

WORKING REMOTELY

...AND OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

It wasn't too long ago when being able to work remotely was considered a privilege, it needed necessary approvals and was only permitted in an emergency. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, little did we realize that in a world that was traveling at breakneck speed, a virus could cripple it and bring it down to its knees. As the days progressed, it became evident that the widespread impact of the virus would not only lead to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide, but also completely change the way the world functioned in general. To avoid getting infected, people had to start wearing masks, keep sanitizing their surroundings and maintain social distancing. Companies across the world had to close their offices, work culture was forced to evolve and employees had no choice but to work from home. This was a big change for a major chunk of the workforce, and just as every enforced and unplanned change does, it brought its own challenges along. According to Buffer State of Remote Work survey, these are some of the challenges that employees face when working remotely and what they can do to overcome them:

1. Unplugging after work/Getting overworked

When your personal and professional life is under the same roof, it's very easy to overwork. It is, therefore, extremely important to know when to stop working, to take regular breaks and not get drawn towards your laptop after office hours. It is also important that you let your team know that you're 'leaving' or logging off for the day. Shut down your computer immediately, so that you don't hang around for long after you've logged out. It also helps if you have a dedicated office space that is away from the rest of your leisure activities like the television or the gym. Turning off notifications on your phone can also help you unplug better.

2. Taking vacation time

The flexibility that remote work offers occasionally means that remote workers can work while traveling and don't necessarily need to take vacation time to travel. Vacation practices vastly vary by organization, by country, and by culture. However, the purpose of taking a holiday is defeated if you choose to work during that period. It is advisable to not carry your laptop with you on your holiday and turn off work-related notifications from your phone to truly be able to enjoy the time off.

3. Loneliness

Humans, by nature, are social animals and we crave for interaction with other people. When you're not at work, you miss the water cooler discussions, the gossip, the jokes and the general feeling of camaraderie with your colleagues. Working from home can be very challenging and can make you feel lonely and isolated if you live alone. During the ongoing pandemic, where social interaction is advised to be limited, you can opt for video-calling close friends and family. Meeting people who live close by for a quick lunch or a walk can be a welcome change and will take your mind off the isolation. If you live in a place where bars and restaurants are open, consider working out of a coffee shop for a day or two. Co-working spaces are another great way to interact with people.



4. Finding reliable Wi-Fi

With the multi-fold load on internet service providers, it can sometimes be a bit of a challenge to have good internet connectivity 24x7. If you have a network outage, you could head over to a friend's or colleague's place to avoid work from piling up. Several coffee shops and libraries offer free Wi-Fi so make use of that! However, always make sure you practice safe social distancing practices and maintain at least 6 feet distance between yourself and other people, wear a mask at all times when speaking to or interacting with other people. Finally, if reliable internet is a constant hindrance, you should consider opting for another service provider or working out of a co-working space.

5. Collaboration and communication

Working as a team can be hard, messy and complicated and takes a huge amount of collective effort to make it work efficiently. Meetings and discussions can be especially more difficult with team members scattered around the globe across different time zones. We also tend to rely on nonverbal communication like intonation and gestures which is absent in email and text communications.



This can result in team members misinterpreting messages. To avoid this, it is important to have regular video conferencing calls with your team members and managers. Remember to keep all team members in the loop and on the same page when it comes to email and IM conversations. Try and avoid non-work communication on work emails.

6. Distractions

When you're surrounded by family, especially children, it is hard to actually stay productive despite being at your desk for the stipulated time. Working from home means you're constantly reminded of a lot of your personal chores like cooking, laundry etc. If you have young children, consider using noise canceling headphones to be able to focus better. Try to have a dedicated office space, close the doors while you work and hang a "Do Not Disturb" sign so as to avoid other family members from interrupting you when you're working. It also helps to get household chores done before you start your work day so that you don't have them at the back of your mind.



7. Reduced supervision

Managers provide supervision, guidance and direction about your work. They also give timely feedback about your progress. A lot of employees tend to feel lost without these crucial inputs. However, this issue is relatively easy to fix and all it really needs is an open communication channel between you and your manager. Try to have weekly meetings where you can discuss prioritization of work, any challenges that you face and how to address those.

8. Different time zones

Without having the opportunity to see each other, communication becomes difficult and tracking individual tasks is complicated, especially for large teams that work in different locations and across various time zones. The most important thing needed for a remotely working global team is an effective communication channel that is instant, responsive, and flexible. It is paramount that all team members across all locations have their work cut-out and pre-defined so that they do not have to depend on a manager or colleague in another location to begin their day and to give instructions.



9. Staying motivated

When you're not sitting in an office with your colleagues every day, there is a tendency to become complacent. People who work from home often get a little too comfortable and tend to lose focus of their long-term career goals. There are no colleagues with whom you can discuss a promotion, a new skill-enhancing training and certification program or anything that could help you climb the corporate ladder. If you have ambitions, it is important to note those down and discuss them with your manager. Ask how you can advance within the company and make your career goals clear. You can also listen to motivational podcasts or audio books or read some inspirational self-help material. You should also continue networking in your industry as it remains an essential way to stay relevant. There are several virtual conferences, meets and shows happening and do consider signing up for and attending those to remain in touch with what's happening around you.

10. Personal well-being

Since you're cocooned at home all day, there is a tendency to neglect your health and well-being. It is important to stay physically and mentally fit to be able to do your job efficiently. You must include some kind of exercise routine that will help clear your mind. Exercise not only flexes your body, but also keeps you in shape, active and alert during the course of the day. Make sure you take regular breaks from your work chair, stand-up and walk around the house for a little bit. A standing desk has been advised in situations where possible to install. Companies have been contributing towards making a personal well-being fund to help their employees maintain a healthy lifestyle during these pandemic impacted times.



While telecommuting comes with a host of benefits, it's certainly not a bed of roses. It requires a lot of commitment, dedication and work. And it is the proverbial double-edged sword - every advantage comes with its own challenge. This is especially true for those industries where remote working was not the norm in pre-Covid times like teaching, banking and public sector enterprises. Stay Safe and follow these recommendations to reduce the negative impacts that working remotely may have on your health, family, work and most importantly, your own personal well-being.

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