

# How to make remote work work for you

What are the keys to success when you aren't going to the office every day?

Working remotely may seem like nirvana — saving the time of commuting, staying in your pajamas, being able to meet the roofer without leaving the office. In a lot of ways, it makes life easier.

But there also are downsides. Not everyone is cut out for the isolation of working alone 8 hours a day. And remote workers may worry about career advancement; it can be difficult to build relationships and maintain visibility with higher-ups.

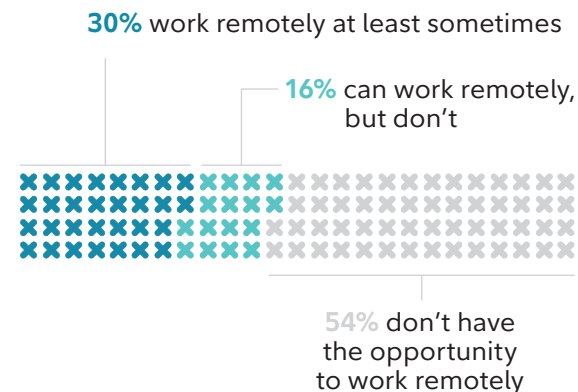
New research from Fidelity illustrates some of the ups and downs: People who take advantage of remote work are more likely to say they're happy at work. They also score higher on their overall well-being, and they rate their diet as healthier. But they also sit more and get less light physical activity than those who don't work remotely.<sup>1</sup> Sound familiar?

Whether you're working at home full-time or just occasionally, you want to give your best when you're "at work." We have some tips from people who have worked at home:

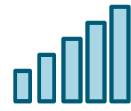


## Working from home? You're far from alone

Among workers today:<sup>1</sup>



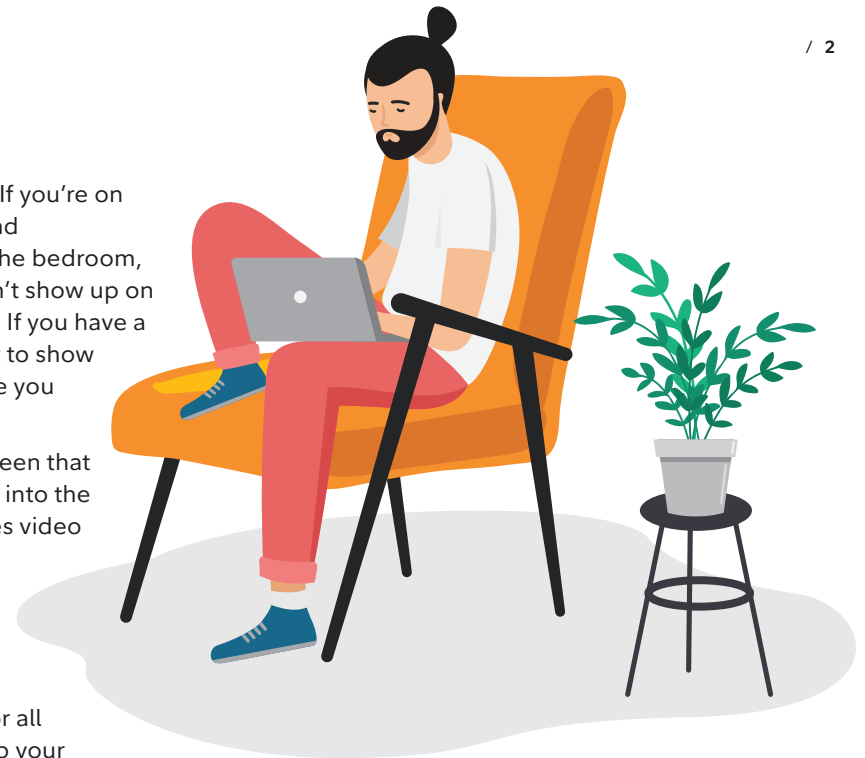
## Work effectively



You want to feel focused and productive, and you want your colleagues to see you as engaged and professional. To that end:

