

FROM THE (REMOTE) DESK OF STRAUS:

A COLLECTION OF STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING TASKS WHILE WORKING REMOTELY (AND WHILE PARENTING!)°



I. ESTABLISH YOUR ROUTINE

- **Transfer your commute time to intentional rest time:** instead of stressing over traffic and arriving at the office on time, invest into something that relaxes you and prepares your mind for the day.¹
- **Use your alarm clock:** even if you allow yourself more time to sleep, set a consistent wake-up time.²

° Compiled by Professor Sukhsimranjit Singh, Managing Director, Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, Caruso School of Law, Pepperdine University with excellent help from Alexine Carr and our colleagues at the Institute.

¹ Elisette Carlson, *10 Tips From CEOs on Working From Home Effectively and Happily*, ENTREPRENEUR (2020), <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/347479> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

² Lindsay Tigar, *Working from home? 7 smart tips to help you get more done*, FAST COMPANY (2020), <https://www.fastcompany.com/90476020/working-from-home-7-smart-tips-to-help-you-get-more-done> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

- **Create a morning routine:** Katy Cowan advises that instead of heading straight from your bed to your computer, allow yourself time to get up, complete your hygiene routine, and have a good breakfast.³ This way, when you do sit down to start your work day, you'll feel refreshed and ready to go.
- **Get dressed:** ditching the PJs will help put your mind into "work mode."⁴ Plus, if you are called to an impromptu Zoom meeting, you won't need to worry about pausing what you're doing to run and change.
- **Set your work hours around your internal clock:** when possible, allow yourself to work during your most productive hours, even if they are outside of the typical workday.⁵
- **Make a daily schedule:** budget every minute of your day to hold yourself accountable and ensure you make time for the activities that are important to you.⁶
- **Fight the urge to multi-task:** Lexie Sachs suggests that this current time may seem like a convenient time to catch up on chores, but it's easy to become distracted and let the workday get away from you. Instead, try adding chores to your pre-established schedule.⁷
- **Practice time management:** if you find yourself easily sidetracked, consider using your device's 'screen time' feature or downloading a browser extension to block content.⁸
- **Use the rule of three:** this rule says you need only get three things done. Choose them wisely, make a list, and cross off each thing as you complete it. If your tasks are too large, this helps to break them into manageable goals to keep you on track.⁹
- **Take breaks:** research shows short breaks throughout the day can help to keep you focused and prevent work from becoming monotonous.¹⁰

³ Katy Cowan, *Tips on working from home: how to stay motivated and sane*, CREATIVE BOOM (2020), <https://www.creativeboom.com/tips/tips-on-working-from-home-how-to-stay-motivated-and-sane/> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

⁴ Eleanor Lawrie & Sara Parry, *Coronavirus: Five ways to work well from home*, BBC NEWS, March 17, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51868894> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

⁵ Whitson Gordon, *How to Stick to a Schedule When You Work From Home*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, May 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/17/smarter-living/work-from-home-schedule.html> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

⁶ Carlson, *supra* note 1.

⁷ Lexie Sachs, *7 Effective Ways to Work From Home During the Coronavirus Outbreak*, GOOD HOUSEKEEPING (2020), <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/career/a31436581/working-from-home-tips/> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

⁸ 20 Tips for Working From Home, , PCMAG (2020), <https://www.pcmag.com/news/get-organized-20-tips-for-working-from-home> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

⁹ Kalie McMonagle, *8 Tips for Staying Productive when Studying at Home*, CSU ONLINE VALUED BLOG (2016), <http://blog.online.colostate.edu/blog/online-education/8-tips-for-staying-productive-when-studying-at-home/> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

¹⁰ Lawrie and Parry, *supra* note 4.

- **Try the *Pomodoro* technique at home:** this scientifically studied method recommends setting a timer for 25 minutes, working on a chosen task with no distractions, taking a 5-minute break, and repeating. On the fourth repetition, take a longer break.¹¹
- **Mentally close the door on your work:** create a habit, no matter how simple, that signals the end of the workday (meditation, meal prep, walking, etc.).¹² If it helps, write your job list for the following day, which may help you to switch off your workday.¹³

II. CREATE YOUR WORKSPACE

- **Mimic your best work environment:** it can be hard to draw a sharp distinction between home and work, but to the extent possible, create a space at home that looks and feels like the place you work best.¹⁴
- **Keep a dedicated office space:** even if you don't have a home office, designate a part of your living space, a certain chair at a table, etc. for your work.¹⁵
- **Create a separate phone number:** consider using an app like Google Voice to set up a phone strictly for work.¹⁶
- **Get your technology in order:** charge your devices, ensure you have access to online platforms, and make sure your internet connection has enough bandwidth to withstand everyone in your household.¹⁷
- **Use technology strategically:** for complex and collaborative work, connect a laptop to a large monitor to easily navigate between windows. Consider using a smartphone or iPad with longer battery life for Zoom calls if needed.¹⁸ (*most computers can connect to a TV if you don't have a separate monitor but find a larger screen useful.*)
- **Check-in with your colleagues:** working remotely might mean daily workday interaction becomes less frequent, but it doesn't mean that all communication

¹¹ Cowan, *supra* note 3.

