How to Work From Home

The ultimate guide to remote work from a company that does it successfully

Emma Patmore   March 2020

The Coronavirus pandemic has got the whole world wearing pyjamas to the office. Sort of. Social distancing means that most companies have a home office policy for the foreseeable future: an unprecedented and disruptive change to our working lives. And if you're struggling to adapt to the change, you're not alone.

However, home office doesn't have to mean a drop in productivity, happiness and general motivation. While it might be tough, this is a chance to get good at working outside of the office, giving you the opportunity for more flexibility and autonomy in the future.

As a company of 21 employees with 7 offices on a normal day (before COVID-19), over 4 continents; working remotely is something we're pretty good at. So, in the spirit of helping others during this time of crisis, we want to share our knowledge with the world!

Below are tips, tricks and hacks for staying productive, effective and happy over the next weeks (or months!). The article is organised into four parts: Mood, Focus, Communication and Tools. It includes hacks and resources throughout to help you get over those classic work from home problems.

We hope it helps you during this time and encourage you to share your own tips and tricks with the global home-office community!

Mood

How you feel is essential to staying productive at work. Here's a few things that can help you stay mentally balanced.

Staying positive

No matter where you are, our first piece of advice right now is to stay positive! There's a lot going on out there (or nothing at all), but in the end our reaction to it is one of the few things we can control. It's not all bad though: consider the upsides of working remotely.

Find joy in the small things. No need to iron shirts!
Enjoy how you can get a lot more done when you're not distracted by things around you. And last but not least: play louuuud music and dance around a bit. You're not in the office, who cares?
Rasmus Hansen, Managing Director Kenya

Your mental health is as important as your physical health. A lot of the tips in this article, such as getting outside, meditating, exercising and keeping in contact with others will help you to do that.

Enjoy the freedom you have
You've suddenly got a lot more freedom than you would in the office: enjoy it! We're in a very unusual situation and things can feel quite strange; remember to take a moment and be grateful for the good things, too. Wear odd socks every day, dye your hair a different colour, test your theory about having two powernaps a day. We don't all run on the same body clock: maybe now's the time to find out what schedule is best for you.

Try to make the most of the extra time you have at home, where you'd usually be commuting to work or a meeting. Tackle some projects or admin, do a big spring clean, call that friend you've lost touch with or get through that stack of books. Learn something you've wanted to for ages: Coursera and Skillshare are great resources for this.

If Coronavirus means your workload is lower, take the time to reorganise things, streamline processes, work on a passion project or learn something that can help you to do your job better. If you can't think of something, maybe someone on your team could do with support.

Do the things you love
Ravi, our regional director in Latin America, has been working remotely for well over a year – and a lot of that was completely on his own. He says that when you work from home, it's even more important to do things that keep you healthy, happy and feeling like yourself.

Take time to do the things you enjoy, like going for a run, biking, yoga, cooking a nice meal. Don't skip it even if you've had a busy or long day. Your body and mental health will thank you after!

Do what makes you feel like YOU. Just because we're in quarantine doesn't mean we have to stop being ourselves!
Ravi Sahai, Regional Director LatAm & the Carribean
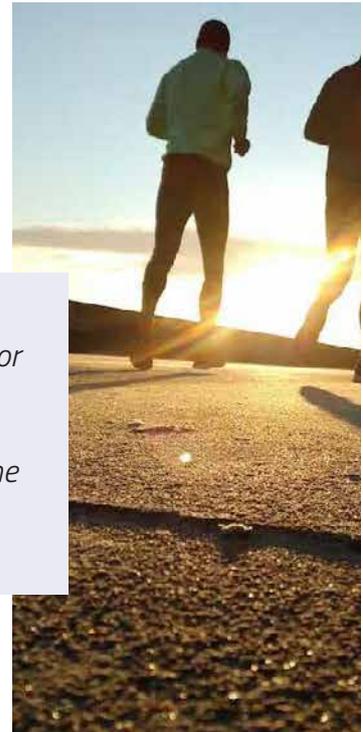
Keep your head up
Working at a desk all day already takes its toll on posture and chances are it's worse at home, where you may not have a good chair or desk. The <u>links between posture and mood</u> are strong, so there's more than one reason you should keep it in mind. <u>Here</u> are some good exercises to help stretch out.

