

Remote Working: The New Normal & Firm's Efficiency



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Remote Working: A New Culture

It may be a novelty for some, but the emerging flexible working arrangement is increasingly popular. Remote working can make for a better work/life balance by allowing people to live further from their workplaces, and it can come in handy during periods of extreme weather when staff can stay safe at home.

Working remotely can benefit both employee *and* employer. For the employee, the number one thing that people love is the flexible schedule; you don't have to be tied into the 9-5. Some people love the fact that you can work from anywhere, so maybe you take yourself off for a long weekend, but you do a bit of work on Friday in that location. And working from home is more helpful than working in cramped office environments.

Employers can benefit too, from a reduction in office costs, as well as improved productivity rates from happier workers and longer retention of staff.



Advantages for Employees



Flexibility: This doesn't just relate to timings either although the flexibility to determine your work hours to some extent, is the most crucial aspect of this. You can also assess your environment, lighting, temperature, setting, mood; basically, work in the framework that suits you the best.

Fewer distractions: Co-workers banter and distractions, unnecessary interruptions, unimportant meetings can all be avoided if you are safely at home and sealed off in your environment which you have barricaded from any possible disruption.

Proximity to home and family: For many, the physical proximity to family and the convenience of being at home is tremendously comforting. For parents, it can be especially soothing to know that they are very near to their children and available should they be needed for any reason. This also applies in the case of elderly care.

Less stress: The stress of commuting in bumper-to-bumper traffic at rush hour is extremely counterproductive and can lead to disgruntled workers. This is especially true where the workplace is far from the office. Other stresses often cited include unfriendly co-workers, a suboptimal work environment and constant distractions.

More productivity: Removed from the stresses and distractions of the workplace and working independently in their preferred environment at their own pace, professionals are often a lot happier and a lot more productive.

Better health: Often with long commutes and anywhere from 1- 3 hrs/day spent getting to and from the workplace both physical and mental health is adversely impacted; the former as the exercise hours are usually the first to go and the latter due to the stresses associated with both the commute and the workplace itself.

Better work/life balance: Work/life balance is often achieved and tuned to satisfaction through working at home arrangement, particularly when a professional has the flexibility to report into the office and work from the office partially as an option and can fine-tune the method to achieve the most optimal balance.



Isolation: Often, professionals working from home complain of isolation and loneliness gave their removal from their bosses and co-workers, and this can be very depressing to some.

Distractions: Although office distractions are avoided by working at home, different distractions may arise. Interruptions from children, work, neighbours, friends, family may be disruptive and special efforts must be made to make it known that you are working and unavailable for interruption.

Disadvantages for Employees



Difficulty in separating home from work: The temptation to engage in household matters is often overpowering. Suddenly you may start feeling obliged to clean the house, do the shopping, the childcare, the cooking, the home finances and the socialising all while meeting the full requirements of the job too. It is essential to draw the line between home and work to avoid both areas suffering.

Work doesn't end: Since there is no-one looking over your shoulder enforcing strict hours, you may feel tempted to work endlessly. This pressure to work indefinitely may be compounded by the fact that you think there are higher expectations made of you as a home-worker or by self-imposed constraints to prove yourself and your abilities in this arrangement.



Advantages for Employers



Your office, your way: Being the way you wanted to be is the most significant advantage of working from home. People working from home has the power of accommodating themselves a beautiful office set up wherever they wanted to be. It is generally said that work efficiency increases at a right level only when an employee has a good office setup.

Rule your time: People generally have their work timings according to their mood. Having their work hours will help the employee to be more productive, and more freedom to work the way they want. A lot of time has been saved from commuting from office to home and vice versa. This helps the employee save time spent time on the dress they wear, the traffic and many inconveniences.

Scheduling is according to the convenience: Having a schedule on their own is a big stress buster. Working from home will help them to have their plan, and taking a break from regular work will help them increase productivity. Even if they take a ten minutes break, they can move quickly around their house by having a cup of tea or watering their plants will make them relaxed.

Developing independence: Being on your own is a good part of working from home. Just because you don't have any colleague around to help you, it will make the person more proactive and independent in working on their own. Yes, you might have technological aspects to help, but this will help to increase your ability and enhance your skillset as you work on your own.

