

HOW TO WORK FROM HOME: A 2020 GUIDE TO REMOTE WORK



Technology is the perfect answer to how to work from home. Digital tools connect us in every facet of our lives, so it should come as no surprise it's changing the way we work. What was once a very expensive long-distance phone call is now a free video chat. And the painfully slow process of sending a package by courier has been fully replaced with instantly shareable cloud storage and messaging. We can now work with anyone anywhere in real-time.

Telecommuting. Remote work. Working from home. These aren't corporate buzzwords or the empty promises of shady "friends" on social media. They are the new and emerging reality of employment in the 21st century. The way we work is changing forever.

WHAT IS REMOTE WORK?

Remote work, also sometimes called telecommuting, is any work that is done for a company or employer from a location other than the company itself. As a broad term, remote work includes working from home, a coffee shop, or a hotel room. Working remotely can be full-time, at fixed times, flexible, or temporary due to special circumstances depending on the needs of either employees or employers. And thanks to digital technologies, we have more options than ever for doing remote work from home.

WHY WORK FROM HOME?

Clearly there are advantages to telecommuting. Otherwise, no one would do it. Here are a few of the reasons why people might choose to work at home.

Flexible Schedule

For most remote workers, at the top of the list is the increased flexibility of working in their own space on their own time. From the comfort of their own home, employees are able to adjust their schedules and environments to maximize their productivity.

In many cases, the work is also based on output instead of punching a clock, which means that work is judged on its own merits instead of how busy someone looks at the office.

“REMOTE WORKERS VALUE THE FLEXIBILITY AND CONVENIENCE THAT COMES FROM REMOTE JOBS. THEY ARE READY TO GO THE EXTRA MILE TO MAKE IT WORK. IT MEANS THEY ARE WILLING TO PUT IN EXTRA TIME AT NIGHT, WEEKENDS, EVEN HOLIDAYS TO MAKE UP FOR THE WASTED TIME.”

- Jens Jakob Andersen, Founder and CEO of RunRepeat

Save Time (And Money)

Working from home also saves time and money for both employees and employers. The worker saves time on the commute and all the little processes and time-wasters (like meetings) that happen in office life. Plus, between the cost of transportation, lunches, and venti coffees, there are hundreds of little ways office workers can spend their money through the workday that just aren't there at home.

The employer also saves money in terms of overhead related to having an employee on-site. From renting enough space to utilities, an employee costs more than just their salary. A company can actually save significantly by outsourcing work off-site. (And a savvy remote worker will realize this and be able to get more pay for the same work. Everyone wins.)



Work-Life Multi-Tasking

There are a number of life situations that suit working at home. The employee may be ill or have to care for a family member. There could be an emergency situation like a natural disaster or extreme weather. Or it could be as simple as wanting a little more time and freedom. No matter the reason, doing your work from home can actually give you a better work-life balance.

For example, when working in the office it's impossible to be 100% focused for an entire workday (even with productivity hacks like the **Pomodoro technique**). So you might find yourself spacing out or surfing the Web and "looking busy." Not only have you not done anything, but you probably also feel a little more stressed for having wasted that time.

At home, however, you can break the work-stress-exhaustion cycle by doing a quick chore, squeezing in a short workout, taking a walk, or just about anything else from your regular life. Then you can get back to work feeling fresh and focused with the added benefit of having gotten something else done.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO WORK FROM HOME?

In a digitally connected world, communication with anyone anywhere in the world happens at the speed of light (give or take a satellite or two). We communicate more and more through our devices with an ever-increasing number of people replacing face-to-face communication with **remote collaboration**.

Connected Devices

At a minimum, you'll need at least one Internet-enabled device: a smartphone, tablet, or computer. Most people consider a laptop and a smartphone to be the absolute minimum setup for effective communications. While some tablets are getting closer to the productivity of a computer, they're not quite there yet.

And don't forget a good set of noise-canceling headphones with a built-in microphone. It will serve the dual purpose of reducing distraction and allowing for online calls. Ideally, you would have an optimized workspace or home office if you're working remotely on a regular basis, but more on that later.

Email and Messaging

At its simplest, a manager's relationship with remote workers is strictly by text. Text communication can be by either email or messaging services like WhatsApp, Messenger, or Skype. And this is a cornerstone of digital communication even if the team is also using other tools. And it's always nice to have a record of your work clear and in writing.

Still, communicating only through email and messaging does leave out a lot of the nuance of human interactions and it's one of the slower methods of communication.

Teleconferencing and Voice Chat

This has been around for a while. This is when a remote worker calls into the office either via telephone or a messaging app that allows voice calls (most do these days). Using voice chats can add a human element to your communication – and you can communicate more information faster than you could with text – but with this option isn't likely to work on its own.

The fact of the matter is that most work – the actual deliverables – are in the form of documents or files from the remote worker, so there are almost certainly going to be other methods of communication.

Video Chats and Screen Sharing

Functionally, this is the same as teleconferencing except you can see the other person (or people) on the call with a service like Zoom or Microsoft Teams. This adds another layer of personalization, but it's mostly unnecessary and can slow down the connection. Related to the video chat, however, is screen sharing. This is really useful, allowing people to share media directly and allowing participants to present their ideas in a very natural way.