How to work when you don't feel like working

When you're working remote, you don't have people around you to motivate you or lift you out of a bad mood. And when you don't feel like working, there's plenty around you to distract yourself. It can be a nightmare for productivity, particularly when we introduce the whole new galaxy of virus memes and apocalypse articles that can suck you in these days.

It's up to you to get yourself out of these moods and into ones where you can be productive. The key is recognising your mood and responding in the right way. If you really can't focus, then it's important to recognise that, stop trying and do something else in order to come back to work refreshed. Now that you're more in control of your schedule, take advantage of this. Below are some tips for getting yourself back into work.

Remote management

Open communication is the most important factor in managing a remote team. Be a role-model by always being available for your team and if in doubt, over-communicate. As a manager, you should also take responsibility to keep your team motivated. Check in with them, give even more feedback than usual and be mindful of their own situations. If they have family at home, discuss ways that you can help them to make it easier.
Martin Baart, CEO

![ecoligo logo]

Hacks to help you get back on track

1. Go for a walk or run. Just 15 minutes is proven to boost productivity.
2. Play music you really love! Struggling for inspiration? Here's a curated guide for songs to fit different parts of your day.
3. Watch inspirational TED talks. This excellent list has a talk for every state of mind.
4. Call a friend, family member or colleague.
5. Meditate. It's easier than you think. Headspace is a great, down-to-earth resource, while The Chopra Centre has a lot of feel-good resources. Yoga with Adriene also has a nice one to help with anxiety.

Start your own list of things that inspire you and turn to that when you're struggling.

Hacks for when you still can't get on track

Rule of threes
For some reason, humans love things in threes. You can apply this to work; give yourself a list of the top 3 tasks you need to get done and work solely on those.

This works well in conjunction with Kanban boards: you can create one with post-its or with the apps Asana or Trello (see tools list below).

1. Write everything you need to do on a post-it, then prioritise. If you're using an online tool, those tasks should already be in there.
2. Take the top 3 tasks and move them to an 'In Progress' column or stick them right in front of you.
3. You can work on these at the same time, but nothing outside of that.
4. Once you finish one (and only then), move it to 'Done' and move another task to 'In Progress'.

This works because it keeps you focused, avoids multitasking and gives you encouragement as you see the completed work stacking up.

Get a buddy!
You've probably got quarantine buddies: flatmates, family, partners. To be productive, it's best to have your own space, but it can be good to work alongside each other for a bit. You'll get less distracted and feel like if they're working, you should too. If you're home alone, buddy up with a friend or colleague that you can check in with throughout the day to keep each other on track.

Pomodoro technique
A productivity hack named after a tomato. Set a timer for 25 minutes, during which you focus on work, then take a 5-minute break. Repeat. It works for many, but you have to be able to stick to that initial focus. If you struggle, start with smaller periods of work and increase steadily.

Recap: Hacks

Mood
Take a walk
Play music you love
Watch inspirational videos
Talk on the phone
Meditate

Work
Rule of threes
Kanban board
Get a buddy
Pomodoro technique

Focus

That elusive resource. It's even harder when you can just slip off and watch TV, scroll Instagram, work from your bed or wear PJs all day. It's not impossible, though. The best way to stay focused is by creating a routine and sticking to it.

Here are ten tried and tested tips from the ecoligo team for getting a great routine that helps you stay on top of things, no matter where you are in the world.

Get a good sleep
With a shutdown of all the fun activities that make you stay up late, it's also a great opportunity to get your sleeping pattern in order. For athletes, sleep is the biggest performance booster. Makes sense for the rest of us too, right? Resist the urge to watch Netflix until 3am and get a good night's sleep. Let's face it: there's not a whole lot else to do anyway.

Wake up around the same time every day
It doesn't matter what time, but it should be consistent. Set an alarm in the morning, or alternatively to remind you to get to bed at night: if you go to bed at the same time every day, you'll wake up naturally around the same time too, even if it sometimes takes you a while to fall asleep.

Exercise!
Whether it's in the morning, at lunchtime or after work, get some exercise. Yoga, running or a workout video are great ways to do this while the gyms are closed. A few resources:

Yoga with Adriene: one of the most-loved online yoga channels (this class is great for opening up your shoulders after a day at your desk!) Strava is good for tracking runs if you want to see what you're achieving each day. There are so many fitness classes on YouTube – try a few and see what works for you.