Being in touch is very easy: Nowadays, all business has a lot of tele-communicating options like emails, phone calls, video chats and a lot more. This will always help the employee to get immediately in contact to solve any kind of urgent issues where presence is needed. In-fact, working from home has become more comfortable and convenient due to the presence of technological advancements.

More focused on work: Being alone in your home will undoubtedly improve the focus on work. Sometimes there might be distractions, but as the commitment increases due to the non-availability in the office desk, an employee tends to be more alert and focuses on the job. Many things can be avoided from office distractions like gossip talks, frequent breaks, unnecessary meetings etc.

Being out of the harassing office politics: You cannot choose people or your boss. There might be few people who really distract and guide you away from the job. And it is tough to cut down the talks without any embarrassment. Working from home will surely help to stay focused.

Excellent work-life balance: There is nothing significant in this world than responding to your family commitments. It doesn't mean working from home can give you a lot of freedom in attending your family life. But, still, it helps to connect and be there when you are most needed.



Advantages for Employers



Pleasant working environment: It is widespread in the office environment to be surrounded by lots of noise and disturbances around. This will hinder the concentration and make stressed. Having a peaceful environment and the fresh atmosphere is possible from working at your home.

Higher responsibility, higher the commitment: It is a common notion that an employee tends to be lethargic when the boss is not around or when he is not at his office desk, But the truth is, more commitment comes only when given the responsibility of doing things on own. Working from home has more benefits as the person takes more obligation and responsibility of doing things at his place.

You can choose whichever software you like: One of the most significant benefits of working from home is that you can choose any software you please. There is no need to go by the rules of your office anymore. Now you can download what you like and use things whenever you feel so. Nobody is there to tell you which software should be used and what is not allowed and that we think there is an excellent benefit of working on your own.

You get to make time for yourself: Another advantage of working alone is that you will have more time for yourself. If you have ever wanted to work alone, go ahead and do it because you won't have to deal with too many people anymore. Neither do you have to go through things like office politics. You can save a lot of time for yourself and stay more focused.

No need to worry about making it on time: There is no need for you to worry about making it on time anymore. You can make dinner for your kids at home whenever you please, without having to worry about making it on time for your kids. Your relationships will improve at the same time as you will be able to make more time for the kids and your spouse. This is one of the best benefits of working from home.



Disadvantages for Employers



Security problems: There might be some kind of risk in sharing or transferring information away from the office. So, working from home might lead to information security risks at times. Sometimes this might be the reason to deny work from home options to the employers.

Increased telecommunications costs: Sometimes, long-duration teleconferencing calls, regular meetings, or status updates through phone calls can cost more than usual. So, sometimes this might hinder giving a work from home option.

Communication problem: Missed telephone calls or less data connectivity can cause some technical delays when working from home. There might be some difficulties due to communication problems while working from home.

Decreased staff morale: Good rapport is always needed to have a healthy environment in the office. When employees often take work from home, there are a lot of many chances to not communicate with each other, and sometimes it might create a distance from each other. There are chances of decrease in staff coordination.

All jobs do not suit from home: There are few jobs which might not suit working from home. There are jobs where individual presence is very much needed. Hence, work from home is not a good option.

Promotions can be overlooked: There are chances of being avoided or ignored for development as your presence might be missing in office. This might also lead to not being involved in higher-level decisions.

Disadvantages for Employers



The toughness of restricting only to work: Getting only to job mood might be difficult many times in the home. Maintaining a discipline depends and varies from person to person. Due to this reason, work from home might be a disadvantage.

Missing Company's developmental activities: Working from home might also lead to missing a few significant occasions in the office. A person might tend to miss the day to day activities like newsletters, birthday events, the inauguration of new technologies and many more. Due to this reason, work from home is not as good as the regular office.

Plenty of distractions: You will face plenty of distractions when you are working alone. The thing about working from home is that a lot will be placed in front of you because you are at home all the time.

