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FACTSHEET

Working remotely

10 essential tips how to work from home effectively

Prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic outbreak, we might have imagined working from home as the opportunity of sleeping in late, lounging around in our pyjamas, and long leisurely lunches. However, as many of us are now having to work from home, even though this offers a great amount of flexibility, it is still a professional job – and it needs to be treated as such.

As you have likely already discovered, working where you live is not as easy as it sounds, especially if you have other people in the space. So where practical and depending on the individual for many working at home, it is still important to have set hours, a dedicated workspace, avoid home-bound distractions, and actually dressing as if we're going to work, to help keep our mindset sharp and focused.

TO TIPS ON HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY WORK FROM HOME

1. PLAN YOUR DAY

This will help you minimise your distractions and maximise your true productive times. Without supervision, even the most conscientious of us can lose focus. Setting a plan not only provides structure to the day, but it also helps you stay motivated. Start the day as you would if you worked in an office. Get up at the time you would usually wake up. Get dressed, and try to avoid online distractions once you sit down to work. You'll soon discover the best rhythm for your day. Then set realistic expectations for what you can accomplish on a daily basis. Make a plan and stick to it. Make sure you give yourself permission to have downtime. If you have to work extra hours, give yourself some extra free time later on to compensate.

2. GET ORGANISED

Maintaining balance is one of the most difficult aspects of working at home, because the work is always right there staring you in the face. To keep you on track (and not working too much or too little), organisation will be key. Get organised by creating schedules and to-do lists. At the start of each day, spend some time organising your to-do list. Be realistic by setting goals you know you can achieve, and never promise too much. Along with your to-do items, set yourself deadlines to get each one done. For example, if you've got a report to write, promise yourself you'll finish it before lunch, before moving onto the next item.

3. HAVE A SET WORKSPACE

If you can, designate a specific place for a home office. Store all work-related files, reference materials, supplies and computer or laptop there. Try not to make it near a bed or a TV. Avoid home distractions, and never underestimate the gravitational pull of the fridge and your comfy bed. Ideally, you should ensure that your office space emulates that of a true work environment.

4. SET OFFICE HOURS

Make sure to create a time slot for each of the day's activities. This helps with communicating to others when your work-time and down-time is. If you have small children, you may need to schedule your work around their naps and periods of home schooling, so that you can have a good period of time to work uninterrupted.

5. LIMIT THE NUMBER OF TIMES EMAILS ARE CHECKED

You might find yourself constantly checking email because you're worried about being out of the loop. However, while it's important to stay connected, spending too much time on email might distract you from more important tasks.

6. TURN OFF ALL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

In this social media–driven world, it's likely that you spend a significant portion of your spare time browsing Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. And because the home is therefore inherently capable of putting you in a social media mindset, it's important to remove it as a distraction while working. Unless it's essential for your work, stop checking Facebook, turn off Twitter notifications

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and avoid the temptation to browse your Instagram feed while working. Again, you can do this by promising yourself some time with them once the work is done.

7. KEEPING CONNECTED AND IN TOUCH

If you are now having to work remotely due to the coronavirus pandemic, your employer may already have provided the technology – and the chances are you're using Zoom, Google Chat, Microsoft Teams and so on. However, if this is not the case and you're looking for tech to enable you to keep in contact with clients or customers, employees or suppliers, the main tools are Microsoft's Skype, Google's Duo and Apple's FaceTime, the last of which only works on Apple devices. Most phone-based messaging apps, including Signal, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, also offer video chat, which can be easier to use.

8. TAKE MICRO-BREAKS

When making your schedule, you might want to consider working in smaller chunks of time, and allowing yourself time to get up from the computer to stretch. This will really help you both physically and mentally. When you take micro-breaks, you'll likely to be more productive. Get some fresh air if you can. Open your windows to let in as much natural daylight and fresh air as possible.

9. DON'T GET DISTRACTED

One significant difference between home working and the traditional work environment is the presence of family members. While they may not be there all the time, you're bound to come into contact with them occasionally while working. Because of this, it's vital that you set boundaries. Make sure that you are focused on the best and proper use of your time during your work hours. Have the radio or some music on in the background as you might do at work.

10. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Working at home can lend itself to a sedentary lifestyle, not to mention the close proximity of the kitchen and refrigerator, making weight gain a problem. Make sure to schedule time for exercise, keep healthy nutritional snacks nearby to maintain your concentration levels, and remember to keep yourself hydrated at all times. ■

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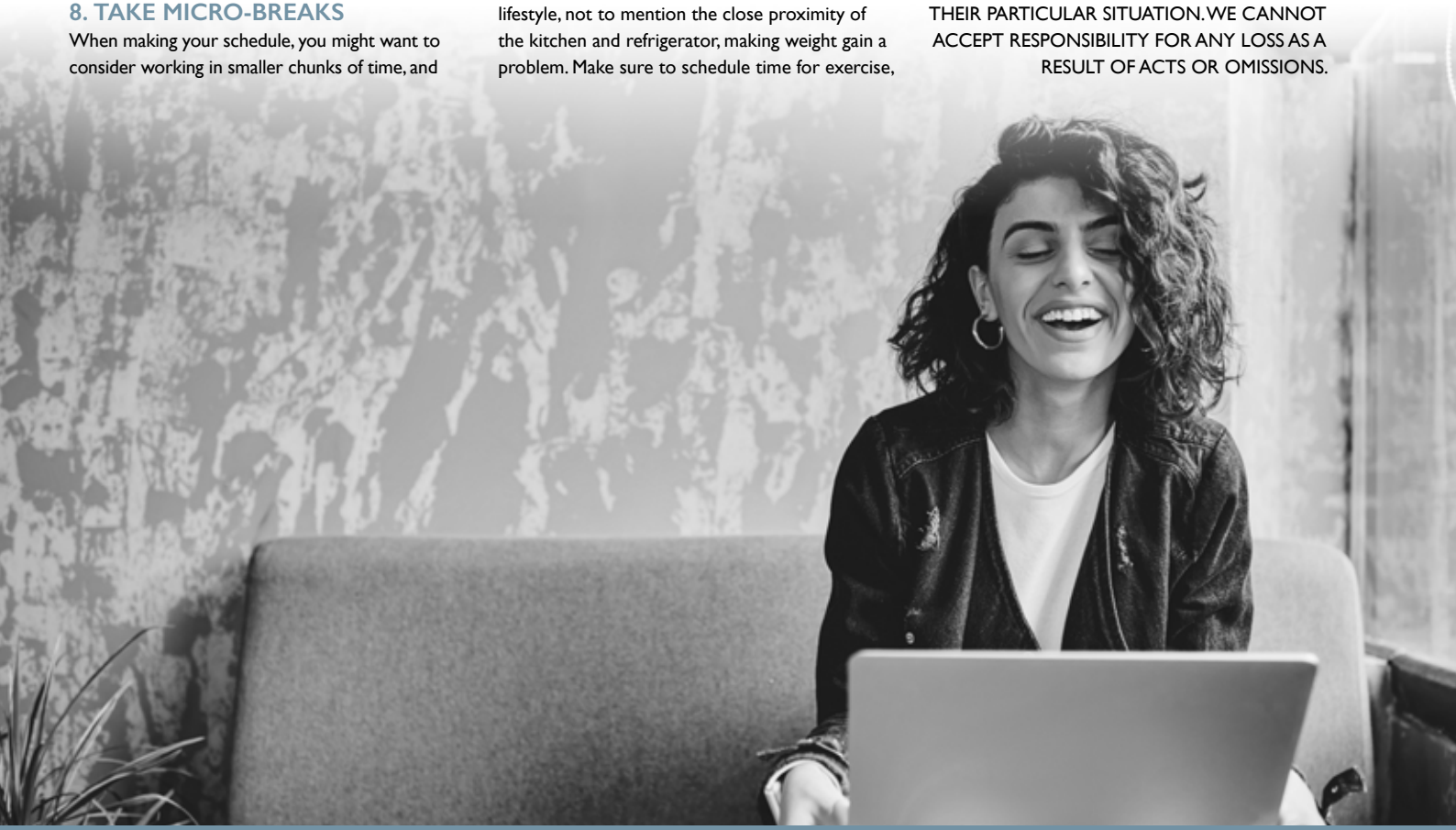

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