If you use Urban Sports Club, ClassPass or something similar, a lot of instructors are doing video classes. It's a great way to keep your usual routine up and support the teachers you love. If you're a member of a gym, they're probably doing something similar – get in touch and find out.

Get dressed

Really. Yes, you can work in your PJs, but while it might feel good for the first hour, ultimately it will wreck your productivity and make you feel less good about yourself.

Dress to impress! It will make a real difference to your mood.
Paula Rodriguez, Sales Associate, Costa Rica

Get outside

Take a walk, have a phone call outside, work on your balcony if you're lucky enough to have one. The Scottish government recommended workers to take a walk in the morning before starting, then as soon as they finish at the end of the day. This is a great way to create separation between work and free time and get some fresh air, too. If you are close to nature or can walk in a park or on a leafy street, even better.

Start and finish work at the same time

Or as close as possible. This helps to get separation and keep a work-life-balance. If you prefer to switch it up or want to test your theory that you're actually more productive between 10pm and 2am, plan your working times and stick to it.

Make an 'office'

Likelihood is, you're not lucky enough to have your own office in your house. Still, create a corner in your bedroom or living room that's only for work. If you're low on space, set up your desk in the morning then clear it away to make room for something else in the end of the day. Just make sure you get fully set up and don't just end up working from the sofa or bed (We know it's tempting, but you can resist!).

Experiment and find what suits you best.
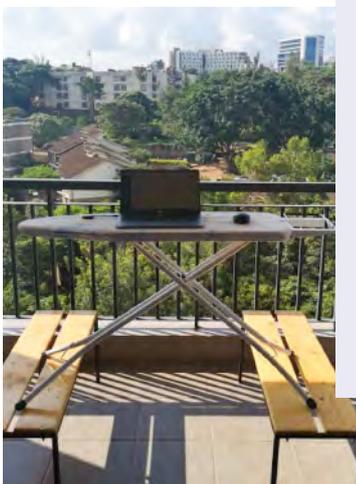
Find a place where you can see the landscape (or city) outside to boost motivation.
Thuong Duong, Country Manager Vietnam

Work from different places and in different positions - sometimes standing up or sitting down.
Rasmus Hansen, Managing Director Kenya

< See example - Ras' homemade standing desk!

Avoid distractions
This is good practice anyway: mute social notifications on your phone and computer as well as anything else that typically grabs your attention. Let flatmates or family know when you can't be disturbed. Consider putting a lock on your fridge.

Take breaks
Coffee, tea, smoking breaks (not recommended for health reasons, obviously), dance breaks, break dances, standing-in-the-sun breaks, lying-on-the-sofa breaks. Look at something that's not a screen, move your body, do some breathing exercises.

Eat well and drink water!
Here's why. Yes, it's still ok to order from your favourite restaurant every so often – it's a great way to support small businesses right now.

Still struggling? Take it out of your hands. Here's a handy list of 10 apps to help you focus – we can recommend the ironically-named Self Control and StayFocusd.

Recap: Focus

1. Get a good sleep
2. Wake up around the same time every day
3. Exercise!
4. Get dressed
5. Get outside
6. Start and finish work at the same time
7. Make an 'office'
8. Avoid distractions
9. Take breaks
10. Eat well and drink water!

Communication

If you're used to speaking with colleagues constantly throughout the day and suddenly, you're in your room alone with only a messaging app for company, both knowledge-sharing and happiness levels are going to take a hit. Here are a few things we always do, plus a few extra that we've established amid the pandemic, to keep everyone in the loop and feeling connected.

Say hello in the morning!
Sounds simple. Changes everything. When we start in the morning, we say hello on a thread – and reply to those who join later from different time zones. Sometimes it's just a quick 'hi', sometimes it's a full story about an early meeting or the cute dogs you saw on your morning run.

It's not about checking in or clocking working hours; it's about bringing those little gestures that mean so much in real life to the online world. You wouldn't walk into your office without saying hello, right?

Pick up the phone

This one is a company policy we've had for years and it avoids a few classics such as double work, miscommunication and wasting time with big email or message threads. Just pick up the phone and give someone a call! If you're worried about others breaking your focus, just put devices on 'do not disturb' mode when you need to concentrate.

This rule means you get the topic discussed in minutes and ensure you're both on the same page before continuing work. And while you're at it, you can ask them how their day is going. Nice.