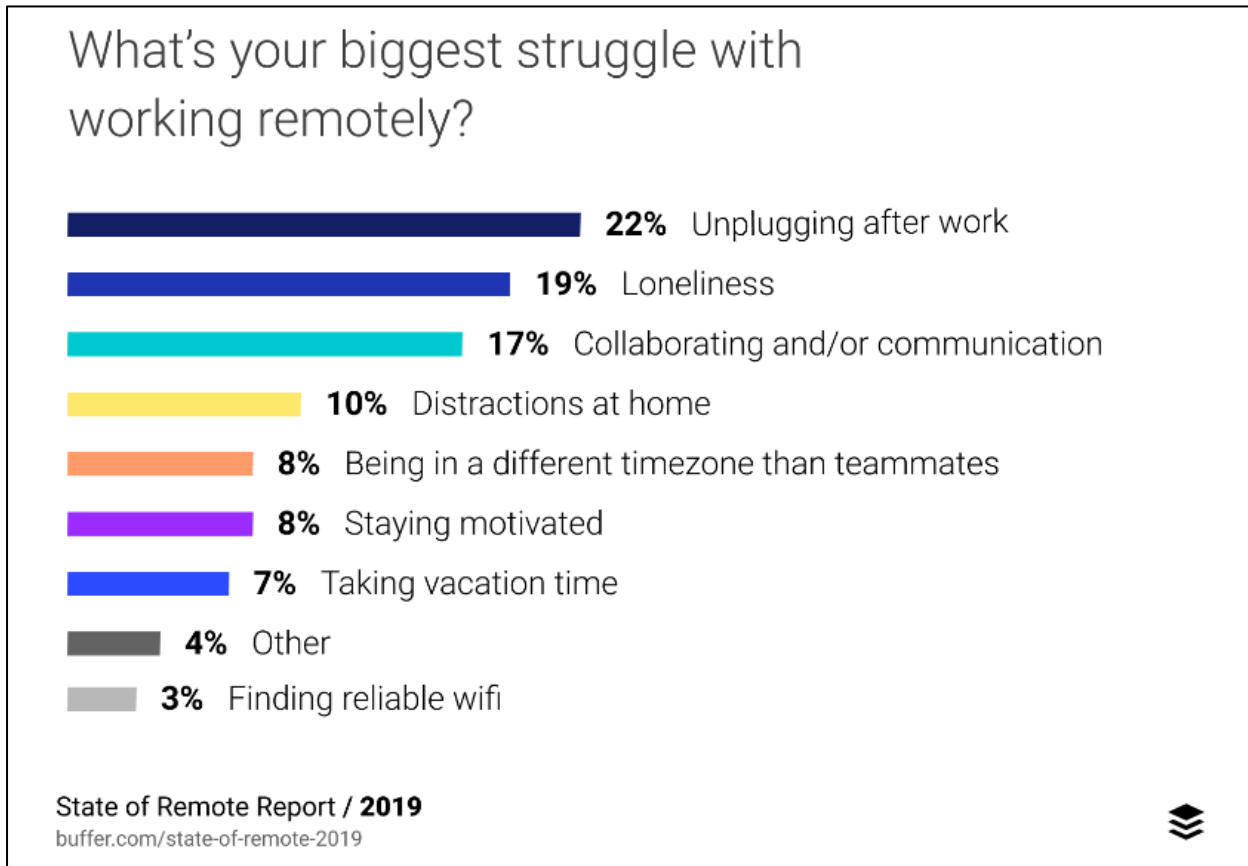
You become a lazy person: Another sad part about working at home is that you don't stay active all the time as a result of which you become a sluggish person.

Nobody to help you: One of the worst things from working at home is that there is nobody to help you. You will have to work and support yourself the whole time. There will be nobody to reach out to you or be your staff. You have to handle all work and assignments on your own.



Solutions to Challenges of Remote Working

One of the reasons many managers don't approve of remote work is they fear employees will slack off without that physical, in-person oversight. But the opposite tends to be the reality: remote workers are more likely to overwork. When your personal life and your work are both under the same roof, it's harder to switch off.



Overworking

- Set appointments on your calendar for the end of the day
- Similarly, set up reminders to take breaks.
- Be transparent with your team on when you're leaving
- Create physical boundaries between you & your workspace.
- Turn off notifications on your phone and computer, so you're not pulled back into work after hours.