- **Invest in a fast internet connection**, especially if you have video calls. A good connection looks more professional. You don't want to be the one who's always derailing meetings. Close down large software and competing virtual meeting programs while on video calls to minimize glitches.
- **Communicate.** Don't assume your manager or your team knows what you're doing. Work out loud when you can, sharing your progress with your team as you go. And if you don't send your boss regular updates, that's a good idea too.
- **Be disciplined in your work habits.** This means keeping a regular schedule and being available when your colleagues need you. For some people, being disciplined about work also means dressing professionally every day.
- **Set up an "office."** You don't have to have a separate room devoted to work, but it can be helpful to have a dedicated space that you think of as where you "go to work." (The jokes about your "tough commute" will never get old.) If you don't have a room you can use, carve out a distraction-free zone where you can get some privacy, like the corner of a bedroom where you can close the door.

- **Be aware of your surroundings.** If you're on video, try to keep your background uncluttered. If you're working in the bedroom, angle your desk so the bed doesn't show up on video — especially if it's unmade. If you have a window behind you, you're going to show up as a dark silhouette, so be sure you have some light on your face.
- **Know your audience.** We've all seen that video where the toddler wanders into the room while dad is on a high-stakes video call. There are times when it's perfectly fine for a child or pet to make an appearance (in fact, at times this can help build important personal relationships with close team members). But for all those other times, be sure to keep your office door closed — and securely latched. And keep in mind, the mute button is your friend



## Make social connections



Having close friends at work is important to both your job satisfaction and productivity. Building those relationships can be harder at a distance, so:

- **Get personal.** Remote meetings don't have to be 100% transactional. When appropriate, take time to ask about your colleagues' lives or share something personal to break the ice. To form closer relationships, consider taking walk-and-talk meetings or scheduling virtual coffee or lunch over video. If you can get into the office occasionally, schedule casual in-person meet-ups where you can talk anything-but-shop.
- **Create a virtual watercooler.** This is part of building personal relationships. When you're at home, you miss out on those casual, drive-by encounters where you chat about work, TV shows, or something cool you're reading. These days, you can create a virtual watercooler through common persistent chat software like Slack or Microsoft Teams. Start a watercooler channel where you share links, observations, personal stories.
- **Raise your hand.** Sometimes it can feel like it's "out of sight, out of mind" when you're working at home. To maintain your profile, get involved wherever you can, including Employee Resource Groups or special projects. Our research shows people who volunteer do better in all aspects of their well-being, including work, health, money and life in general.



## Stay healthy

When it comes to health, you'll want to lean into the good things — the flexibility to take more time for yourself, get some exercise, and eat healthy.

- **Set boundaries between your work and life.** One of the bad raps working at home gets is that your workday bleeds into the rest of your life. It certainly can do that, but working from home doesn't mean you have to work all the time when you're at home. Step away from your computer at the same time every day, when others are heading out on their commute home.
- **Get up and move.** Without a commute to get you moving in the morning and the evening, it's too easy to be sedentary all day. Use what would have been your commute time to get some exercise, or go out and walk for 30 minutes at lunchtime.
- **Don't work too close to the fridge.** You want to get up from your desk regularly throughout the day ... but not to walk to the kitchen every time. This is a case in which "out of sight, out of mind" is probably a good thing.
- **Relax and let your work speak for itself.** If you are getting your work done and doing a good job, there's no need to worry. You can step away to refresh your coffee or make lunch without worrying that someone will think you're shirking your responsibility. You wouldn't be working from home if your manager didn't trust you. Don't betray that trust, but don't feel like you have to be chained to your desk to keep proving you deserve it.

## Tips for remote managers

Managers can be remote too. You might not even be working from home; you might just be the only person on your team in your location. Most of the same tips apply, especially when it comes to communicating and building personal rapport. In addition:

- Set clear expectations, not just for work product, but also for how you will communicate with one another.
- Meet in person on a regular basis.
- Make sure your remote employees feel like part of the team.
- Focus on meeting goals, rather than how the goals are met. You won't have insight into your team's every working moment, so focus on their output.



<sup>1</sup> Fidelity Investments Employee Value of Benefits Research online survey of 9,465 active Fidelity 401(k) and 403(b) participants from across the United States. The survey was conducted by Health Solutions Thought Leadership in October 2019.

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