

# HOW TO SURVIVE WORKING FROM HOME

*Practical Strategies To Help You Work Productively*



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Coronavirus (Covid-19) has had a global impact. It has disrupted all our lives in some way or another. Holidays have been cancelled, cruise ships unable to dock, the general public asked to self-isolate and many thousands of people are now being advised to work from home.

Let's be honest, working from home sounds like a dream. You don't have to put up with crowded commutes, you don't have to sit in a noisy office, and you're not tied to 9 – 5 office hours.

What you can do is have a leisurely breakfast, get your household chores done then start work. Heck, you can even work in your pyjamas if you like. Yahoo!

If you've never worked from home it sounds like fun, right?

But, is that *really* the reality?

I'm not going to lie. It can be fun, initially. Especially if it's only for a few days. Most people can cope. But if it goes on for weeks, things can become very different. Here's why.

- You can begin to feel isolated and lonely, especially if you live by yourself.
- You may become distracted with other things like daytime TV or household chores.
- You could be constantly disturbed by other family members, particularly younger ones.
- You lose structure and your life becomes chaotic.

That's only the human behavioural side, what about the practicalities of working from home?

How can you remain focused on your workload if you have young children or other dependents who need your attention?

How can you ensure your work remains confidential, especially in this new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) world?

How do you look after your own health and wellbeing?

Here are six practical strategies to help you work from home productively.

## 1. Workspace Set Up

Find somewhere you can set up a work area in your home away from daily distractions. If your work is computer based, have your laptop/keyboard on a desk and sit on a chair. Sitting slumped on a couch can cause injuries over time, especially to your back, neck and wrists.

If you must sit at a computer and it's based in a main family room, look at moving it to somewhere quieter in your home. It shouldn't be too much of a problem if you have wi-fi. If you can't move the computer, try and designate some time where you have the room to yourself. This may be difficult for smaller or open plan houses or apartments. An alternative could be to screen off the area temporarily whilst you are working.

Ensure you have everything you need to do your work. Think about equipment you may take for granted in your workplace such as a printer, ink cartridges, paper, web cam (for team calls if you don't have a camera already built in), mobile phone, pens, an extension cable for your laptop/PC if there isn't an electrical socket near to where you sit, broadband or a mobile package you can tether your laptop/PC to.

Do you have somewhere to securely store paperwork when not in use such as a lockable cupboard or drawer?

Carry out an equipment audit before you start working from home and think about all the things you use daily so you can identify what you need but may not currently have to hand.

Try and work where there is natural light, you'll find you'll work much better than if you're sat in a dark corner somewhere.

## 2. Confidentiality

Large companies are more likely to provide you with a laptop if they ask you to work from home. However, small businesses may not have the budget to do this so you may be asked to use your own PC or laptop whilst you are home based. If other family members have access to the computer or laptop, there are things that you can do to keep your work private.

- [Set up users](#) on your PC/laptop. This means that each user only has access to specific files and folders. Remember to log off your account after you have finished working.
- **Keep work files Cloud based** using [Dropbox](#) or [Google Drive](#). Always remember to sign out of your Cloud accounts when you walk away from your computer/laptop or finish for the day. Using a cloud-based method will also allow you to collaborate with work colleagues.
- **Use a password manager** such as [Dashlane](#) or [Lastpass](#). All you'll need to do is remember one master password as all your others will be stored in the password manager once you've added them. No need to leave passwords lying around on sticky notes or scraps of paper!
- If you need to save work files to your personal computer/laptop, purchase an external hard drive such as a [PASSPORT™ ULTRA Portable Hard Drive](#) which has WD Unlocker installed. This will enable you to password protect it. Save files to the external drive instead of your computer/laptop. Remove the drive when you have finished your work and lock it away until you need it next time.
- **Lock away all hardcopies of work files** when they are not in use either in a cupboard or drawer.
- Ensure you have an **up to date virus checker**.
- Ensure that your **broadband router is password protected**. You'll be AMAZED at how many household routers are not password protected or are still using the password given to them when it was installed. Internet routers can easily be accessed by neighbours or

hackers if they are not password protected. If you don't know how to check your router, contact your internet provider, and ask them to help you.

### 3. Time Tracking

If you're asked to keep track of the time you work by your employer's, you'll need time tracking software installed on your computer/laptop. Time tracking software can keep track of which projects you're working on and accurately account for all your hours. If employers have asked you to work from home and want you to keep track of your time, they should provide the software for your use. Here's a list of time tracking software programmes:

- [Timeiq](#)
- [Harvest](#)
- [Deputy](#)

### 4. Workload Management

If you've never used a project management system before, they're great! Instead of having lots of sticky notes everywhere, plan your workload using one of these systems. You can set up to-do lists, deadlines, delegate tasks to colleagues and collaborate with team members.

