

A guide to remote working

- for managers and employees



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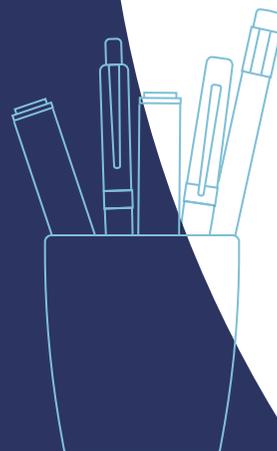
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Working remotely can be a one-off or needs must for some, but a regularity for others.

It takes trust from the side of management, discipline from the employee, communication between all parties, and the right technology – these four elements are key to the perfect home-work mix.

Obviously, not everyone is able to work remotely, whether this is because their job involves providing a face-to-face service, or manual labour. But, according to recent statistics, 20 million out of 33 million people in the British workforce could technically work from home (March 2020).

Working from home can be the answer to several situations – from needing to be home to give access to a plumber when your boiler packs up, to needing to get your head down and concentrate.



Where to start

If you do not work from home on a regular basis, it can be difficult to know the protocol. Where should you start? What should you be doing? When should you be doing it?



Bukola Odofin,
Reed HR expert, says:

“ Most companies may give some guidance about how to work from home. But often, in this situation, employees are left to their own devices and trusted to put their own regimes into place to ensure the best work output.

“When you say working from home, the knee-jerk thought for many is flexible working, but depending on your style of working this may not be the case. While setting up an office within the home may work for some, for others, sitting on the sofa with a laptop may mean they are more productive.”



Where to start

1. Choose a workspace

If you like working in an office, and you are more productive in that environment, then you can replicate this in your home too. It's understandable that, sometimes, if you are working in spaces that are associated with relaxation and family time, then you are likely to get distracted. It does not have to be a dedicated room that you make into your home office, but a dining table, breakfast bar, or even coffee table will work.



2. Pretend you're going into the office

It may work for you to sit in your pyjamas all day – but if you are doing video calls then your colleagues will still see you. To get yourself motivated and maintain a routine, get up at a normal time, shower, brush your teeth, take the kids to school if you need to, come home and get stuck in.

“Having a routine is vital, if I don't stick to my normal routine then I am not very motivated for the day. I need to feel as though I am going to work, take my son to school, come back, turn on my PC and make a cup of tea. It sets me up for the day and I can then get my head into the accounts,” says Catherine Berry, financial controller, Gtechniq Ltd.



Where to start

3. Don't be distracted by social media

Unless you are in marketing and need access to social media, it may be an idea to log out of all your accounts. Whether social media is addictive is a topic of much debate, but certainly when working from home it can be a distraction. By signing out of your accounts and deleting any shortcuts you have on your desktop, you will limit that temptation.

5. Give yourself a definitive start and finish time where possible

Working from home can be tricky when it comes to timings. People are often fooled by the fact that they can work from home to get a better work-life balance, but this does not tend to be the case, as you can easily become submerged into the work you are doing. Setting a definitive start and finish time can help you to combat this issue. It also will help your team members keep track of when they can contact you.

4. Work when you are most productive

People are more productive at different times of the day – use this to your advantage. Ross Davis, chief mechanic, Progressive Motorsport, states: “I’m so much more ‘alive’ in the mornings and feel I can conquer the world, by around 2pm this tends to wear off. I therefore like to start as early as I can when working from home to be able to be the most productive. I also tend to tackle those tasks that I keep putting off first thing and then do those I find more enjoyable in the afternoon.”

Although some people will have set working hours, if you are working shifts or more flexibly you can really use working from home to your advantage. Start at 6am if you are most productive in the morning and finish a little earlier – you are the master of your own destiny.



Where to start

6. Schedule your day

It is important, even if you are not the most organised person, to have a plan of action. Give yourself a purpose to keep you on track. Without a schedule you may find yourself lost or doing 'bits and pieces'. Plan out your day using your diary, as you would in the office - including meetings and projects you need to work on.

