

Tips for Home-Based Workers

Almost one million Australians now work from home, and according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 20 per cent of employees do some work at home for their main job. For the employee, working from home saves time and money and may provide better work/life balance. For employers, having well managed working from home arrangements for staff, has meant increased productivity, reduced office space and overhead expenses, lower absenteeism and higher retention rates.

People work from home for many different reasons including to better manage commitments away from work, to get away from the stress office politics and reduce time spent travelling to and from work but home based work has its own stresses and needs a disciplined approach to be successful.

Following are some tips for working from home successfully:

1. Find your rhythm and establish a routine.

Working from home can provide great flexibility and allow people to establish routines that enable them to work at their most productive times. Some people find it useful to get dressed as if going out to work and then walking around the block to make the psychological transition from home to work before starting for the day, a similar routine to end the day can be helpful.

2. Make sure performance outcomes are clear.

Successful home-based work arrangements are based on a high level of trust from managers and a high level of performance from individuals. To make it easy to assess your performance and demonstrate that you are doing a good job at home make sure you have a set of working from home performance outcomes that you have agreed with your manager and regularly monitor.

3. Don't allow yourself to become isolated from colleagues.

You need to develop strategies to avoid becoming socially isolated from the workplace and colleagues. This might involve working flexibly so you can maintain contact through meetings and social events. Colleagues will need to know that what you are doing at home makes a significant contribution to the outcomes of the team so make sure they understand how your work arrangement helps you perform at your best.

4. Write down and prioritise a realistic number of tasks to achieve at work each day.

It's satisfying being able to tick these off and have a clean slate at the end of the day. Also think about which tasks you can put aside to do more effectively when you are working from home. For some people this is the jobs that need total concentration and for others it can be the tasks they have been procrastinating over. Somehow being at home makes them easier to get through!

5. Set some boundaries.

Work is always there to do and you can easily get into the habit of working excessive hours because the work is so readily accessible so set some boundaries around the hours you work.

6. Home-based work is not a substitute for child care or elder care.

Don't expect to be able to do both simultaneously.

7. Set the ground rules for family and friends.

Let family, friends and neighbours know that you work between certain times and that you would prefer to be contacted outside of these hours. If possible have separate telephone lines for work and home. Leave the answering machine on to return calls at a convenient time for you or put a sign on the door.

8. Establish a process of good communication with your manager and colleagues.

Your colleagues need to know when it is okay to contact you at home. If you are working flexible hours at home it may not be appropriate for them to call you before 10am for example. Because you will not be in the workplace office it will be easy to miss the subtle social cues managers often give face-to-face, particularly positive feedback. It is important that this is recognized and compensated for, and that extra effort is made so communication is consistent and regular.

9. Have regular reviews of the home-based work arrangement.

It is in the best interest of you and everyone you work with to have regular reviews of the arrangement because being part of a team means how you work can potentially impact on a many people so you need to regularly stop and check that it is still working for you and them and make changes if necessary.

10. Make sure you have healthy breaks.

To be effective throughout the day regular breaks are needed. It is easy to raid the pantry, get into the habit of drinking too much coffee or just keep working when you are on a roll when you work from home. So diarise daily healthy breaks and keep this appointment with yourself to maximise your productivity. Have a jug of water handy.