

3 Ways To Make Your Working From Home Routine More Sustainable

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Across the country, many states have started the early phases of reopening but most corporations haven't asked remote workers to return to the office just yet.

In fact, several tech companies such as Google and Facebook recently announced that they would continue to allow employees to work from home until 2021. Twitter is offering employees the additional option to work from home permanently, if their job allows for it. Virtual working appears to be a better and easier solution than reconfiguring office spaces to adhere to social distancing guidelines and managing the myriad of challenges that come with trying to ensure employees aren't exposed to unnecessary risks.

While the timeline to return to the office for other industries and locations remains unclear, many people are slowly realizing that they'll be working from home a lot longer than they had originally planned. If you are in this position, here are three tips to help you assess and tweak your current routine to create a sustainable plan for working from home going forward.

1. Learn how to leave the office

Beyond social distancing, remote working has several benefits. Many people are more productive and efficient when working from home and it also provides the much-needed flexibility right now to manage increased household and caretaking tasks.

But there are downsides as well, such as an inability to set boundaries and check out of work at the end of the day. While it may have been common for you to leave the office and still engage in a few work-related tasks from home, having to leave a physical office space gave you a clear indication that the most demanding part of your workday was complete; leaving the office forced you to take a substantial break while you transitioned into your personal life.

Without the action of leaving the office, you may find yourself harboring the feeling that you are constantly available to your boss and teammates and you may end up working longer than you should.

One way to avoid this is by having a specific trigger that lets you know that it is time to leave the office. If you have a dedicated office space, you can try to limit work to that space only and not bring your work smartphone or laptop outside of that room in the evening.

Another option is to put on an article of clothing that clearly marks your time in the office, such as a hat, scarf or vest that you can remove and put on daily to remind yourself that your work day has begun or ended.

Either of these options helps you train your brain to know that you are off and helps you reclaim your downtime at the end of the day.

2. Address your unmet needs

Simply plopping down to work from any free space in your house can meet your needs for a few weeks, but if the place you choose to work lacks the functional and esthetic requirements of an office you may already be struggling with environmental fatigue.

Take the time now to consider if you might be more effective working in another room, facing a different direction, or using other office products. Yes, it's a hassle to reconfigure your space and it may feel strange to pick up a new routine, but don't simply accept that what you have been doing is the only way. Pause and reconsider the space you are using and invest the time in trying out new arrangements.

Consider going further with your adjustments, because you shouldn't downplay the importance of beautifying a space. It is taken for granted that physical office locations tend to be tidy, have greenery and may even have been professionally designed for functionality and beauty. At home, you are on your own to recreate the best work setting for you. So if you've been putting off moving clutter out of your workspace or making other visual improvements, now may be the best time to get to them.

3. Use your vacation days to reset

I understand why you don't want to take vacation days right now. Sitting at home like you do every day seems like a waste of your limited vacation time. There's also a fair amount of pressure to keep adding value at your company in a period when many people fear layoffs.

But there are also several reasons why you should take a vacation in the near future. Everyone needs a break from the continuous demands of work. Keep in mind that even if you must stay at home, one of the best things about going on vacation is simply being off work. Turning on your out of office reply and knowing that you are not available to others is a thrill all by itself.

Taking vacation days also helps your mind and body reset. You are sure to lose stamina in your job if you try to handle both the stress of living through a pandemic and your full workload indefinitely. You need to build in time to take a step back from at least some part of this experience. You probably can't make the newly created burdens of homeschooling or needing to provide remote care to family and friends disappear, so checking out of work for a few days or a week is the easiest way to reduce your cognitive and emotional load. Don't underestimate the power of giving yourself the space to rest even if it can't be as much of a vacation as you would like.

No matter what you decide about changing your current routine, make sure you are thoughtfully considering what you have already been through and what you will need going forward to make this new arrangement work best for you.