Jem Collins, founder, Journo Resources, says: "One of the biggest switches from office to home working is the amount of time you spend by yourself, and that can be a big gear change if you're a people person. It might sound silly, but make sure to schedule interaction into your day, even if it's just a five minute catch up with a co-worker on the phone to talk about how your day was or is going."

7. Take breaks

Working from home does not mean you cannot stop for lunch, to make yourself a drink or to take time away from your screen (put your washing in, go for a walk). Plan your breaks into your schedule and make sure you stick to them. It might also help to let a colleague or manager know when you are off on your lunch break so they can cover the phone – it also increases the chance that you will not take longer than you should.

"Take time to eat – if you work a 9-5 with lunch, don't be tempted to spend the entire hour doing chores or you will feel flat in the afternoon," suggests Claire Brown, business development and incentive manager, BOSE.



Where to start

8. Create the right ambiance

It can sometimes get lonely when you work from home – even if you are talking on the phone or video calling. The hum of the office is something you do not expect to miss when working remotely. When you are not on a call there is no harm in keeping yourself company with a bit of background noise.

“We’re not talking about having a party or sitting in front of the TV and watching EastEnders, but creating the right ambiance. This can help you focus and feel more comfortable in your working environment. The key is, don’t put something on that you like, or it may cause a distraction. Try music without lyrics, or the fishing channel if you don’t like fishing,” suggests Bukola Odojin, Reed HR expert.

9. Tell those at home with you what you’re doing

In some circumstances, you may not be in your home alone. If this is the case, it is important to communicate with everyone in the house what your

schedule is. If you are on a conference call, you do not want your partner doing the housework around you – hoovers are not the best soundtrack to a meeting.

10. Utilise technology

“You need to have clear channels of communication between your colleagues and clients to be able to successfully work remotely. Applications such as Skype and Slack work really well for quick chat, or group conference calls. You need to communicate and be clear what your objectives for the day are,” says Emily Marshall, head of client services, Autonomy Multimedia.

When working from home, some of the tools you have available in the office may be unavailable. Thankfully, there are other apps and programmes, some of them free, you can use to ensure remote working runs seamlessly.



Technology in-depth

Communication tools

The biggest drawback to working remotely is isolation from your team. For organisations to work effectively, employees need to collaborate. However, in the 21st century, not being in the same physical location as a key team member is not an excuse for a lack of clear communication.

These are some of the tools available:



WhatsApp is a messaging app which allows you to text or call individuals or groups of people using their phone numbers. The app's group chat function is used to help teams communicate quickly with each other in most organisations.



Facebook Messenger operates very similarly to WhatsApp, but is based on your Facebook connections rather than mobile phone numbers. Again, you can communicate with individuals or groups, and the app allows you to make audio and video calls.



Slack is a hugely popular real-time communication app geared up to serving workplaces. It is designed to reduce the number of emails employees receive, allowing teams to create different channels to communicate and share files. Organisations can also set up 'announcement' channels to communicate information quickly to either the whole business or select employees. It offers both free and paid-for services.



Technology in-depth



Microsoft Teams combines group chat, conference calling and file collaboration into one piece of software. When used alongside Microsoft's other Office 365 apps, Teams also integrates with your emails, documents and workflow management systems.



Webex conferencing software similarly has free and paid-for versions for audio and video calls. You can host up to 100 people on a call using its free version.



Skype, the original video calling app, can be applied in a work setting despite being more consumer focused. The platform allows you to make free video calls, with up to 50 people on a feed at once (increased to 250 on its paid-for business version).



Zoom is video conferencing software which allows users to make audio and video calls either via phonelines or a computer. Its free version can host calls of 100 people for a maximum of 40 minutes.