¹² 20 Tips for Working From Home, *supra* note 8.

¹³ Cowan, *supra* note 3.

¹⁴ Yuki Noguchi, *8 Tips To Make Working From Home Work For You*, NPR.ORG (2020), <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/15/815549926/8-tips-to-make-working-from-home-work-for-you> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

¹⁵ 20 Tips for Working From Home, *supra* note 8.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Noguchi, *supra* note 14.

¹⁸ Carlson, *supra* note 1.

with your colleagues must end. Don't be afraid to catch up with your team and check in on them like you would in the physical workplace.¹⁹

III. PRACTICE HEALTHY HABITS

- **Get some fresh air:** schedule time away from your desk to go for a run, walk the dog, ride a bike, or whatever it takes to clear your mind.²⁰
- **Eat healthy foods:** it may be tempting to eat all the calorie-dense, delicious snacks you've successfully curated from the remaining shelves of your local grocery store. However, routinely eating foods low in nutritional value may make you sleepy and unproductive.²¹
- **Meal and snack prep:** avoid the "I have nothing to eat" dilemma by thinking ahead and preparing several meals at once.²² Plus, making several fridge or freezer-friendly meals can help minimize trips to the grocery store.
- **Use a standing desk:** this can help alleviate lower back or hip pain.²³ If you don't have a standing desk, you can create a makeshift one out of boxes stacked on a tabletop or counter. If you don't have one, try stand at least once every hour.
- **Take care of your ergonomics:** search for items to make your office space more comfortable, from back supporting devices to elevating laptop stands.²⁴
- **Time your caffeine wisely:** the best times for coffee are between 10 AM and noon, and between 2 PM and 5 PM. Why? The body naturally produces cortisol in the morning, which helps you wake up. Caffeine interferes with proper cortisol production, making the body *more* dependent on caffeine.²⁵
- **Build resilience:** allow yourself time to reflect on stressful situations (COVID-19) that may impact your ability to focus. Now is an opportunity to recognize how stress impacts you and build your toolkit to manage adversity in the future.²⁶

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Lawrie and Parry, *supra* note 4.

²¹ Tigar, *supra* note 2.

²² Carlson, *supra* note 1.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Cowan, *supra* note 3.

²⁵ McMonagle, *supra* note 9.

²⁶ Hari Srinivasan, *New to Working Remotely? These Resources Can Help*, LINKEDIN (2020), <https://learning.linkedin.com/blog/productivity-tips/new-to-working-remotely--these-resources-can-help> (last visited Mar 21, 2020).

IV. COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

- **Get to know your remote work productivity tools:** invest some time into learning the full features of the work tools you use. Click [here](#) for crash courses on Zoom, Skype, etc.²⁷
- **Lead from a distance:** we must be more intentional with our teams. Out of sight might literally mean out of mind, so ensure you maintain a presence even from afar.²⁸
 - o Continue to build trust and working relationships through online platforms, web calls, and casual conversations to check up on your colleagues.
 - o Continue coaching and building feedback through scheduled check-ins.
- **Be (digitally) present during video calls:** it may be tempting to mute your audio and turn off your webcam to multitask; however, bear in mind that actively listening and participating lets others know you value their time.
- **Don't be afraid to ask for help:** while you're settling into your new routine, you may find certain projects require different mechanisms when approached digitally. Communicate with your team and/or students and adjust practices as necessary.
- **Overcommunicate:** working remotely requires more communication than usual. Don't be afraid to repeat yourself, clarify things a few times, and check in frequently.²⁹
- **Focus on your output:** while working from home, your contributions are judged entirely by the volume, quantity, and timeliness of your output.³⁰ Take advantage of your extra time to invest in the quality of your work and teaching.

V. MANAGE EXPECTATIONS WITH OTHERS IN YOUR SPACE

- **Set ground rules:** ensure the people in your space are on the same page about when you are working and when you are free to socialize. Establish quiet hours, consider noise-cancelling headphones, and plan mealtimes as a group to stay focused yet connected.³¹
- **For parents:** stock up on books and puzzles, peruse educational streaming services, and create an appropriate learning and playtime environment for your

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ 20 Tips for Working From Home, *supra* note 8.

³⁰ Tigar, *supra* note 2.

³¹ Carlson, *supra* note 1.

children. Consider helping them set up virtual play dates with friends and being flexible with screen time.³²

Stay Safe, Friends!

³² Richard Harris, *How A Coronavirus Blood Test Could Solve Some Medical Mysteries*, NPR , <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/02/28/810131079/how-a-coronavirus-blood-test-could-solve-some-medical-mysteries> (last visited Mar 16, 2020).