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NGLCC and Greater Houston LGBT Chamber of Commerce Guidance for the LGBT Business Community During COVID-19

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Work-From-Home Tips & Best Practices

Article: [The Verge: How to work from home](#)

HAVE A SEPARATE WORKSPACE

A separate workspace doesn't have to be a dedicated office with a door that closes (which is often not an option in smaller living spaces). It should be an area that mentally prepares you for work mode, whether it's a separate room, a small desk set up in a corner of the living room, or a laptop at the end of the kitchen table. Ideally, it would be a place you don't go to relax, like your bedroom or your sofa, and a place that other members of your household know is designated for work.

If you find you're most productive with a laptop on the sofa, then by all means, set up shop there. It may take a bit of trial and error to figure out what area of your home is most conducive to getting work done.

ESTABLISH A ROUTINE, INCLUDING NON-WORK HOURS

This was the hardest part for me to adapt to when I started working from home: with devices that allow bosses and clients to reach us constantly, you can end up working 24/7. Try to start work around the same time every day if you can, and schedule breaks (including meals) around the same time if possible. I would also advise not eating in your work area, but I can't



put myself up as a good example – all journalists tend to eat at our desks, even the remote ones.

Ideally, you should try to get some outdoor time once a day, to get coffee or walk the dog, so you don't go too stir crazy.

Working remotely can feel isolating at times, so as part of your routine, try to interact with your co-workers regularly (yes, introverts, even you). Chatting over messaging apps like Slack (even just saying "Hello!" when you sign on in the morning) and holding meetings over Zoom or another video app are two quick and easy ways to stay in the loop. However you connect, don't let email be the only way you interact with colleagues.

Finally – and this is the rule I violate most often – try to end work at the same time every day. Obviously, there will be times when a late deadline or project needs after-hours attention. But in most situations, a 10PM work email can wait until the following morning for a response.

DRESS THE PART

Look, one of the biggest selling points of working from home is that you can wear what you want. This is true, and some days, especially if it's miserable weather or you're not feeling 100 percent, indulge a little and wear sweats and comfy socks. But to keep a sense of routine, try to get dressed and do it around the same time every day. This might sound a little odd, but I find that in addition to jeans and a comfortable shirt, wearing shoes (instead of slippers or just socks) helps me keep that sense of work vs. relaxation. I'm not talking about the most expensive shoes in your closet; sneakers, flip flops, or other comfortable footwear are just fine.

KNOW YOUR BODY

I splurged on a good desk chair when I first started working from home, and you may find that's a worthwhile expense; it's hard to work if your back is bothering you or you're not comfortable. Definitely make time to get up and walk away from your desk at regular intervals to stretch your legs (one colleague is a fan of regular breaks for a few [sun salutations](#)) and make sure your work area is well-lit so you don't strain your eyes. [The](#)



[American Academy of Ophthalmology](#) recommends the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes look away from your screen and focus your eyes on something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

DON'T HAVE KIDS

Ha, I jest. But in all seriousness, make sure everyone in your family (kids, parents, spouses, and anyone else with a key to the premises) knows that when you're working you're not available to help settle minor juice-box-related spats or engage in idle chitchat. Shared living spaces can get noisy, so if your workspace isn't isolated from common areas, I strongly recommend getting some noise-canceling headphones to signal to others that you're not to be disturbed and to avoid getting drawn into conversations that are going to distract you (shout out to my well-meaning husband who has a knack for this) while you're on deadline.

If you're going to try to do chores while you're working from home, be realistic about what you can get done. Taking out the garbage or checking the mail are two ways to get away from your desk for a quick break, but it's probably not practical to try to conquer that mountain of laundry all at once while you're on the clock.

Another suggestion: don't offer to be the on-call person for friends and neighbors. Of course you should help in emergencies, but if you're always the go-to for package deliveries or to feed people's pets "because you're home anyway," this can quickly become more time-consuming than is fair. Establish – and stick to – clear boundaries about when you are and aren't available.

