10 things I wish I'd thought about before I started working remotely.

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My Virtual Experience.

Is the concept of working from home or remotely new to you?

This transition can be a bit daunting with the recent shift of leaders asking their employees to work from home or remotely. I thought I'd share a few experiences that would have been helpful for me when I first made the transition to work from home four years ago.

Here are some tips that would have helped me when I dove into working remotely as a fulltime employee.

1) **Assign a designated work area to yourself.** Finding a quiet place at home and working out of it as my designated work hub or home office has paid off. Clearing distractions like TV, tablets, and cell phones with easy access to social media feeds that aren't relevant to my job has helped keep me focused on my work with minimal distractions. By allocating a designated area for work, my mental headspace has shifted to understand that when I'm in this area of my home, I'm focused on work. It's helpful for me to have a room or space allocated for work, as opposed to my living area or family area.

2) **Track your progress and journal your activity daily**. Buy a notebook….I'm old school, I know; but make lists!!! I am the type of person that feels a sense of accomplishment by crossing things off my to-do list. By making a daily list of my top priorities for activities I need to do, it has helped me to stay focused, on task and gives me a good gauge of what I accomplished during the day. By having a documented journal of daily activities or work lists that you've completed, it's also a great way to reference that you actually aren't slacking off while working at home, if your employer ever asks what you did on a specific day of work.

3) **Do a Technology Analysis:** Take the time to analyze what you require to do your job remotely. Communicate this with your company to ensure that there is a standard operations system to communicate and share documents. Equipment-wise for my role, the following are must-haves: Laptop, Headset, Camera, Mic, Software, Phone. Ensure that your internet is strong and stable. Perhaps it may be an option to have your work email set up on our mobile phone as a backup as well, if your company is willing to do so. Plan B for me has usually been finding a coffee shop or public wifi hot spot (not ideal if you are practicing social distancing, though).

4) **Troubleshoot: Find a peer or buddy** to try out new technology if you're not familiar with using a new platform. Having a stable internet connection or clear phone connection can be so crucial in communication while working virtually. Over the past 2 years, I've moved to video-conferencing platforms more than ever,as this type of technology is readily available to connect us for virtual meetings around the globe. I will typically use Zoom Meetings but have also conducted sessions through other platforms like Skype, Blue-jeans, Teams and Google Hangouts. One of the most painful encounters I've experienced in working with new technology is being unfamiliar with it. I've requested my colleagues to assist in test-piloting new technology and have never been told: "no, I can't help you." I also suggest that if a technology is new to you, ask your work buddy to log into the meeting 10 or 15 minutes before other participants are scheduled to join you so you can pivot around any issues.

5) **Connect with others: Social connectivity while working from home.** Now more than ever, it is easy to feel isolated or disconnected. Be intentional about scheduling time to connect with others. I find that if I have more interaction using a video platform opposed to phone or email, it helps build a stronger rapport and sense of community.

6) **Take breaks and do some physical activity**: It's easy to dive down a rabbit hole these days, and I quickly realized that physical activity has been a key for me to work from home. I'm very intentional about blocking time during my day to go for a hike/jog/dog-walk to get me up and active and away from work. Anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour on most days gives me a clean break from work, and I usually come back more energized and with more creative juices flowing for the rest of the day. Having a stand-up desk or even just intentionally standing up throughout the day is a great habit to get into.

7) **Communicate clearly on what the expectations are of working hours with your colleagues/boss**: If you have an expectation of working a 40 hour work week, I've found it helpful to communicate your availability with your colleagues and your boss to establish your boundaries around response time to emails or phone calls. Just because you have your office at home doesn't mean you always have to be "on". Of course, there is a give and take relationship that you need to develop if you are new to working from home and being flexible is another added benefit for both you and your employer to work virtually together.

8) **Talk to your family or roommates about your schedule**: Letting my wife and 11-year-old daughter know when I'm working and when I'm not has helped us all respect each other's boundaries around my availability to them if they are home while I'm also working from home. I've found the toughest situation as a parent who works from home is having a child who is home from school on a sick day. In this case, I will let my boss and/or team know that I've got a sick child at home with me today, which is my priority. I've never once had an issue.

9) **Be camera-ready** when you're working. With the amount of video conferencing going on these days - and I can imagine in the coming days and weeks it will only get busier - I've found that I need to dress in a professional manner and be ready for a video meeting on short to no-notice at times. There is nothing worse than being caught off-guard for a video conference. I strongly recommend that if you are video-conferencing a lot that you dress in the same way you would for that meeting if it were in person.

10) **Commit to your plan:** When you've committed to allocating a block of your time towards a priority that you are working on, stay focused on that task. The laundry can always wait.

I hope you find this helpful if you've recently transitioned to working from home. It's not a "one-size fits all" experience for sure but hang in and look at the bright side of things. Within the last few days, we have seen an exponential global transition to a new virtual workforce that didn't exist last week. Hopefully, this leads to more agility, workforce flexibility and helps cultivate stronger relationships for all who share this planet.