# Simple Tips for Working at Home

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I have a bit of a head start on you. When I'm not traveling for client work/programs/events, I am a home-based worker, and I've been one for more than 16 years now. I thought I'd share some of my best tips for maintaining productivity and sanity while working from home.

1. **Set up a dedicated "productivity space" and USE IT!** Many people, myself included, think because we have a laptop, we can work from anywhere in the house. And, that is true to a point. However, if you have children home too (and perhaps your spouse as well), they will do everything in their power to distract you while working – loud music, movies, video calls, exercising, etc. If they are old enough, and you let them know you are going into your workspace and you can only be interrupted due to an emergency, most kids will leave you alone. If you camp out on the kitchen table or in the family room however, just expect to get very little done *(Trust me on this. Seriously.)*

2. **Invest in tech and infrastructure.** Make your home office/workspace just like an actual home office/workspace. Get a desk and ergonomic chair. Buy a second monitor. Get some office supplies. Get a printer/copier/fax. Invest in needed software – including possibly video conferencing software/tools. Pay for a higher speed Internet (or get your employer to subsidize your higher speed Internet). "Steal" equipment from your office (take it for now, but bring it back when the outbreak dies down). Do whatever it takes to make your home location nearly as productive (if not more productive) than your regular office location.

3. **Get on a schedule, and stick to it.** Even though you may not have to go into the office, try to stay on your normal schedule (sure, an extra 30 minutes of sleep is OK since you don't have to commute, but no more!) Get up. Make your coffee. Boot up your computer. Check your calendar, build a task list, get through your e-mail. Take a lunch break. Take a workout break. Schedule virtual meetings and tasks. The closer you stay to your normal regimen, the more productive you will be overall, and the easier it will be for you to transition back to your office when things go back to normal. *(Plus, if you show you can be highly productive even while away, perhaps your boss will give you more flexibility to do some remote work in the future!)* I read a great quote the other day that I've tried to make my own personal mantra: ***"I may not enjoy structure and regimen, but I certainly thrive on it."***

4. **Schedule meetings with yourself.** One of the best tips for better productivity, even if not working from home, is to schedule meetings with yourself. Don't just leave your time wide open – block specific blocks of time each day for different projects, activities, tasks – possibly work and personal. Book time for your most critical projects. Book time for your workout. Book time to read/learn. Give your day some structure, and set goals for better use of time daily.

5. **Schedule meetings with others.** You can still meet with others! Find out what your company uses – Zoom, Webex, GoToMeeting, etc. Or just pick up the phone. Do a conference call. Set up meetings just like normal and have them. That will also add structure and a semblance of normalcy to your day. ***I will give you one funny tip I use frequently*** – do some of your calls from your car in the driveway! You'd be shocked how often I do this – I have kids and dogs in the

house, but I can literally go out in the driveway with my phone and do a regular and/or even a video call in near complete silence. And I don't drive anywhere – I just sit in my driveway.

6. **Have kids? Hire them. This is no joke.** If you have a teenager and younger sibling(s), hire that teenager as an in-house babysitter. Tell them they will make money, but only if they actually WORK to keep the younger ones occupied AND safe. Paying them a few bucks an hour to keep the interruptions down for you is a good investment (and might build stronger relationships between siblings … if they don't kill each other.) Now, if you have kids of an appropriate age, you might even be able to hire them to do some simple jobs around the house – dishes, vacuuming, laundry, little organization projects, etc. You might even be able to hire them to do some simple business tasks as needed – printing, copying, stapling, organizing. Pay them a few bucks an hour or by job – teach them some skills, keep them useful, and keep your focus!

7. **Don't get lured into distraction.** Now, we've already discussed family, kids, dogs – they are built in natural distractions. However, when working from home, it is SUPER easy to get pulled into social media, streaming the news, having a TV show or movie playing in the background, and those darn addictive games on your phone and/or computer. You need to be aware of your own distractions, and do things to limit them. I allow myself a morning, lunchtime, and end of day news check in – even during this crisis! I don't need to check any more than that, and I promise you this – in this day and age of "overconnected people", *if something truly huge happens, you will hear about it quickly*.

   I also noticed I had 2-3 different games on my phone that were getting a bit too much time/attention. I deleted all but one, and that one (Words with Friends) has LONG breaks in between plays usually. I look at it once or twice a day for a few minutes as a mental break – that is just fine. But any more than that I can't afford. And with social media, I've tried to check in about once a day on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. That is enough to stay in touch, but no more. Plus, there is just a ton of "panic porn" (funny phrase I first saw by author Dan Rust recently) on both the regular news and social media platforms right now. You could stir yourself right into a panic attack if on there too much right now. Instead, give yourself a few mental breaks a day with these tools and venues, but no more, and keep your focus otherwise on something productive. *"The best cure to anxiety is focused action."* – Jack Nicklaus

*Are you an employer with people suddenly working at home?* You need to give them some leniency right now. This is an unprecedented situation. Suddenly, we have all of these people used to working in a normal workplace environment that are trying to balance kids and dogs and spouses. Now, remember that some of your workers will actually be MORE productive working from home, and that will help to counterbalance the loss of productivity by others. Do what you can to make it easy for them to be productive, but if you have good people, don't damage your relationship with them in the long run due to a short term hit to their productivity right now. And remember they will most likely get more productive over time as they get into a routine depending on how long this goes. Hopefully if they follow the steps above, they will get into that productive work-from-home routine even a bit faster. *We can get through this together … just as long as we are at least six feet apart.*

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