GET THE TOOLS YOU NEED

You'll get a lot of advice about investing in various work tools, such as a standing desk or a separate work computer. If you have the resources to do this and think it will help you (and better still, if your company will reimburse you for these expenses), go for it. If your company is requiring you to work from home, find out what tools they'll provide and what they'll pay for.

In addition to the noise-canceling headphones, the only must-haves for my own work-from-home setup are a decent Wi-Fi connection, a computer that meets my needs (this will vary



greatly depending on your job), and a reliable cellphone. But if you end up working from home long term, you'll figure out what you need and what you can afford.

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Article: [Wall Street Journal: Advice for Working From Home as Coronavirus Spreads](#)

So if you do need to work from home, how do you do it successfully—especially if you are scrambling? Here is what you need to know.

I am a manager. What do I need to do now to make sure my team can function when we are at home?

Make sure they have the right tools. Have them do a test run and report any problems. Ensure they have the right laptops, network access, passcodes and instructions for remote login.

Set some ground rules. If you don't want employees using public Wi-Fi or other unsecured access points—for example, in libraries or cafes—say so.

Set up tools to maintain personal connections. Schedule group meetings by videoconferences and set up group chats via tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams.

How do I make sure my boss knows I am working?

Make an extra effort to check in with your bosses and co-workers. In many messaging tools, you can set a status for colleagues to see. If you sense there is a misunderstanding via email, pick up the phone or hop on a video call. And be as dedicated to your job remotely as you are in the office—don't use telecommuting as a way to secretly do other things.

How can I try to recreate that informal office back-and-forth when I am separated from my colleagues?

Email can be tricky—our inboxes quickly blow up and it doesn't lend itself to casual conversations. Your company most likely has chat or videoconferencing tools; make use of them. Group collaboration tools like Slack and Google Hangouts can feel closer to regular conversation and videoconferencing lets you see people's faces. To create a water-cooler feel, many companies also create nonwork chat threads on themes ranging from cute animal



pictures to sports talk. And there are plenty of video-calling apps to choose from—Skype, Google Hangouts, Zoom or FaceTime.

What is the ideal work-from-home space?

While not everyone has space for a home office, it is important to set something up that allows as much privacy and quiet as possible. Remind other people in your household that even though you are at home, you are still working. Try to keep it separate from your personal spaces, if possible—spend your time there working and don't hang out there when you're not.

How do I minimize noise and distractions from children, pets and outdoor sounds?

Separate your spaces as much as possible. Then invest in a pair of noise-canceling headphones. On conference calls, mute your microphone when you aren't speaking so your co-workers can't overhear your children. And when videoconferencing, be mindful of what the camera is picking up behind you.

How do I make sure my home internet is fast enough?

Most U.S. households don't use most of their bandwidth, but you may encounter slowdowns during periods of heavy use—like when you're trying to work from home while your children are watching videos or playing games. Your router and your location in the house make a difference too.

The best solution for poor connectivity: Switch to Ethernet. Most laptops don't have Ethernet ports anymore, but you can get a dongle. And you will need an Ethernet cable to connect to your router. If Ethernet isn't an option, move as close as you can to your Wi-Fi router.

What if I need to make overseas calls? How do I avoid running up charges if I am using my cellphone at home?

Google Hangouts, WhatsApp and Skype let you make international phone calls over the internet for very low rates. And if you are both on the service, the call is free.



Working from home can feel lonely. How do I fight isolation?

While you want to minimize distraction from your family members or roommates, you also want to avoid feeling like you are completely alone all day. Maintaining social connection is tricky when we are trying to create social distance to stave off the virus. But there are ways to maintain your mental health: Call people on the phone or videochat and break up the day with some exercise. Some employers have also begun offering online resilience training for staff to address the challenges of working from home during the outbreak.

How do I set boundaries so I don't feel like working from home is overtaking my personal life?

Try to maintain a schedule—start and end your work at the same time as if you were in the office. Be in your home office when you're working, but leave it when you're not. Imagine that you are simply relocating your office to another building.