Technology in-depth

Replacing workplace tools

While Microsoft Office suite of programmes (Word, Excel, Powerpoint etc.) are almost universally adopted in workplaces, paying for a subscription to have them outside of work may not be a viable option.

Ideally, your organisation will have a system in place which allows you to use the software you have access to in the workplace. However, if this is not the case, the easiest workaround is using free Google software. By simply creating a Google account, you will have access to a word processor, spreadsheets and slideshow software, all of which can be accessed by multiple colleagues at once.



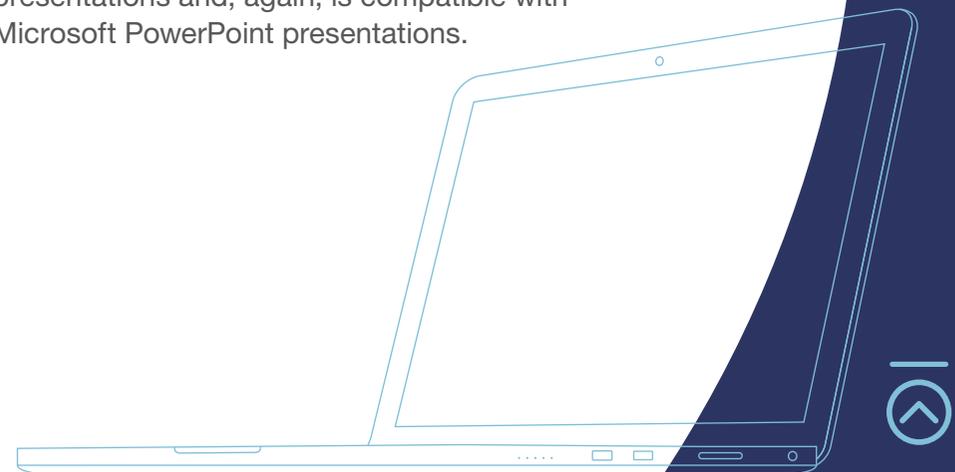
Google Docs is an online word processor in the mould of Microsoft Word. It replicates much of the functionality of Microsoft's product and, most importantly, is fully compatible with Word documents – meaning you do not need to convert files when working between the two.



Google Sheets is an online spreadsheet that mimics the functionality of an Excel spreadsheet. Like Google Docs, it is fully compatible with its Microsoft counterpart.



Google Slides allows you to create free online presentations and, again, is compatible with Microsoft PowerPoint presentations.



Technology in-depth

Project management

Coordinating projects with lots of moving parts can be tricky even when everyone is based in the same location. There are a range of project management tools that can help teams to understand the tasks involved in a large project.



Trello is a free tool which allows everyone in a team to create and assign tasks using cards – there is also a paid-for option with access to further functionality if required, such as uploading large files.



Asana allows project managers to plan and assign every phase of a project. The software includes a timeline, allowing employees to better visualise how a project will unfold, while tasks are dynamic, meaning that the activities with the most pressing deadlines move up the priority list. Asana is available for free, but also has premium and business packages.



Technology in-depth

Productivity tools

There are distractions across all workplaces. But when working remotely, employees are often their own worst enemy; distracting themselves without anyone to nudge them to get back to work. These distractions can include family members, housemates, pets, housework and even the television. Luckily enough there are also many tools available that can help you stay on track.



Timely is an application which allows you to block out time to complete certain tasks, while also tracking your progress in real-time.



Toggl is a popular time tracker which lets you accurately document how you have spent every minute of your day, again allowing you to track your work. This comes in handy for people who bill time.

If you find you are struggling to concentrate, there are a couple of apps which can help keep you productive.



Rescue Time monitors your computer usage and sends you notifications when it detects that you have become distracted. It can even block access to websites which side-track you.

Focusmate

Focusmate pairs two remote workers as “accountability partners”. Both can view what the other is doing via a webcam, with the company behind the programme noting that social pressure helps to maintain productivity.