Probably the biggest downside of this form of communication is how much data it consumes. And even with unlimited data, having a video chat shared among multiple locations can be slow to the point of uselessness. Again, it's one of the tools in the toolbox for when you need to communicate and demonstrate live. You can learn more about effective video conferencing [here](#).

Digital Whiteboarding

Digital whiteboarding refers to software – usually online – that can replicate the function of a physical whiteboard. This is the next level of screen sharing where not only can remote team members share a screen, but they can also annotate, draw, and interact with the screen in real-time from long distances. (Check out our recommended digital whiteboard: myViewBoard.)

The one downside of digital whiteboards is their reliance on touchscreens. While touchscreens are becoming more common, touch monitors are still in the early phases of adoption and most people only have touch screens on their phones and maybe a tablet. While this is a solution, many people still find it challenging to integrate tablet directly into their workstations.

Project Management Systems

These are the all-in-one project management and communication systems that include everything from voice and video chat to file storage to task trackers. It includes powerhouses like Slack and Trello or features of larger suites like Office 365's Planner. These tools work well to collect a variety of communications in one place and help many teams that work in the same place or remotely.

However, these tools' power sometimes works against them. They have lots of features, which can be a double-edged sword. In smaller teams or teams with established lines of communication, adding a project management tool could just be complicating matters. Sometimes it's best just to keep things simple.

PROBLEMS WITH WORKING FROM HOME

While there are certainly benefits to working remotely from home, there are also pitfalls to avoid. The structure and rules of the workplace exist for a reason, so it's important to counteract the problems associated with a remote job.

Too Many Distractions

Offices are famously distracting with conversations and meetings and interruptions of all kinds. But it's important to remember that home has just as many distractions, and there it's only your own discipline keeping you focused. When you're home, you likely have all your regular entertainment options. You have all your favorite snacks and a comfy couch for afternoon naps. And you may be swapping a gossipy co-worker for a kid or three. So to counteract the distractions of home, it's important to be extremely disciplined. That means no TV during work hours, set break times, and letting the whole family know when and where is a designated workspace.

Isolation

One of the biggest benefits of the workplace is giving people access to a group of their peers. Work is about more than just dollars and cents. Effective work also about people. Switching to remote work eliminates all that social time that you used to take for granted around work. Video chats and emails are no substitute for face-to-face interactions, and lack of community ties can be **damaging to mental and physical health**.

In the absence of social time during work hours, it's even more important to make space in your schedule for social time. This could be family meals, outings with friends, or even phone calls with people not at all related to your work. Do not underestimate the effect social connections will have on your well-being and engagement.

Working Where You Sleep

It's easy to blur the lines between work and rest when both happen in the same location. It can be hard to switch off the work mode, which means it's impossible to actually relax and refresh yourself. You should be able to relax at home, but if that's also the workplace it can cause some conflicting emotions.

You can help mitigate this problem by having defined times and places set aside for either work or rest. This means taking regular breaks – even scheduled breaks – and working a regular day. **This also means that you should avoid working in bed if at all possible**. It also means having times that are completely work free when you focus on other things like family, a movie, or your favorite video game.



PRODUCTIVITY TIPS FOR WORKING FROM HOME

Certain things about your home environment are going to be unique to you, but there are a few basic guidelines to get the most out of working at home.

Make Sure Work Stays Work

Remember that you're at work. The actual location may be a desk in the living room, the far end of the kitchen table, or your grandmother's breakfast nook, but it's the workplace wherever you are. Act accordingly.

- Start and finish around the same time each day.
- Get dressed for work (even if you dress more casually than you would for an office).
- Turn off the TV or face away from it with noise-canceling headphones.
- Have a dedicated place as your workspace that you leave for breaks.

Set Up a Home Office

There will be some basics that you need for a home office or workstation. Make sure that you have at least those things you need for your work set up in an efficient way. While this will vary from person to person based on their goals, here are a few things to include for a home office or workstation.

- Get the best Internet connection you can afford so that you can communicate with your team.
- Include at least a computer and a smartphone so that if one has problems, you can use the other to communicate.
- Use a large enough display that you can work without eye strain or constant jumping from window to window.
- Follow at least basic office ergonomics to prevent strain or injury.

Have Clear Goals

Many people find that making the switch to working offsite changes the way that they work. When you show up at the office, you are at least physically there. That's something. Working from home carries the extra burden of proof that you are earning your salary: you need to produce. The best way to do that is with clear goals.

- Set daily goals for yourself when you start work and check your progress when you finish work for the days.
- Make goals with clear beginnings and ends (like with the SMART method).
- Adjust your goals as time goes on just like you would with any other workplace.
- Share your goals with teammates and leaders so that everyone is on the same page.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON HOW TO WORK FROM HOME

For some people, working at home is a preference. For others, it's a necessity. Either way, you can set the stage for success with a little bit of planning, a healthy dose of discipline, and the right opportunities.

In a globally connected world, it's no longer necessary to slave away under the fluorescent lights of some stuffy office. You can set yourself free to work where you want on your own terms. The technology is available. Businesses are ready. The work is anywhere you want it to be.