Prioritising work

- Eat the frog- "Mark Twain once said that if the first thing you do each morning is to eat a live frog, you can go through the day with the satisfaction of knowing that that is probably the worst things that are going to happen to you all day long. Your 'frog' is your most significant, most important task, the one you are most likely to procrastinate on if you don't do something about it."
- Limit the number of jobs you plan to do each day. Use the Eisenhower matrix to avoid unnecessary time-wasting tasks and know which tasks to do next. Or plan to make just 1 big thing, 3 medium things, and 5 small things per day, the 1-3-5 rule.
- Install distraction-limiting tools.
- Manage your energy, not your time.

Interruptions: you gave a family, pets or a doorbell

- Set up a kind of signal that lets others know when you're in focus mode.
- Explain why it's essential for you to avoid interruptions
- For young kids, getting childcare is a must, unless you plan on working only when they're asleep.
- Train your kids and significant other to be self-sufficient and occupy themselves.
- Keep consistent work hours.
- Escape. If all else fails, try working out of a co-working space, the library, or a coffee shop.

“
To a certain extent, your co-workers are your social circle. Sometimes it is hard to explain to others that all your friends are online.”

- Cody Jones

Loneliness & lack of human interaction

- Include social breaks in your schedule
- Try working at co-working spaces or coffee shops so you'll at least feel like you're still a part of society.
- Be more intentional about joining local groups or organisations.

Communication Issues and Being Out of the Loop

- communicate as much as possible—clarifying anything that could be a misunderstanding
- be proactive in speaking up.

Time zone differences

- Remote workers need to be flexible when working with others in different time zones.
- Think a bit more about when to send messages to others.
- Learn not to watch your phone for notifications when you don't plan to work.
- Handoff work to others who can finish it up during their day and get it back to you.

Technology hiccups

- to avoid delays in your work—have a backup plan.
- A mobile hotspot device like a MiFi or a cell phone plan that allows tethering can save you when your internet goes out.
- A backup computer—or maybe even a tablet—can get you through the day until you can get your computer fixed.

Bad health habits

- Be mindful when working from home about your health habits.
- Set reminders for yourself in your calendar or to-do app to eat a salad or do some yoga.

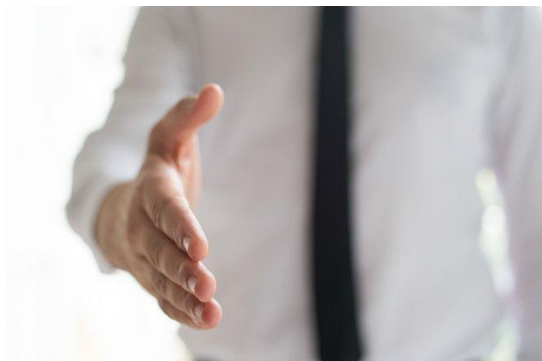
Tips to Keep Employees Engaged & Motivated when Working Remotely

Community Building



Robust Communication is the need of the hour

Keep them engaged with Recognition



Offer Employee Perks and Discounts



Re-examine relationship between organisations and employees

Engage with fun

Meaningful Goal Setting



Encourage Learning



Provide Support for Equipment and other necessities



Promote Health and Wellness



Tips for Cybersecurity when Working Remotely

Recommendations for Employers

- ❖ Ensure that the corporate VPN solution scales and is able to sustain a large number of simultaneous connections.
- ❖ Provide secure video conferencing for corporate clients (both audio/video capabilities).
- ❖ All the corporate business applications must be accessible only via encrypted communication channels (SSL VPN, IPsec VPN).
- ❖ Access to application portals should be safeguarded using multifactor authentication mechanisms.
- ❖ Prevent the direct Internet exposure of remote system access interfaces (e.g. RDP).
- ❖ Mutual authentication is preferred when accessing corporate systems (e.g. client to server and server to client).
- ❖ Provide where possible corporate computers/devices to staff while on teleworking; ensure that these computers/devices have up-to-date security software and security patch levels and that users are regularly reminded to check patch levels. It is advisable that a replacement scheme for failing devices is also in place.
- ❖ BYOD (Bring your own device) such as personal laptops or mobile devices must be vetted from the security standpoint using NAC, NAP platforms. (e.g. patch check, configuration check, AV check etc.).
- ❖ Ensure that adequate IT resources are in place to support staff in case of technical issues while teleworking; provide relevant information, e.g. on contact points, to staff.
- ❖ Ensure policies for responding to security incidents and personal data breaches are in place and that staff is appropriately informed of them.
- ❖ Ensure that any processing of staff data by the employer in the context of teleworking (e.g. time keeping) is in compliance with the EU legal framework on data protection.

