

5 Tips To Help You Work From Home

 dennis-gilbert.com/work-from-home

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There are some people who just realized their dream opportunity. Largely, this sudden shift may feel more like a nightmare to many people. Are you prepared to work from home?

More or less I have worked from home for the past 14 years. I've had part-time offices out of my home and spent many hours onsite at client locations. However, when I'm grinding out new content, writing, studying, and preparing for deliveries, I'm often at home.

Work From Home

First, let me say that there are pros and cons. I spent over 20 years working in conventional workplace settings. I definitely recognize both sides of this story.

Solitude can drive you mad. Yes, it seems kinda cool at first, but after some time you miss the interactions and sometimes the climate of a face-to-face team. There is also no one immediately available to bounce ideas off of, except for your plant or a family pet.

Let me jump right in. Here are five tips to help you get started, stay productive, and not feel like you're totally alone.

1. **Set a schedule.** Planning to do things when you get around to it is probably a bad idea. If you're planning to do some wash, run the vacuum, or get a snack for the kids you are best to plan around a schedule. A schedule keeps you focused during high energy times of the day and helps you avoid time sucking distractions. Productivity is going to be important so set a schedule.
2. **Prepare a work space.** A home office is ideal. However, you can also use your kitchen island, a coffee table, or a stand up desk by using your ironing board. Your best work is going to occur if you can establish a place to setup and keep it somewhat permanent. Using your laptop on your recliner may work for processing some email but your best work is going to occur from a little bit more rigid work space.
3. **Block out distractions.** It may feel pretty cool to have the news on the TV, or be jamming to music so loud that the neighbors can hear it, but these are largely distractions. While everyone is different and some will think that they work better with these distractions I encourage you to think twice. Every time you pause to think about something else, something different, or throw in the next load of laundry you are wasting time and more importantly energy.
4. **Take some breaks.** A break is not necessarily a distraction. It can be an energizer. It can also be very healthy both emotionally and physically. Your best-case scenario is to plan your breaks. Set a timer and forget about it until you are alerted. You could take break every hour or every two or three. They are important and don't skip too many.
5. **Teamwork.** If you you're working remotely with a team a great energizer is to plan for team calls or video chats. One way is to plan a call for every two hours. The team quickly assembles at the appropriate time and in a round-robin approach you take turns talking about what you accomplished since you last spoke and what you plan to accomplish in the next time slot. This call should last no more than 15 minutes. It is a quick huddle, and energizer, and a great way to hold each other accountable.

Working from home is just that, it's work. Yes, you may be able to dress down a bit and yes, you may have some additional flexibility but there is still plenty of work to be done so don't coast.

-DEG

You may also be interested in the [Managing Remote Work Teams](#) webinar.

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How To Measure Productivity Through Metrics

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Overwhelmed, too busy, and unsure of exactly how to save yourself? Join the crowd. People everywhere are concerned about improving personal efficiency. How you measure productivity is a good place to start.

Metrics

Most measurement begins with metrics. In our digital world personal productivity often includes metrics centered around email processing. Ask someone how busy they are and chances are good that their inbox will enter the conversation.

Doing whatever pops up and identifying that you are busy may be a fact. However, you shouldn't confuse the fact that you are busy with productivity.

I had to process over one hundred new email messages.

My boss sent me six new to-do's in the last half-hour.

I didn't have time to answer your message, I had to process three days of backlogged email.

When helping businesses form strategy I often suggest that many individuals and businesses can get caught up in “firefighting.” This is a tactical approach to solving problems which can slowly erode strategy.

Metrics, such as the number of email messages processed may be valid, but don’t make the mistake of confusing metrics and measurements with productivity.

Keeping Busy

Proving that we have a lot of motion and that we are busy should never become a metric.

The digital relationship builder can amass new social media friends, connections, views, clicks, likes, and shares but that doesn’t necessary mean that they’ve built a single new relationship. The numbers are there. Is the relationship?

We can make metrics improve which will cause busy work, but that doesn’t necessarily mean we’ve created progress or value.

Measure Productivity

Often the most confusing part about strategy is understanding the difference between tactics and goals. Seldom is there a need to make executing a tactic a goal. That is more about motivation rather than strategy.

There is a related concept to measuring productivity. Many people believe being busy is a measurement of accomplishment, thus being better at being busy means improved productivity. It could, but often it is just busier.

Do you really want to measure productivity? You can start by measuring the value of the outputs from all of the work that you do.

Keep in mind that metric improvement may be a fact, but did you create any real value?

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Managing Disappointment Starts With Managing Expectations

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Are you working hard for an outcome only to later become disappointed? Have you given your best effort but someone only expresses their perceived shortcomings in your work? Are you effectively managing disappointment?

It may happen today, perhaps it happened yesterday, or maybe it even feels like a chronic pattern. What is the root cause of disappointment?

Great Expectations

It seems that the root cause is linked to expectations. We have a goal, or someone sets a goal for us. It could be related to vision. A great cake to me is chocolate, but a great cake to someone else may be vanilla.

Misunderstanding expectations are sometimes to blame. Differences in opinions, values, and beliefs may also be a cause. "When I discovered her political views, I was disappointed."

So, the root cause probably exists in expectations. What is expected compared with what is received.

I worked so hard on that assignment, but I only received an 80% for my grade.

