

# ALL WORK AND NO PLAY...



WE'RE LIVING THROUGH UNPRECEDENTED TIMES AT THE MOMENT. WHILST THE TREND TOWARDS ALLOWING PEOPLE TO WORK FROM HOME WAS ALREADY WELL AND TRULY UNDERWAY, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS PUT A ROCKET LAUNCHER UNDER IT. WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF WORKERS NOW WORKING FROM THEIR 'HOME OFFICE' OR AS WE USED TO CALL IT, THE KITCHEN TABLE, IT SEEMS UNREALISTIC TO EXPECT THEM ALL TO RETURN TO FULL-TIME OFFICE-BASED WORKING WHEN WE COME OUT OF THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS.

When you down tools and leave an office to head to your house, it's easier to draw a line under that side of your life and switch into home mode. It's less easy if your commute is a 30-second stroll to the living room. So if home working is a culture that is here to stay, it's important to find a good balance between your professional and personal time.

## THE POSITIVE SIDE OF HOME WORKING

In theory, it sounds great! No fighting over the bathroom to get out of the door, the end of sitting in traffic jams, the flexibility to pop a load of washing on. And yes, many people will thrive in a home working environment. Indeed, a 2019 study by Airtasker found that on average, remote employees worked 16.8 more days a

year than office-based colleagues. Not only did they devote more time to work, but they were also more productive.

For individuals who are self-motivated, the flexibility can be a great bonus. With a move towards judging performance on achievement rather than hours sat in the office, there is freedom to work at the time that suits you. If you are an early riser, you can be up and at it, and have your workday completed by lunchtime. If you work better later in the day, you can have a slow start and ramp up the adrenaline during the afternoon and early evening. And it's certainly easier to fit in those domestic things we all have to do. You're at home if you need to accept a delivery or let the electrician in.

## BUT THERE IS A DOWNSIDE

When you work from home it can feel isolating, particularly if you are someone who thrives in a team environment. You might find you are feeling out of the loop with colleagues who are office-based. Unless you are self-disciplined, it's easy to lose focus and get distracted by home chores or, dare we say it, Netflix. The flip side is that when you don't have that natural separation, you can find that work takes over and you end up feeling like you never get time off.

## ACHIEVING A BALANCE

That elusive work/life balance really is the key to working from home successfully. Here are a few tips on finding it:

### ***Establish a routine***

Decide which hours work for you – and of course the needs of your job – and set the hours you are going to work. By following a pretty fixed routine each day, you will start to feel that your day is structured. Get up, take a shower, get dressed just as you would if you were office-based. Let remote colleagues know when they can contact you so that communications go smoothly. And when your working day is complete, switch off your computer and phone and shut the door.

### ***Create a dedicated workspace***

We don't all have the luxury of a bespoke home office, but to successfully work from home, you'll

need something more than a laptop balanced on your knees. Create a workspace with the tools you need to work productively to hand. If you can afford to splash out, buy a good quality office chair, it will help you to stay at your desk and improve your productivity. You might want to consider noise-cancelling headphones, to filter out the dog barking or the doorbell. You'll find it is much easier to switch off if you can walk away from your work environment than if it is spread all over your house.

### ***Take breaks***

If you were in the office, you would take a coffee and lunch break. Make sure you do the same at home – and you can use this time effectively to do some of those errands or chores without guilt. Whether you need to throw a casserole in the oven or pop to the corner shop, getting those little jobs out of the way helps you to relax and switch off during your downtime.

### ***Use productivity tools***

Whether its cloud-based software or a simple to-do list, documenting what you want to achieve each day will help to keep you focused. And take advantage of all the technological tools that are available these days. Cloud-based systems that let you store and share data, desk-based conferencing platforms, these all allow you to work more productively and efficiently. Remember, once you have ticked everything off your list, it's time to wind down.

### ***Check in with colleagues***

To address the feeling of isolation, make sure you regularly catch up with your boss and co-workers, whether that's by email, phone or conferencing. And it's a good idea to have some physical time with them, whether that's popping into the office once a week or attending a monthly meeting.

### ***Plan your social life***

Make plans for your after work time. If you have committed to going to the gym or meeting up with friends, you are much more likely to sign off for the day and move into home mode.

If you can find the right balance between work and home, remote working can be an enriching experience. Are you or your team working at home at the moment? How are you finding it? Do share your tips on getting the balance right by commenting below; we'd love to hear from you.