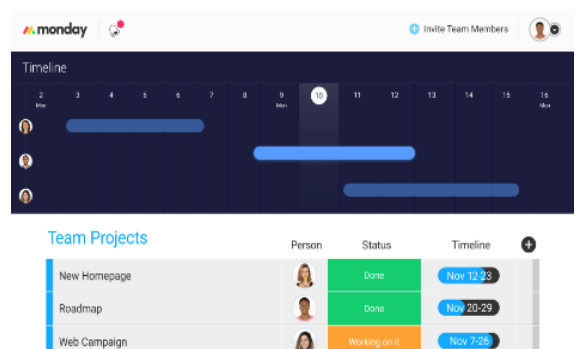
Recommendations for Employees

- ❖ Use corporate (rather than personal) computers where possible - unless BYOD has been vetted. As far as possible, do not mix work and leisure activities on the same device.
- ❖ Connect to the internet via secure networks; avoid open/free networks.
- ❖ Avoid the exchange of sensitive corporate information (e.g. via email) through possibly insecure connections.
- ❖ As far as possible use corporate Intranet resources to share working files. On the one hand, this ensures that working files are up-to-date and at the same time, sharing of sensitive information across local devices is avoided.
- ❖ Data at rest, e.g. local drives, should be encrypted (this will protect against theft / loss of the device).
- ❖ Antivirus / Antimalware must be installed and be fully updated.
- ❖ The system (operating system and applications used, as well as anti-virus system) needs to be up to date.
- ❖ Lock your screen if you work in a shared space.
- ❖ Do not share the virtual meeting URLs on social media or other public channels. Unauthorized 3rd parties could access private meetings in this way.

Essential Remote Working Tools

1. Productivity Tools

- ❖ Trello
- ❖ Google Online Suite
- ❖ Monday



2. Time Management Tools

- ❖ Serene
- ❖ Status Hero
- ❖ Toggl



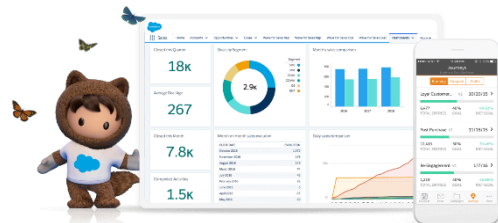
3. Remote Communications/Connectivity Tools

