

As we face the Covid-19 pandemic, millions of employees are now working from home. But while you may relish the thought of skipping your commute, remote working can present its own challenges. Here, productivity expert Barnaby Lashbrooke explains how to optimise your productivity, hang onto your sanity and keep your wellbeing on track.

“If you’re now working from home for the first time, you may be discovering this long-sought-after perk isn’t always the easy street to productivity that it’s made out to be,” says Barnaby.

“Particularly for those with creative rather than administrative jobs, and more flexible deadlines, it can be genuinely hard to reach that flow state we strive for. And there are distractions lurking in just about every room in the house.”

These tips should help keep you motivated and productive...

1. Do a ‘fake commute’

The idea of rolling out of bed and onto your computer might sound heavenly, but neither your body nor your mind will thank you. While the commute has few benefits, it does offer at least a small dose of fresh air, sunlight and physical activity. This is why many seasoned remote workers will do a ‘fake commute’, to build routine and exercise into their working day.

If you can do this without coming into unnecessary contact with others, use your usual commuting hours to get out for a walk, jog or cycle. Alternatively, follow an online workout at home. To make sure you don’t succumb to the opportunity for a lie-in, lay out your kit the night before, and get up and out before you’ve had the chance to talk yourself out of it. For further motivation, envisage how you’ll feel after it’s done – alive, awake and energised.

2. Create physical boundaries

Many home workers designate an area as an “office”. This doesn’t need to be a whole room, it can just be a corner. The point is to demarcate work from play. If you don’t there’s always a temptation that, after dinner, you could just do a little more work. Being productive at home isn’t just a matter of overcoming distractions but also one of being able to switch off. If we don’t rest, we find productivity will slowly diminish, eventually towards the point of burnout. For further separation, shut down your computer at night to make logging back on a little harder.

3. Learn to recognise procrastination

At work, chatty colleagues are the biggest distraction. But at home, it’s the laundry, the washing up, or perhaps a dirty bathroom. While many are comfortable with chaos, many more find mess serves as an

anxiety trigger. For those people, tidying one's desk becomes a thing that must be done in order to be productive. But your tidying habit may be procrastination by another name.

When we make a bathroom sparkle, we feel an immediate sense of satisfaction that masks the discomfort we feel about avoiding a pressing work task. You'll probably agree that, when motivated by a tight deadline or an interesting project, you can work just about anywhere. Therefore, we need to learn to recognise when we are tactically avoiding a task.

Break the complex task you're avoiding down into smaller simpler pieces, and it'll suddenly seem more manageable. And, if the state of your house is genuinely upsetting, why not allocate a 30-minute slot, every day, that's dedicated only to housework. Set a timer, and when time's up, go back to work.

4. Curate your workspace

Design your home workspace with productivity in mind. Studies show that adding pot plants can improve our output as well as our creativity. Not only are plants natural air purifiers, being surrounded by greenery is known to be calming and good for stress. Likewise, pick an area in your home to work from with plenty of natural light to keep you alert and awake.

5. Make time for good conversation

We're sociable creatures, and even introverts need human companionship. Make time every day to pick up the phone to a co-worker or a friend, and have a conversation that's not about work. You'll feel more energised for it. Conversing over Slack and Whatsapp just don't have the same powerful effects on our happiness and mental wellbeing.

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