The Key to Work at Home: Adaptability

For many decades now, companies had work at home or telecommuting programs and policies. Oftentimes, management and employees utilized these arrangements on a temporary basis for a range of reasons: health-related circumstances to impacts from natural disasters. In light of shifts in business models, changes in the economic landscape, and the emergence of unpredictable situations (such as COVID-19), work at home / remote-work has become more prevalent, and for some companies, has evolved to be part of an organizational structure.

When these programs are on a temporary or part-time basis, it is seen as a business perk. When the job turns into a full-time, permanent remote-work scenario, it can be a challenge rather than a perk.

The good of working remotely:
• Schedule flexibility

• No commuting headaches

• Freedom to work anywhere

• Better work / life balance

• More family and personal time

The not-so-good of working remotely:
• Lack of impromptu communication and collaboration

• Time zone related issues for coordination and teamwork

• Isolationism – loss of a sense of "community"

• Difficulty in unplugging work related thoughts and tasks

• Home environment distractions

Navigating through this new workplace, while balancing productivity with the need to maintain a sense of well-being, requires some new "workday" habits. The important thing to bear in mind is to be active in turning the "not-so-good" aspects of working remotely into positive ones.

Create a new work system
Not going into a company office provides work freedom in many ways. On the other hand, it also eliminates certain physical and mental structures that helped people be more organized, set priorities, and communicate easily around tasks and assignments. Working remotely therefore necessitates the creation of these structures at home to promote productivity.

A dedicated area specifically for work will establish not only a physical structure but a mental on as well. Customizing the space with office equipment and work-related items promotes a tangible and mental separation of work-time and home-life. Visually, it also helps in the mental preparedness for work. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, it may be difficult to "leave the office" behind even if you have a physical area only for work. It is much easier to mentally disconnect from work when a person can actually leave an office building.

Finding ways to unplug from work with a home office also requires developing another new habit. Just as it is necessary to set up a specific work space, it is equally as important to establish a different time management system; that is, a daily framework which takes into account work expectations as well as personal well-being. This means letting go of an 8-hour workday concept. With a work at home schedule, knowing what assignments needs to be done and by when will help put some structure to your work pace. In order to stay productive, the pace should also include regular breaks. Incorporating scheduled down-time and work-

outs not only aids in maintaining alertness and overall well-being, but it helps in balancing a healthy work life with a positive home life.

Stay connected
Bouts of isolationism and loneliness are common feelings when working remotely. Being physically apart from co-workers and team members contributes to those emotions. As such, some extra effort is needed in this new "workday" situation to stay connected and to foster work relationships. It is vital to instill in a daily framework the habit of scheduling virtual people time. Some examples of online relationship building activities are regular "coffee breaks" or after work "happy hour" with co-workers; "informal drop-ins" with your manager; "chit chat" time added to each meeting agenda; and lunch and learn programs. Scheduling times to touch base with co-workers, whether it is for socializing or for team discussions, as well as with managers may feel awkward at first, but once scheduling becomes a habit and a part of the daily framework, it takes on a rhythmic quality and thereby will feel more fluid.

Maintain professionalism
Working at home provides a level of coziness which a building office cannot. While the home situation is more relaxed, it is still important to stay professional during video conferences. These are business meetings and should be taken seriously just as if you were sitting in an office conference room. Demonstrating credibility starts with your appearance. Being business casual does not mean wearing something that is better suited for the gym. Additionally, the background of the room should be unassuming. The presence of a menagerie of things will distract the viewers; they tend to focus on these items rather than on what you are saying. Since virtual meetings replace actual face time, your words and how you present yourself become critical in engendering respect and in showcasing your knowledge. Actualizing professional standards not just with the work deliverables but also during video conferences are the elements that can elevate a person's reputation and career.

Business models along with the organizational structure will continue to evolve due to internal and external forces. Work at home is likely to be a significant part of that change and perhaps even be the business norm. How a person navigates through this change and be successful in the organization will depend on how well that person can learn to adapt and work remotely in a constructive way. Finding the right balance between taking care of work priorities with personal wellness needs is the key to a happy and healthy work at home situation.

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