

CREATING BALANCE

Working from home.

After 20+ years of working from home I've developed some best practices that have creat-



ed balance and overridden my temptation to sit at my desk and do “just one more thing”. As you read these best practices also consider how unique each of us are and address specific needs you might have given that uniqueness. Remember that the recipe for success will look different from individual to individual, something for all leaders to take into consideration as you support employees to become effective workers in the home environment. Measuring the success of the work from home plan should reside in results. In other words, is your de-

Not everyone will have a utopian work from home space. Creativity can turn home environments into effective work spaces.

partment or team hitting their goals even if the work from home plan looks different from employee to employee?

Best Practices:

1. **Reaction to change:** Shifting from an office environment to a work from home environment might seem like a simple and luxurious change but remember that this is not the case for all. People react to change of any kind, even positive change in a myriad of ways from excitement to resistance to trepidation. It's normal. Give yourself time to adapt.

If you are working part time from home, part time from the office don't be surprised to find yourself disoriented. Small things can add to the psychological burden of becoming accustomed to a new routine. We are habit forming creatures that love the safety and comfort

found in routine. For example, does your home desk have left hand drawers and your office desk have right hand drawers? How many times do you find yourself sitting in the middle wondering which way to reach? This is a small and perhaps humorous example. However, reflect on how much change

you are currently experiencing. It adds up and you may find yourself more tired than usual as your brain attempts to keep up. Take extra time to prepare yourself for the transition, keep a list of things that travel back and forth with you, and take extraordinary care of your well being until your brain and body adjust.

“As dealing with change becomes a regular activity, leading it becomes a skill to hone, an internal capacity to master. – Arnaud Henneville

2. **Communication:** There are so many ways to communicate now. We can choose from text, email, telephone, social media and multiple virtual platforms. Keeping up with it all can be daunting. Develop a communication plan and agree on which platform you will use to communicate depending on the content and need. When you begin



Which area of your home will provide you with the most structure and stability to work effectively?

your work day, create space to connect and engage in informal conversation to help offset the void of “loneliness”. If done well, you might find that your teams become closer and more productive. Some teams have taken to working virtually side by side with *cameras on* to mimic the experience of an in office environment. If you’re self employed, find others that are self employed and do the same. It’s a great way to network, build community and promote happiness. Psychological health is the key to productivity.

3. **Connection:** Despite being in constant communication via technology, working from home does cause a daunting aloneness. Those quick stops at someone’s desk to discuss weekend adventures, ask an opinion about something or to debrief a meeting provide us with more connection and emotional support than we realize. We are connected beings and those in-person interactions give us the depth we require to thrive beyond the flatness of screen life. Be purposeful about connecting with real humans rather than avatars throughout the day and week. Notice and reflect on what it is that you’re missing and create ways to fill it. Some of them might be outside of your comfort zone, embrace the challenge. Attend or create mastermind groups, think tanks and other creative spaces.

4. **Structure:** This is one of the most important factors in successfully working from home. Create structure whenever and wherever possible. Do it immediately. Get up at a set time, shower and dress for work. Create office hours. Establish when you will start, when you will break and when you will leave your desk. If you routinely exercise at lunch, stick to that routine. Establish a specific, separate work space that you love being in and if possible, create the space so that *after hours* you aren’t able to see your work. Once you’re in your work space, relate to it as though you have travelled to your office. Resist the temptation to hit the fridge, throw a load of laundry in or wander out to the driveway to chat to your retired neighbour. Conversely, once you’ve left your work space for the day, let it be complete. Resist the temptation to *drop back into your office space* during personal time and to give into the temptation to do one more thing. Once you’ve become reliable at sticking to a healthy, productive routine you’ll be able to reward yourself with some flexibility. If done too early before the structure has become habitual you’ll begin to develop habits that will contribute to inertia and a lack of motivation. Remember that we train people how to be with us, if we train the people in our lives that we are now available any time of the day, this will become the new normal. When you’re feeling a lack of motivation, those people will become the new excuse to take short breaks that quickly turn into day eaters.

5. **Exercise:** As mentioned above, if you have a plan in place to exercise, stick to it or adapt your workout to your home environment. If you exercised with your peers or had other health initiatives at your workplace there are many apps that incorporate group challenges, set this up immediately and use group challenges to stay motivated. Virtual plat-

forms now offer worldwide access to fitness classes that you would not have had access to, join them and at the same time expand your community beyond the geographical limits. It's very common for people to report a loss of motivation because the team aspect of fitness is missing. Create set times in your work day to attend to your physical and psychological fitness and hold yourself to them. Get outside and breath fresh air at least once per day. As permissible by your employer and after you're feeling confident in your ability to work productively from home use exercise to support you to clear blocks in your creativity. Be careful not to let the exercise break slide to distraction, use exercise on purpose and watch your productivity soar.

6. Habits of a leader: The work from home environment seems to accentuate all of the small undisciplined ways in which we work. No longer commuting to work, you'll have more time on your hands, more temptations and distractions. The personal will threaten to intrude on the professional if you lack the discipline to stay focused. In some cases, you may have children and partners at home during office hours. As you and your family adjust to work at home it might be acceptable, even funny at times to have them accidentally interrupt a meeting. Remember that your ability to adjust nimbly to transition is an important leadership quality. Notice who you're *being* working from home. Are you doing what it takes to bring professionalism to your role or are you taking advantage of circumstances? Consider the impact on others and what your behaviour conveys about your leadership? If you find yourself saying, "I don't know how to get my partner to stop interrupting me" consider that it's not about knowing how, it's about choosing not to. In today's world we can learn *how to* do just about anything. The person who is not performing is simply not *choosing*. And that's a different matter altogether.

There is so much more to be shared about working from home including having adequate technology, and being mindful of the impact on your body of your home office ergonomics. In short, remember that you are in uncharted territory. Be mindful of what physical and psychological symptoms you're experiencing. Communicate and be prepared to resource yourself in new ways, we're in a whole new world of possibility if you choose to look at it that way.