Here are three great systems to try out.

- [Asana](#)
- [Trello](#)
- [Monday.com](#)

I've been using a free Asana account for years and I couldn't live without it. Remember to allocate some time to set up and get used to new software.

### 5. Plan Your Day

Going out to work at your employer's company gives you structure. You know what's expected. You turn up at a specific time and you finish at a specific time. You dress accordingly and you have agreed breaktimes.

Working from home is COMPLETELY different. If you are not disciplined, it can all go wrong *very* quickly.

Set yourself a routine right from the start.

Ensure that you get up and get dressed as you would for work – by that I mean put some day clothes on, don't lounge around in your jim-jams. Working in pyjamas may sound like a great idea but honestly, it's not. If you stay in your sleep wear, chances are your mind will stay in sleep mode too. It's all about mindset.

Organise your working hours with family members. Have a family meeting to discuss how everyone can help each other. If you can, involve *all* family members, children need to feel included. Communication is the best way to keep everyone happy.

Depending on your work and circumstances, you might not have to work 9 – 5, you may just have to either get through a set workload or work a specific number of hours agreed with your employer.

So, for example, if you have children or other dependents, and you have been asked to work 6 hours per day, you could in theory work 6:00 – 9:00 and then 18:00 – 20:00. This leaves the rest of the day to spend with your family, and quiet time for you to work when your kids are in bed. What I'm trying to say is, look at the way your family life works and build your work hours around it if possible. You might be able to work out shifts with your partner. *They* look after family members whilst you work between set hours then you swap so they can work, and *you* have family time.

After a few days have another family meeting to find out how everyone is coping. If you find something isn't working, discuss how you can tweak it and try a different approach for a few days. Listen to everyone's concerns, even the youngest, and adapt.

Schedule time to do similar tasks at the same time. Batch your work so you avoid going back and forth unnecessarily.

Consider applying Parkinson's Law.

*"Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion."*

If something must be done in 12 hours, it'll be done in 12 hours. If it must be done in six hours, then it will. Utilise your time as efficiently as you can.

## **6. Health and Wellbeing**

When you go out to work you leave your family life behind for a few hours. Suddenly, you are working from home and with your family 24/7. Holidays are different. Family holidays usually consist of doing fun things outside normal day-to-day life.

Working from home means that you stay in your normal day-to-day life but also have to work there too.

Short term is usually not a problem - most people can cope for a few days. When it becomes a couple of weeks or more, you can start feeling trapped. Everyone needs their own space. This is why structuring your day is particularly important.

If you lack structure you may not get through your work. This may lead you to feeling frustrated and possibly irritable to other family members.

If you live in a small home or apartment, life can become quite difficult for everyone. You'll start to suffer from cabin fever.

Here's how to combat cabin fever.

- Try and stick to the allocated time you agreed to work. You have to value your time and others should respect it too – remember Parkinson's Law.
- Leave some time for yourself. Go for a walk, take yourself out into the garden, lock yourself in the bathroom and have a bath. You don't have to suddenly shut yourself off. Plan it in and let everyone know that you are taking an hour or two to yourself. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to do the same. Kids need time on their own too!
- If possible, take the family out for lunch. This could mean a picnic somewhere local. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money. A break in a different environment, even for an hour or so can make an enormous difference.
- Be aware of everyone's feelings, not just your own.
- If you live by yourself, arrange a meet up with a friend or family member. If you are unable to get out of the house and you have mobile or internet access, arrange to talk to friends and family on a regular basis using [Skype](#), [FaceTime](#) or [Zoom](#) (you can get a free Zoom account) so you can *see* people, not just hear them.
- Find a new hobby to take your mind off work. If you live by yourself and work from home, work can become all consuming. Try reading a book, buy yourself an adult colouring book, do a good old-fashioned jigsaw, or something else other than work you can really focus your mind on.
- Unplug from social media, the internet and your phone at least an hour before you go to bed. Give your brain a break from multi-media.

Working from home isn't for everyone. You may find it's not for you, but that's okay. If you have to work from home, the best way to deal with it is to create a plan, build in some coping strategies like the ones above and manage your days.

You can find more hints and tips about working from home on my website [back2businessbasics.co.uk](http://back2businessbasics.co.uk)

If you have any questions, please get in touch by email [pat@back2businessbasics.co.uk](mailto:pat@back2businessbasics.co.uk)

## About Pat Gibson

Pat founded Admin24 in 1999 long before broadband existed and when tweets were something birds did. She has provided virtual assistance to many small businesses over the last 20 years.

Pat still works with a select number of clients as well as providing help and advice as [The Veteran VA](#) to anyone new to the world of virtual working.

[Join here](#) for her weekly email blast packed full of top tips, tools and free resources.

