**Looking after yourself whilst working from home**

It’s one thing volunteering to work from home, but I guess it’s quite a different matter when it’s something we have to do. For instance, we may spend the odd day at home to get something done knowing that we are going back into the office in the next day or so. However, facing a prolonged time working from home is a whole new ball game for many of us and brings with it many new issues.

The purpose of this article is to look at the issues and hopefully provide some positive ideas on how to manage being at work, at home, if you see what I mean. I hope to produce something that can become a live document where you can add your own tips and best practices so that we can still benefit from a sense of sharing and belonging.

Having read a few articles online and in the national press, the whole concept of working from home seems fraught with complications and conflicts. Do you for example, get dressed or stay in pyjamas all day? What if you get a skype call and your colleagues see what a mess your room is?

Here are some things I have gleaned so far.

* Establish a routine and stick to it
* Take regular breaks
* Try to have a place that you can comfortably work from
* Get up and move around from time to time
* Keep in touch with colleagues
* Be aware of how much time you are looking at the screen
* Look out of the window / gaze elsewhere form time to time
* Find a way to manage the inevitable distractions that works for you
* Keep hydrated
* Turn off the computer at the end of your working day
* Take some time out for exercise, walk, cycle, run, jog, whatever you can do!

We are all different and demands put on us will very much depend on your home circumstances. So it is quite difficult to come up with a list that is one size fits all but I guess many of the things above will apply to all of us at some point in the day.

**Stress**

Home workers often report feeling stressed as much as those who work from an established base. The difference is that there isn’t always someone there to talk to when you need it like there probably would be in the office. Try to understand your own stressors and develop strategies to manage them. A big stressor is feeling “at work” all the time and the temptation to fill the hours with work because of guilt. We could have niggling thoughts that our colleagues may think we are drinking tea all day and bingeing on TV box sets. And of course there is that temptation to do so! Establishing a routine and recognising the stressors and negative thoughts can help countermand this.

**Anxiety**

This can be linked to or be a part of feeling stressed. Am I doing enough? Am I taking advantage when I have that cup of tea? What will my manager think? All of these negative thoughts can have a profound effect on our mental health. So try to reframe these thoughts. For example, if a friend told you they were thinking like this, what would you say to help them? Apply that logic to yourself. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Somehow working at home seems to encourage us to feel like we have to tackle everything ourselves. You don’t! Talking things over when we are feeling stuck is very helpful and we would do it in the office or somebody would sense it and come to speak to you. At home we may have to pick up the phone, press the skype button or email someone. Yes, it’s an extra step to take but you will find that colleagues will be pleased to help out.

**Loneliness**

Perhaps this is the biggest drawback to working at home, especially in the early stages when this is all new to us. In the office there are people around you mostly focussed on similar things. At home, there is not the same opportunity to have that personal interaction, crack a joke, make someone a coffee, share a problem and perhaps more importantly feel connected. To overcome this we may want to establish a time when we are all available to share a little of our plans for the day, what we did at the weekend etc. This can help to keep us in touch and feel part of the whole.

**News**

All of the material consulted suggests very similar things to with news especially in times of crisis as we are in right now. They suggest listening / watching the news in the morning then again at the end of the day. They also suggest turning off news updates on mobile technology. This can stop feeling overwhelmed by the constant bombardment of information which by its very nature is quite likely to be negative. Also try to use official outlets rather than just rely on social media platforms which may contain fake news.

**Other ideas to keep you sane**

Below are some other ideas I have come across when researching this work. Some are perhaps more practical than others and would be useful when you are not working but still confined to home. They are all designed to make you think and concentrate differently.

* Have a virtual Cocktail hour with friends for an hour.
* Try growing herbs indoors
* Sewing, Knitting, other craft activities
* Decorating assuming you have the paints etc. to hand!
* Fun with kids (boredom buster jar – a jar full of post it’s with suggestions of things to do when somebody says, “I’m bored!”))
* Reading – where’s that book you got for Christmas that you haven’t opened yet?
* Podcasts & Radio,
* TV & Movies,
* Music – listening, playing an instrument
* Puzzles, Jigsaws
* Call friends

**Summary**

So that’s it, my guide to keeping yourself relatively sane whilst working from home. It’s an incredibly huge subject to cover, with many sources of information available online and in print. I have found that the suggestions outlined above at para 4 features in most information I checked out in one form or another. For me, the key seems to be finding a way that works for you taking on board the suggestions above and in the reference articles and web pages below.

Now over to you guys. What works for you? What would your suggestions be? We may even come up with the Learning Centre Top Ten tips for Safe Homeworking. (Why do I feel another job coming on?)

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