures, cities on lockdown and travel bans on a global scale. Each day is starting to feel more like Groundhog Day. You may now find yourself working remotely, possibly for the first time and foreseeable future. Whether this is new to you or not, you may be in for a bigger catch: Your spouse is home, your kids are home and your pets are under the impression that it's still the weekend. How do you manage work productivity given the changes and distractions?

As a telecommuter for the last 13 years, with young children and a spouse that has an irregular military work schedule, I have often found myself working through important projects and conference calls while my spouse and children have been home. While it may seem like a bonus day off to them, it's still work as usual for me. Creating and maintaining a routine has helped me get focused and down to work, so the chaos around does not distract or tempt me.

This is Part 5 of our series
Coronavirus & Working from Home.

It includes insights from Alliances Management staff, who have worked remotely since the company's inception in 2006.

[The entire eight-part series can be viewed on our website.](#)

Loss of Boundaries

A traditional office setting creates natural work boundaries. During the time spent within the office walls, you are open to assignments, discussions with colleagues and general work activities. When you leave the office, your workday comes to a close and you are able to dedicate your time to personal matters.



The same connected world that makes remote work possible can blur the boundaries between work and personal. At one end of the spectrum is the prospect of a never-ending workday; at the other, homelife can prevent you from finding quiet, space and uninterrupted time. Routine can help establish boundaries while maintaining some separation and sanity in the process.

Where to Start

In general, you likely start your day with some combination of helping family members get ready and off to school or work, getting yourself ready for work, and then actually going to work. With many of us no longer leaving the house, these routines may be lost. Here are some tips for creating a routine to focus your work energy and improve your ultimate productivity:

1. **Start with an activity to signal to yourself (and others) that you are beginning your workday.** Maybe you still get dressed in something beyond loungewear, or maybe it's completing a morning workout, walking the dog or simply pouring that first cup of coffee. Whatever it is, it should be something that works for you and gets your mindset ready to say "goodbye" to the family and transition to work-mode.
2. **Head to your workspace.** If you have a home office, this is simple. If you do not, finding that physical separation is sometimes easier said than done. Any space will do as long as it has the technical requirements (desk, computer, internet access and preferably a comfortable chair) as well as the mental requirements (quiet, non-distracting and ideally, a door). If you find yourself needing to work remotely with young children and no other adult support, I suggest waking up early or focusing critical work during naptimes or after your children's bedtime. In a pinch, I've setup a movie or game and forged ahead. It's never easy and not ideal, but again, can be manageable if needed.
3. **Map out your day.** Without an office setting, you may not be receiving the assignments or direction you typically rely on to carry out your day. Working remotely requires a certain amount of self-motivation, direction and autonomy. To maximize productivity and my momentum through the day, I start each morning by reviewing my calendar, skimming my email inbox and creating a checklist specific for that day. This way, I can plan my schedule around any conference calls and work efficiently in the time I have between. While my email inbox will certainly add to my daily to-do list, I always have recurring projects and tasks. I have found that the latter are best managed (and remembered) through a checklist app, accessible from any connected device. My app of choice is [ToodleDo](#), but there are many available.



4. ***Schedule time for breaks, lunch and especially an end to the workday.*** Without the “water cooler” in the office or casual conversation that starts in passing, breaks may not naturally occur when working remotely. However, they are needed for self-care, to mentally recharge and avoid burning out from a never-ending workday. It’s also a great way to take advantage of the fact that your family is just a room or two away and find some time to connect (or help). Then, at either the end-time set by your employer or the completion of your checklist, leave your workspace behind for the day and mentally unplug.

Kids need a Routine Too!

If you are finding yourself working remotely with kids that are out of school, create a routine for them as well. Children need and crave structure. Not only does it help them to understand what is happening next and what you expect from them, but it provides them with a sense of security.

Considering the age gap of my own children, I’m finding myself in the somewhat new territory of working remotely while potentially running a homeschool and preschool of sorts for my 11 and 3-year-old. To get us all ready, we spent some time creating a schedule together for the upcoming weeks. Doing it together helped them to understand what we are going to do (and why) and set some expectations and ground rules. Including them in the process also allowed them to have some ownership and control. As a starting point, we used the excellent schedule resource provided [here](#), but in all honesty, the next few weeks will be a combination of the schedule and a free-for-all.

About Alliances Management

Alliances Management is a consulting, association management, and strategic staffing firm that delivers top-quality project management, operations, and administrative services. Visit us at www.am.consulting or on [LinkedIn](#).

To some extent, we are all dipping our toes in uncharted waters. Whatever your circumstances, a routine will help. Hopefully, the experience and knowledge we’ve acquired over the years at Alliances Management will help you navigate these new times and offer some relief, clarity for moving forward and, at a minimum, knowledge that you are not alone.