I'm disappointed in my meal. It looked nothing like it did in the picture.

My hair looks terrible. It came out completely different than I expected.

Society is constantly shaping many of our expectations. Social media, traditional or digital media, and other informational sources are constantly changing our expectations.

Today many of us have a camera in hand. The photographs are processed immediately, and are also easily filtered, adjusted, and cropped. What does this lead to? It could be higher expectations.

Managing Disappointment

Perhaps the best thing to always ask yourself about disappointment is, "Compared to what?" When there are feelings or expressions of disappointment you may have to consider the expectations.

If you work with your supervisor on goals, be sure of the expectations. When you get a new project, understand the expectations.

We tend to place too much emphasis on what didn't work as compared to what did work.

Instead of assessing the output and being critical, consider how you will build on what worked.

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Response Time Expectations and How to Manage Them

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Perception is reality. At least that is what we are often told. It is true, what people expect or perceive is what they measure against. Internally and externally, response time expectations condition satisfaction. Are you managing them or are they managing you?

Perceptions of Response

What are your expectations for response time? It is often a critical measurement. People evaluate and judge your acceptance or not by response time.

When will the wait staff realize I need a refill of my iced tea?

How many rings until someone answers the telephone?

How long do I wait while on hold?

When I send an email how long until I get a response?

How quickly can emergency responders get to my area?

This webpage takes forever to load.

Where is my pizza?

How long until the medicine starts to work?

When will the eBay seller ship?

What time will dinner be ready?

There is an important question to ask about all of these scenarios, "What are your expectations?"

Response Time

We can go through a McDonald's drive through lane quickly, especially once our order has been placed. The pizza delivery guy is only minutes away after the pizza leaves the oven. The on-line merchandise order is typically less than two days away, and shipping is advertised as free.

Patience may be important for the recipient but it is still based entirely on expectations. Those expectations often develop from past experiences. Fortunately, or unfortunately, those past experiences are working for or against your perceived level of service.

Today expectations are shorter, faster, or quicker than ever before. We can get a loan for very little cost, very fast. Our pizza can be hot and ready, just stop in the store. Our burger is fewer than ninety seconds away, and researching to find answers to our questions are at our fingertips in under a minute.

Managing Expectations

How does the service provider manage expectations? Typically, information will help manage expectations. It may be the notification on the technical support line of the number we represent in the queue. The same is true for the help chat.

The pizza shop will often tell us the wait time when placing an order by phone and we expect the medicine to work in just minutes.

It still remains a two-way street. Push the employee, vendor, or service provider too hard, and you'll likely find errors or rework is necessary. While you often measure with response time, perhaps patience is another metric to consider. It is the push and pull of quality and problem resolution.

Expected Wait Time

People wait for hours in line to get the new iPhone. They tailgate at the big game for more than triple the time the game is actually played.

Not so long ago a mail order businesses (today's dot com) once shipped in 30 days, or call from a friend or relative only happened when they had access to a landline telephone.

When we expect an immediate response we may have to remind ourselves about our expectations. We may have to consider our patience, which often allows for better quality. A fix it once correctly is better than a fix it wrong or part of the way for two or three tries.

Information is Key

Keep communicating. Respond to email, text messages, or telephone calls. Provide updates, status reports, and historical data.

Expectations are guided by perception, perception becomes reality, it is all based on past experiences and information. When in doubt, practice patience, it matters.

Do you want to be a step ahead of the competition? Find ways to do your best work faster, it is what everyone *expects*.

- DEG

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The Short Supply of Workplace Patience

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Most workplace teams are driven by time. As individuals, many people express a need for improving their time management skills. Do your employee teams illustrate workplace patience?

Often when the conversation of patience emerges there is a contradictory feeling connected with speed, pace, or customer expectations. It is true, time does tend to directly connect with money.

Should patience be a core value?

I often suggest to groups and teams that it should.

Patience is a learned skill. Patience should be practiced to be improved. A lack of patience costs.

Cost of Workplace Patience

There are at least two forms of cost connected with a lack of patience.

One cost is that of the work completed in a hurry or work completed through haste. The work becomes inferior. The idea often is, the more quantity across time, the better. Of course, the quality needs to be a recognized factor.

The other cost is more intangible. It is the cost of a lack of engagement, lower morale, bad attitudes, employee absenteeism, and turnover.

When employee teams see a team assignment slacking, they may jump in to pick up the pieces. In many cases, this is important and a sign of good teamwork.

The other side of this is that an employee who doesn't fully participate often lacks buy-in. As a result of not being bought-in, they become more disengaged. They may take a back seat, the easy road, all the while knowing that whatever they don't accomplish, someone else will do.

Time Factor

The mindset and performance of people is hard to measure with time.

Give ten different employees an individual assignment and not all ten will finish at the same time.

Easy enough to understand.

Yet if we monitor the performance of the fastest seven or eight and then pull the plug on the assignment, we know the unfinished two or three are somewhat disconnected.

Simple enough.

Is there an adequate supply of patience in your teams? How do you balance quality and quantity? Have you measured the impact of a shortage of patience?

Sometimes everybody needs a little patience. *Just trying to get it right.*

-DEG

H/T (Patience, is a 1989 song released by the band Guns-n-Roses. It included the lyric, "Just trying to get it right.")

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