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Tips for transitioning to working from home

Life as a telecommuter isn't all working in pajamas and running errands, and if you've been frustrated by the rise suddenly, you'll figure that out fast.

You've spent years navigating challenges and disruptions at the office, but now you're facing an entirely new set. The good news is the learning curve isn't steep. You can make it easier with some forethought and planning. Here are four tips for how to do that.

Have a communications plan for telecommuting

Though many businesses are accustomed to remote workers, others have no telecommuting infrastructure in place. You can play a role in creating one. Start asking questions but be careful not to bombard bosses. They're often figuring things out on the fly, too.

Will everything run through normal business email or will people use personal accounts? Should events set up group chats for quick communications? Are regular conference calls needed? Is access to proprietary software or systems essential for even possible? Is there a push for getting the technically less proficient through troubleshooters?

If no one else is thinking of this, take minutes to suggest file-sharing folders in the cloud if your company's documents aren't already stored there.

Recommend a free teleconferencing system such as Skype or Google Hangouts.

Explore solutions such as Slack or Yammer, which allow file sharing and messaging. Yammer is included in Microsoft Office 365, so there's a chance many of your contacts already have the software.

Review the opportunities scanners create during campaigns around these services. Use the same precautions you would if you suddenly received an email from your "bank."

Create a home office workspace

Even if it's just a small corner to call your own, establish a workspace. The reasons are both practical and psychological. A home office spurs your brain that it's time to punch the time clock.

In a pinch, virtually anything will do—a laptop at the dining room table. Over time, create a proper ergonomic set-up. Invest in a good chair and desk, a monitor raise, and wrist and forearm rests. Your back and eyes will thank you later.

Set a schedule

In many cases, business needs dictate schedules. This is particularly true if your job includes customer service or sales. In others, you'll have some flexibility. Flexibly comes in handy if there are kids whose school or day care is closed. Working early or late can buy you some peace while kids sleep. If there are two working parents in the household, alternate work and child-care shifts. It's not ideal from a personal standpoint, but it helps lower the emotional temperature of being torn between parenting and professional drives.

Just make sure your schedule isn't too flexible. There's still a need for set hours, both so bosses know when you're around and so you make sure you're putting in enough time to get the job done. A set schedule also helps get your head in the game and keep it there.

As part of that schedule, get dressed. A full office-approved ensemble isn't necessary but changing out of your pajamas is another small mental cue



That creates your team toward work.

Be sure to take a lunch break. Eating at your desk is just as bad as none at all. It's at the office, and avoid the middle-term snafus—your coffee in the corner or the dust bunnies under the bed that suddenly "need to be addressed." You'll appreciate it by saying, "well, it needs done anyway," but that's just high-end procrastination. You'll regret it when you're still working into the evening.

Set boundaries with kids

Think of them as the charity case who interrupts at the worst possible time, except your new disruptions carry sippy cups instead of coffee mugs. And it's hard to make them understand you're there, but not there.

For younger children, try semantic reminders: If Mommy's fingers are typing, you'll need to be patient. It will buy you enough precious seconds to finish a report or email for older children, tell them if it's not something they would bring to you at an office, don't interrupt just because your home

above stacks on hand so they don't "find" anything you do with for the younger set, grip fruit, cheese, eggs, dip and such the night before. It will save time by avoiding trouble later.

For older kids, have meal and dinner routines. Pizza, chicken tenders, and canned soup on hand might not be the nutritional mix you'd prefer, but this could be a time to let go of the ideal and go for what's doable.

Whatever your system, it will fail at times. There's no known status of irritations for food bickering between siblings. Sometimes it burns out without intervention, but other times it's best to step in before things overheat. Problem is, it's difficult to hit the difference.

If there's a chunk of the day when you're always less productive, make that family time if your work schedule permits it. It's a nice break for everyone.

Telecommuting during a crisis is a huge benefit for workers and businesses. There likely will be some trial bumps as everyone acclimates to the new set-up. With the right planning, though, everything will quickly feel more normal.

This special advertising section was prepared by independent writer Debra Long. The production of this section did not involve the news or editorial staff of The Washington Post.