- ❖ Doodle
- ❖ Slack
- ❖ Taggbox
- ❖ Skype
- ❖ Spark



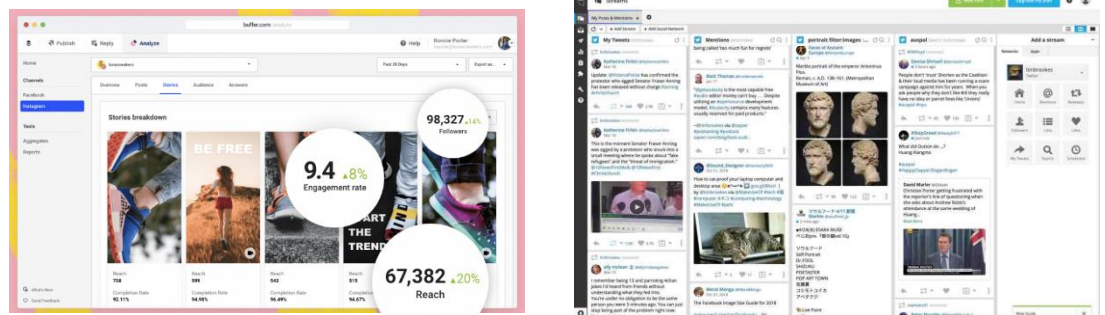
4. Client Servicing Tools

- ❖ Intercom
- ❖ Salesforce Service Cloud



5. Social Media Management Tools

- ❖ Hootsuite
- ❖ Buffer



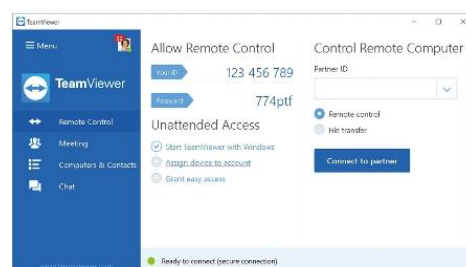
6. Tools for Developers

- ❖ GitHub
- ❖ JetBrains



7. Screen Sharing Tools

- ❖ Teamviewer
- ❖ Screenleap



Some Popular Remote Working Job Titles

If you'd like to work remotely, but you're not sure what jobs would allow you to do so, this list of 20 standard remote job titles can give you some insight. It might help to confirm that your current job can be done remotely, or the list may offer you new ideas for remote-friendly careers.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ❖ Accountant | ❖ Customer Service Representative | ❖ Medical Coder |
| ❖ Engineer | ❖ Business Development Manager | ❖ Territory Sales Manager |
| ❖ Teacher / Tutor / Instructor | ❖ Account Manager | ❖ Nurse |
| ❖ Writer | ❖ Recruiter | ❖ Data Analyst |
| ❖ Consultant | ❖ Sales Representative | ❖ Editor |
| ❖ Program Manager | ❖ Web Developer | ❖ Case Manager |
| ❖ Project Manager | | ❖ UX/UI Designer |

Bonus Tips for Remote Working

- **Keep your routine.** If Mondays begin with a marketing meeting in the conference room, don't let remote work break that tradition. It's good to maintain a routine during stressful periods. If you're managing a team, though, be flexible and understand that team members may now be dealing with children, interfering cats, and partners working in their space!
- **Remote doughnuts? Yes, please.** Send your remote team food vouchers for the online delivery of coffee and doughnuts. They boost morale remotely as much as they do in the office!
- **Pack a lunch.** I know, right? Why pack a lunch if you're staying at home? Having lunch and snacks prepared from the night before can help keep you in work mode. It also limits the time spent preparing food and nibbling things in the kitchen!
- **Be presentable.** Some calling apps like Zoom automatically open with video! Make sure you are dressed and presentable, and that your background environment is not too chaotic.
- **Keep to your hours.** One of the challenges I had to overcome when I first began working from home was the urge to work continually. Doing this can leave you feeling burnt out and exhausted. Keep to your usual hours and close everything at the end of the day. Don't check emails on your phone when you wake up or reply outside office hours!

Conclusion

Working from home takes a little adjustment, especially when you've had it thrust upon you. But with the above tools, perseverance, and a can-do attitude, it's going to be all right.

And even if everything doesn't run *perfectly*, that's OK, too.



Aparajita Prasad is an IIM Ahmedabad alumna. She is a renowned Corporate Leader and Subject Matter Expert with over 15 years of experience in Business Research and Strategic Consulting across Europe and India. She has worked across many companies including Accenture, TCS, Evalueserve, Heidrick and Struggles etc. She later joined few Start-ups and contributed to their success. She has led huge teams and headed business units. Her experience spans across Strategy, Business Research, Analytics, and Consulting.

Currently, she is Founder and Director of MetaConnect Consulting and also Vice President at StartUp Buddy Services. She is an investor and mentor to start-ups and on advisory board of many incubators and accelerators. She also takes many leadership training sessions. She Heads the Women Entrepreneurs Network (WEN) in

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Aparajita holds a formidable reputation of adjusting in any environment and bringing out the best in the team. Her value addition has been recognized by her employers and teammates much sooner than most leaders. She aspires to help anyone and everyone who crosses her path.

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For more details, reach out to Aparajita Prasad.