The same goes for feedback: no matter what's going on in the world outside (or isn't), people are still going to do things you don't like. It's vital not to react online, sending a message that someone can sit and stew with for a few hours while crafting the perfect reply – ruining productivity for both of you. Say no to sassy emails or passive aggressive messages. Pick up the phone, discuss it like adults and then get on with your day again.

Daily calls

Whether it's your manager, your team or a colleague you're close with, if you talk to someone every day, make sure you're doing it in quarantine, too. Schedule a call with them in the morning to align, or if you know your productivity drops after lunch, move your daily call with your supervisor to 2pm to get a motivation boost (or a kick up the ass).

When you're in the office, you don't only discuss business: while working remote, it's important to schedule calls with colleagues to catch up about things outside of work, too.

Team calls

Missing the feeling of being with your team? They probably are too. Schedule a group lunch or afterwork drinks via videocall. Of course, this only applies to people that actually like the majority of their team (if you like all of them, even better). If you don't, rejoice in the fact that you don't have to see them for weeks, possibly months.

Chat to people outside of work, too

If you live with someone, have a coffee with them, or take some time to call up family or a friend. It's social distancing we're doing, not complete isolation.

I speak to my family every few hours for 10 or 15 minutes. It's a nice break and not something you'd usually get to do.
Thuong Duong, Country Manager Vietnam

Tools

Imagine a pandemic without technology. We'd rather not: ecoligo would probably not be where we are now without the great tools we use. Here are a few of the key ones:

Task management
Asana – lifechanging task management tool. Fast, efficient, easy, nice to use. It's also easy to create too many tasks for yourself, but that's probably an optimism problem, not a technology one.
Alternatives: Trello, Monday. But we swear by Asana.

Messaging
Teams – Microsoft's team messaging tool. You can have different channels, private chats, group calls. Like Slack, with less distractions (apparently).
Alternatives: Slack, Skype, WhatsApp

External calls
GoToMeeting – Schedule video calls with externals. This is so important now that everyone is working remotely! Before long, we're going to be so comfortable with doing business over video that we'll only go back to face-to-face meetings when it's really needed. Which would be a pretty good thing for the planet. GoToMeeting is simple to use and works well.
Alternatives: Zoom (recommended by many), Skype. Houseparty for your afterwork fun calls & games.

Remote onboarding

In the past two weeks we've onboarded two colleagues: Doreen, our Country Manager in Ghana and Matteo, our Financial Controller who'll be based in Berlin. Of course, all the onboarding has been remote. It's simpler than you think: here's how we did it:

1. A schedule of video onboarding presentations from many of the key team members on various aspects of company and culture
2. Casual calls to get to know others in the team
3. Open communication!

Team engagements have been great. Everyone is always available to help and assist.
Doreen Kanetey-Essel, Country Manager Ghana

All the tools made everything so easy and smooth, and everyone is always there to answer questions.
Matteo Mutazzi, Financial Controller

Cloud storage
This is also vital, but you were probably doing it anyway. We use <u>OneDrive</u>.
Alternatives: Dropbox, Box, Google Drive

Decision making
Need to make a collective decision? We've not checked them out yet, but <u>Loomio</u> and <u>Tricider</u> were recommended by our friends at the German Crowdfunding Association (BVCF).

Collaborative meetings
Brainstorming 'how our company deals with Coronavirus' needs post-its. <u>Mural</u> has it covered: an interactive whiteboard, digital post-its, and everything else you need for a classic brainstorming session. The only difference is that you need to bring your own snacks. We've only just started using Mural, but heard good things about Jamboard and Miro, too.

Recap: Tools

Task management	Asana, Trello, Mondays
Messaging	Teams, Slack, WhatsApp
Video calls	GoToMeeting, Zoom, Skype
Storage	OneDrive, Dropbox, Box
Decisions	Loomio, Tricider
Brainstorming	Mural, Miro, Jamboard

We've got this!

We hope this guide can be a great resource to help you and your team work well during the Coronavirus pandemic. The methods and tools are tried and tested and we're confident that they can help you get better at remote work. Times are interesting, but it's important to keep chasing your goals: for ecoligo, this means keeping our goal of pioneering the global transition to clean energy at the forefront of what we do.

Stay healthy, happy and connected and don't forget to let us know what helps you to work better at home!

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