Making a Successful Transition to
Working Remotely During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are experiencing many firsts. While some organizations have had virtual workspaces for years, the social distancing that is occurring with COVID-19 will be the first experience some employees have to work remotely. It has its benefits, including flexible dress code and saving money by not having to commute. But it also has its challenges. By focusing on what we can control, working remotely can be a pleasant and productive experience. Here is a list of suggestions to help maintain productivity, work-life balance, and decrease isolation. Always remember to follow your workplace policies and procedures for remote work.

1. Technology

You will be more reliant on technology than ever before; be patient with yourself.

- Work with your technology support department to confirm that your internet service at home is adequate and that you have the right technology.
- Keep tech support contact information handy. You may need it.
- Give yourself time to become familiar with the technology, programs and tools you are expected to use. Ask questions!
- Improve your internet connection by joining meetings with audio only, which uses less bandwidth.
- Minimize the streaming that others in your household are doing, especially when you have a meeting.

2. Communication and Work Expectations

The routines and processes you have established and mastered in the office setting will be different when working remotely. Don't get discouraged – you will set new routines and processes. It is important to have a clear understanding of what is expected.

- Schedule time with your supervisor to set and review priorities, work hours, productivity, dress during virtual meetings, accessibility and time off.
- Communicate with your team regularly. Let them know if you will be away from the computer, including lunch breaks. If you have instant messaging, keep your status updated so co-workers know when and how they can reach you, if needed.
- Be honest with your supervisor about challenges. Not only is working from home new, so is managing the kids who are also home with you. If possible, problem-solve the challenges as a team so everyone can learn and be productive.

3. Work/ Life Balance

Working remotely includes structure and discipline in order to be productive. You have to learn to manage distractions and interruptions that come in many different forms: family members, phone calls, pets and household chores, to name a few. In addition to distractions, you will need to address feelings of isolation, loneliness and missing your coworkers. Work/life balance is more important than it has ever been.

- Create a designated workspace. This is where you are during work hours, except during breaks. The area should be free from noise and distractions.
- Take note of your surroundings, especially if you will be on video or webcam for calls or meetings. You might not want your AC/DC poster in the background or your dog barking during your professional meeting.
- Plan your work schedule and communicate it to your team. If your hours are going to be different than your normal office hours, make sure they know.
- Set a timer for breaks and walk away from your workspace during the breaks. If needed, create rewards, like a walk, to help you stay focused. We tend to naturally take these breaks while at the office, but not while we are at home.
- Plan time to "socialize" with your coworkers, to chat off the grid, and to inquire how everyone is managing.
- Sign out of your social media while working from home. Many hours have been lost falling down the social media rabbit hole. Be responsive and accessible to maintain trust with your employer that work is your priority during work hours.
- Use PTO or leave when needed. Just because you are at home, don't assume you are getting the time off you need to re-charge your batteries. If you are feeling pulled in too many directions or overwhelmed, request time off to go off the grid and refuel.

4. Managing Family at Home

In addition to transitioning from office life to working remotely, parents are also expected to manage the virtual learning and lessons for school-age kids that are home. Remember, everyone is having this new experience at the same time and their anxieties may be high as they are adjusting to a new type of schooling. If your spouse is also working remotely, you may need to tag-team to create a new workable home schedule.

- Research virtual schooling so you know what to expect. Kids respond well to structure, so a daily routine, even if it includes down time and screen time, will help everyone feel more stable and consistent. There are virtual field trips available online including local zoos highlighting certain animals and exercise gurus doing online PE for kids. Take advantage of the services that are available. Each Sunday, create a schedule for the week and post it for everyone in the house to see. Include rewards for work well done. If possible, include your child(ren) in the planning.
- Structure your workday with flexible timing, if possible, in order to accommodate your child's homeschooling. A consistent schedule will allow you to have dedicated time for your work and your child's studies, and will help everyone stay focused and present with each task.
- Exchange ideas and suggestions with coworkers, teachers and other parents to help everyone navigate the new challenges and be productive.
- Recognize needed alone time and schedule it, especially If your spouse is working remotely too. Communicate openly about your challenges and needs, and ask about their needs. Plan time together, and time for yourself. Remember you no longer have the alone time in the car you may have had when you were commuting.

5. Self-Care

Making yourself a priority is key to being resilient. We don't know how long the current situation could be in place. Model resilient behavior to help your children learn how to be resilient in challenging times. It is more important than ever that you dedicate time for your physical and mental well-being.

- Be honest with yourself. If working from home means you will be underproductive, get up and take a shower and put on your work clothes every day. If you know you will over work, get an accountability partner and a timer.
- Maintain a consistent schedule of eating and sleeping.
- Even though we can't socialize the same way we always have, make plans with your family to take a walk or play a game, try new things and socialize in new ways.
- Know what resources are available and how to access them. Your Employee Assistance Program, Personal Assistance Services, has counselors available 24/7/365 at (800) 356-0845 to answer questions, provide emotional support and resources as needed.
- Ask for assistance. During challenging times, people want to help. Extending assistance makes up happy and helps everyone feel more secure. You are not alone; allow others to help you if you need it.
- Limit your time on negative news and social media.

The stressors and adjustments we are making are unprecedented and changing daily. Do not underestimate your ability to manage and be strong. You are *resilient* and together we will move forward to a more certain time. In the meantime, pace yourself and take it one step at a time.

Resources

NPR
https://www.npr.org/2020/03/15/815549926/8-tips-to-make-working-from-home-work-for-you

Forbes
https://www.forbes.com/sites/kourtneywhitehead/2020/03/15/5-tips-to-balance-remote-working-while-your-family-is-also-at-home/#1bdc2b824843
https://www.forbes.com/sites/leliagowland/2020/03/12/coronavirus-have-you-working-remotely-5-tips-to-work-from-home/#4e1c74834fe0

Time
https://time.com/5801725/work-from-home-remote-tips/

Boston Globe
https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/03/13/business/working-home-11-tips-help-you-through/

Consult with a professional PAS counselor 24/7/365
by calling (800) 356-0845
Additional resources are available on the PAS website
www.paseap.com