Ten tips to make the most of work from home

Imagine waking up an hour late every morning and logging in to work in your pyjamas with a steaming mug of coffee.

Imagine working without having to leave home. In fact, to avoid the dreaded commute, many employees prefer a 20% lower salary for a job next to home.

Justifiably so, since nearly 10 hours of commute a week, equivalent to a full working day, is the norm in metros.

Is it possible to harbour this Work from Home dream without harming your career?

Here is how to make it work for you.

- ### Talk to your boss

    Check if your company has an official policy to work from home and the permissions that are required.

    Next, discuss the option with your manager. Most supervisers are hesitant to approve activities that might impact the output or deadline. Negotiate clear, achievable targets and timelines to address his concerns.

    If you keep delivering on outcomes from home, his confidence will increase. Make sure you keep him in the loop if you are unavailable for a couple of hours because you have stepped out for a parent teacher meeting at your child's school.

- ### Designate work space

    Keep aside a work area free of personal stuff. A desk, chair, computer, adequate lighting and clear, uncluttered space build the right environment for you to work efficiently.

    Organise your immediate visual area so that you are not staring out of an open window or worrying about the mess on the floor.

    Ideally, work in a room with a closed door so that the home environment does not creep in and diminish your productivity.

- ## Hour blocks of time

  Establish a clear routine for your work day. Most people find it useful to create 4-hour blocks of time to help achieve targets.

  It is easy to imagine juggling home tasks or kids while you work. But multitasking works well only with activities that require low mental bandwidth.

  For high bandwidth tasks like writing a report, multitasking will stall your creative flow and increase the time required to finish work.

- ## Cut out interruptions

  A benefit of working from home is that you eliminate office interruptions like a gossipy colleague.

  However, a home can be more distracting.

  Establish clear boundaries for family, kids, friends and maid in terms of time and space, so that you are not disturbed in the midst of important calls or challenging tasks.

  To remain focused, switch off Facebook, WhatsApp, cell phone and television. Use the office laptop/software to maximise productivity.

- ## Master technology

  Invest in adequate infrastructure before you start.

  Set up a working Wi-Fi Internet connection with a back-up Net dongle, a smart phone with e-mail and communication apps, computer with the required software, even a signal booster for your cell phone if call connectivity is poor at home.

  Master the use of software, which may include Excel, Word, Skype or proprietary project software from workplace. These investments will reduce your downtime and boost output.

- ## Start with a checklist

  An office environment provides reminders by way of team members or supervisers pushing on urgent tasks.

Without these, it is easy to get waylaid and miss out on primary goals. Spend 15 minutes at the start of each day to make a checklist of tasks, goals and deadlines.

As you progress, strike out each task. This will keep you on track and give you morale-boosting feedback on the progress you are making.

- ### Put on work clothes

  Unfortunately, the pyjama-clad dream does not work efficiently for most people.

  Wear regular work clothes when you sit down at your work area. When you feel professional, you act professionally.

  The results show immediately in work as well as in your voice when you speak to your team members. A lot more work gets done during the day with this simple change.

- ### Avoid loneliness

  Human interaction keeps us sane and contributes to our self-esteem.

  Long stints of work from home without social interaction is the quickest route to professional and personal deterioration.

  Put a plan in place to visit office and meet colleagues or clients at least once a week. If this is not possible, have an active social life in non-work hours so that you do not turn into a recluse.

  On a long-term basis, it can keep you away from positions of responsibility that involve dealing with large teams.

- ### Combat guilt

  Though work from home is mostly challenging from an efficiency perspective, in some cases it leads to guilt at not fulfilling one's responsibilities. This could push you to overwork. To avoid guilt, create a work schedule and shut down your computer at the end of the day.

  Take a break like stepping out of the house to mentally switch to home mode. In off hours, deal with office crises as you would on a regular day.

- **Review every month**

  This is the most important step. Ask yourself if your aim has been achieved.

  Have you reduced unproductive commute time or were you available for a sick family member?

  Is it impacting your career negatively like not being considered for promotion? Assess the results regularly and act accordingly.

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