Working from home with children

The seven steps to sanity

Working from home brings unique distractions, however there is one distraction which if not managed well may trump all others - working from home with your children.

Whether it is asking you constant questions, interrupting conference calls or generally causing havoc, your mini co-workers can sometimes cause disturbances.



The following strategies can be used to help with your productivity and still be a good parent:

1. Set expectations – for your children and yourself

Your children need to know that while you are there for them, you cannot give them 100% of your attention as you are still working. Similarly, your organisation needs to know that you need to be available to your children when working from home and certain unavoidable situations are likely to arise.



Working from home with children

2. Create a structure

The only way it will work is to be structured. Children need the structure too, after all they are used to being at school or nursery.

How you do this very much depends on the ages of children. Older children will have schoolwork to complete, so try to synchronise a schedule where you are both working at the same time.

Younger children are less likely to have schoolwork and their periods of concentration will be much shorter. Plan and arrange several short activities they can do while you focus on work.

You could structure the day very similar to a school or nursery, with set times for breaks and lunch – use these times to synchronise with your schedule and give them some attention, go for a walk or play a game. It may be worth preparing lunch the night before so you can spend as much time with your children as possible during these breaks.

3. Be flexible

Structure is necessary, but you need to be as flexible as possible. While situations like a conference call with the CEO will necessitate you having to block out distractions for a certain part of the day, the rest of your plan does not need to be regimented.

Lost clothes will need finding. Questions will need to be answered. Bumps and scrapes will need to be attended to. Do not feel guilty about stopping work to tend to your kids, as this will undermine your productivity when you resume working. Have a target of what you want to get done in the day and be prepared to adjust your planned itinerary and react to what happens.



Working from home with children

4. Find the best places to work

Do you have a teenager who just loves playing loud heavy metal? Or a child who likes to sing baby shark at the top of their voice?

Rather than be distracted by this, or start an unproductive argument trying to get them to stop, take a deep breath and find a place to work which minimises the noise.

Your children are likely to barge in at some point, but being able to get work done in the meantime while your children are amusing themselves, however loudly, will help to maintain harmony.

5. Learn to multitask

The ease of this varies from person to person, but you are going to have to try to look after your children and get work done at the same time.

Save repetitive and basic tasks for these situations. If you want to keep an eye on your kids playing in the garden, handling basic admin will mean you can stay productive yet also concentrate on your children.

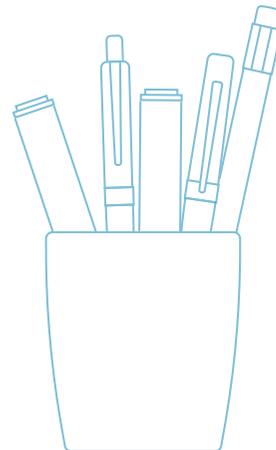


Working from home with children

6. Have entertainment and snacks to hand

Sometimes, you just can not be disturbed. In this situation, do not be afraid or ashamed of letting your children use the technology they love. If you have recorded their favourite tv show, now is the time to let them watch it.

Buying plenty of healthy snacks means that you will not have to stop working to keep getting food for your little ones especially. Create a basket of snacks in the morning and tell your children that is their allowance for the day - this may save you the "I'm hungry" comments.



7. Appreciate it

Working from home with children is a blessing, not a curse. You get to spend far more time with them than you normally would and see things you might otherwise have missed if you are at work and they are in childcare.

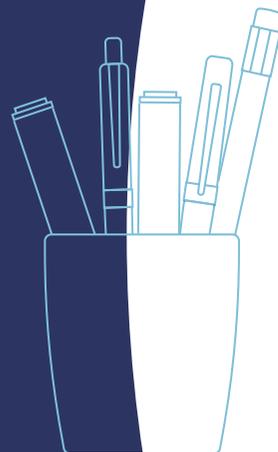
Each day is going to be different so get organised, plan ahead and do your best.



Managing your team working remotely

As a manager, it can be a difficult balancing act when staff are working from home.

“You may be worried about allowing your team to work remotely, there certainly isn’t any need for this. It takes trust and planning. If you are organised and set objectives for your team, they will more than likely thrive working at home,” says Reed HR expert Bukola Odofin.



There are three things to remember as a manager:

1. TRUST

you must have faith that people are working

2. TOLERANCE

for some, working from home may not be the norm - but do what you can to make the most of the situation

3. SUPPORT

it may seem straightforward to you, but you may need to support other members of your team who have never worked from home before

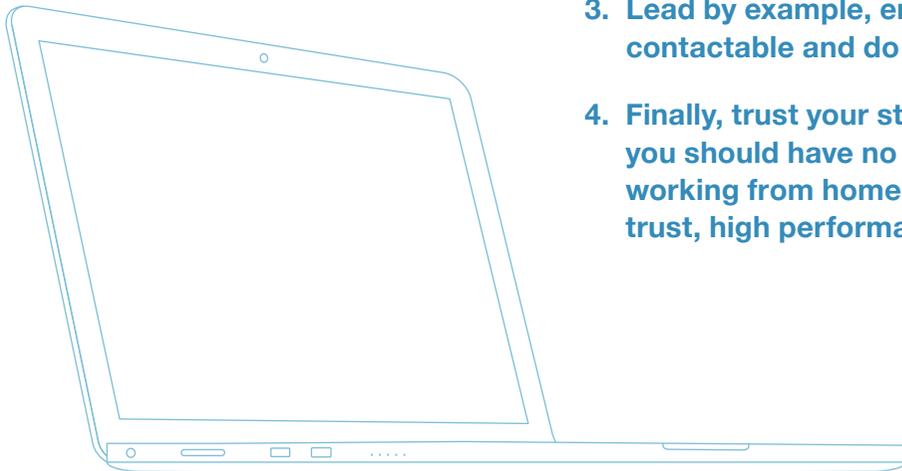


Managing your team working remotely



Chris Adcock, managing director of Reed Technology, has four top tips for managers who have team members working remotely:

- “
1. **Check up on them, not to see what they're doing but to see if they're OK and how you can help. We're social creatures and regular interaction is needed.**
 2. **Agree clear targets at key points, either at the beginning of the day or week. Make sure you then talk through if they've been achieved.**
 3. **Lead by example, ensure you are contactable and do work yourself.**
 4. **Finally, trust your staff. If you've hired well you should have no worries about people working from home. This is where a high trust, high performance culture is vital.**”



Advanced planning is key

Whether your whole team works remotely, or just a few members, you and your colleagues need to know where they stand, and that is where advanced planning comes in.

Here a few things you need to confirm with your team:

1. Team roles

Make sure you talk to each of your team members and remind them what they are responsible for – this should not be any different to what they do when working in the office.

2. Agree what tech you will use

As per our communication tools advice, what technology does your company use/do you want to use as a team to complete your daily tasks? For example, are you going

to manage projects on Trello and talk on Zoom? Do not forget, it is important that you show team members how to use this tech.

3. Check-ins

Claire Brown, business development and incentive manager, BOSE, suggests: “If you work as a team – set up a 15-minute daily Skype/Teams call with your team to keep yourself connected – it can be very isolating working from home.”

As a manager you should decide how you are going to conduct daily working. It may be worth having a quick catch up – literally a few minutes on a video call each morning with your team to discuss what they did yesterday, and their plan of action for the day ahead.

Also, make yourself as accessible as you can throughout the day, tell them if you have any problems to just call.



It is what you make it

With a positive, can-do work ethic, you can find your team is often more effective and efficient working remotely than in the office as there are fewer distractions.

Organise the way you work as a manager, set clear tasks for your team members and make sure they have access to the right tools to do their job. These three elements, combined with support and mentoring, will enable your team to continue producing fantastic work.

