

## **Working From Home Tips for People Leaders**

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**Managing a team while you work from home is all about self-management, and while as a Leader you are already an expert at this, we've compiled 5 classic tips to help you support your team, with more to come:**

**#1. Take what works for you and bring it home – try to follow your on-site work routine as much as you can.**

**#2 Keep Track of Your Tolerance and Stress – more than ever, take care and stay calm.**

**#3 Work-Life Balance Equals Detachment, Mastery, Relaxation & Control – don't let work bleed into your whole week**

**#4 Take Yours and Others Home Context Into Account – tips for helping your team to cope at home**

**Tip #5 Workstation Set up & Personal Hygiene – getting the basics right for long haul working at home.**

It's no surprise that working from home requires a different approach to working onsite. While team meetings, manager discussions, colleague's comments and questions keep us engaged, alert and on track on those days we might not be feeling up for it, when we are working from home, it can also be hard to stay focussed without others around us.

If you don't already have Working From Home Guidelines in place, now is the time to work with your leaders/People team to develop them – make sure they outline the key things you to want to think about and discuss with your team and In the coming months, we will all learn a lot more about how to work from home successfully. What we already know, however, is it's all about self-management.

As a People Manager, you are already an expert at self-management, however in order to lead your team who's also working from home we encourage you to actively focus on what works and what doesn't so that you can help your staff problem solve their challenges. To assist, we have put together 5 classic tips for working from home as well as some suggestions to help you reflect on your experiences and to help your team manage certain situations.

You might be interested to know that Unplugging from work (detaching – see below), Loneliness, Collaborating and Communicating, Distractions from Home and Working in Different Timezones are typically the top 5 biggest struggles of working from home, but we figure there are more, as well as there are going to be some amazing and creative ways to address these struggles as we continue on being calm and connected! So as you learn more about this experience, we ask you to share your tips and stories with us and your colleagues.

## **Classic Tip #1 Take what works for you at work and bring it home**

The best way to translate your onsite working rhythm to your home environment is to make a list of the things you typically do on any given day and across the week and try to follow that routine as close as possible at home.

- While you might choose to start work earlier than you normally do because you don't have the commute, try to reflect this change at the other end of your day.
- If you typically met a colleague/s for a coffee or brief discussion Friday morning, consider doing this virtually.
- If you are a list maker, keep making those lists!

Although some 'working from home' tips encourage you to use your breaks or lunch time to do household chores or do your weekly shopping, only introduce these activities if they add to your sense of control. If they don't add real value to your sense of daily satisfaction, keep them for after hours. Finally, unless you normally work on the weekends as part of your employment contract, leave the weekend for non-work-related activities.

## **Classic Tip #2 Keeping Track of Your Tolerance and Stress**

We all have a window of tolerance – and that window might be wide for some things (e.g., team members missing meetings) and narrow for others (team members missing deadlines). However, add that to the things at home that frustrate you, along with the repetitive context of working from home and it's no surprise your overall tolerance window is going to be challenged at one point or another.

On the other hand, our stress levels ebb and flow across the day/week, depending on what we are needing to get done or cope with and our resources to achieve this.

Unfortunately, when we combine a high level of stress within a context where we have a default narrow window of tolerance, our ability to stay calm and not react in a negative way is compromised.

As the context around COVID-19 continues, you and your team's window of tolerance is likely to narrow around a range of issues including the ability to meet targets and deadlines, collaborate on strategic requirements, even individual ways of doing things. These issues have probably always caused challenges in the past, but when you are working remotely, your ability to lead your team, have a honest conversation with a person or pull the team aside for some focussed conversation will be limited.

So now is the time to know where your window of tolerance is narrow and identify what you can do to increase that window slightly. Ask yourself "At the end of the day, is this really important?", "What are the risks if I am more tolerant?", "How more tolerant am I willing to be?", and finally "Is there some-one I can check in with to test my thinking on this?"

Additionally, you can help by keeping track of your stress levels across the day by rating it across a continuum of 1-10, where '10' reflects significant stress and '1' suggests nil stress levels. If you have a rating of 6 or above, you are likely to react negatively towards others and things that frustrate you. Breathe, take a moment or use some of your other coping skills to try and get your stress rating down a bit or, at the very least, know your stress triggers and keep this in mind when addressing a 'narrow window of tolerance' issue.

### **Classic Tip #3 Work-Life Balance Equals Detachment, Mastery, Relaxation & Control**

The concept of Work-Life Balance may feel like it's been turned upside down for now. With the need to self-isolate for most of the week comes apparent ample time for the 'Life' component! Of course, while this may be true for some of your team, other's will struggle to find any 'down' time.

It's useful though to consider how you might apply what we know about achieving work-life balance when best managing your daily or weekly rhythm and wellbeing.

Professor of Work and Organisational Psychology, Sabine Sonnentag, has dedicated much of her academic life to understanding the drivers of work-life balance. While you can only know that you have achieved this balance after the fact (e.g., by reviewing the week that's gone by), if you have been doing something in each of the following 4 boxes you are likely to be doing well.

*Detachment* – taking time to detach from work and from the news and impact of COVID-19 helps restore your emotional and physical energy. On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is a hearty YES how are your answers on the following questions?

- I forget about work/COVID-19
- I distance myself from work/COVID-19
- I get a break from the demands of work/COVID-19

*Mastery* – this is your ability to engross yourself in a task, skill or ability that is not about work or about knowing all that there is to know about COVID-19. Without the usual pressures of performing well at work, mastery of a personal interest delivers an improved sense of competence and self-efficacy. On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is a hearty YES how are your answers on the following questions?

- I learn new things that are not about work/COVID-19
- I do things that challenge me that are not about work/COVID-19
- I do something that broadens my horizons that is not about work/COVID-19

*Relaxation* – when we can relax we practice the ability to take a break from work/home pressures. The inability to relax has been linked to negative emotional coping and poor health. On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is a hearty YES how are your answers on the following questions?

- I kick back and relax
- I take time for leisure
- I do relaxing things

*Control* – our ability to influence what we do, when and how, whether that be at work or at home has a positive effect on our wellbeing. On a scale of 1-10, where 10 is a hearty YES how are your answers on the following questions?

- I feel I can decide for myself on what to do
- I take care of things the way I want them done
- I decide my own schedule

## Your Results?

If you found an area of your work/life that is challenged right now, consider one of the following tips:

For Detachment: Turn off your digital devices for chunks of time after work and on the weekends. Make it a personal/family agreement (or negotiation!). Remind yourself "My role right now is to take a break from 'all of this' so that I can go again refreshed and energised tomorrow/after today"

For Mastery: What did you enjoy doing a month ago, a year ago, or (if you need to) when you were a child? Can you re-introduce that task or skill into your life again? With everyone making a run for the hobby and sports stores, it might be difficult to access jigsaw puzzles, roller blades or macramé materials, so another option is to consider something new – like mastering origami, a complex card game (e.g., Bridge) or making bread.

For Pleasure: Yoga is a great chill out activity as is watching clouds. Minimal cost Apps like One Giant Mind help beginners achieve effortless meditation while the App CloudWatcher adds interest to your skygazing pursuits.

For Control: Use the ABCDE method of creating some control over your day, where A is #1 priority, B is #2 priority and C is #3 (nice to get done, but its OK if you don't) priority. D is #delegate to some-one else and E is #eliminate from your list today. Feel like making a list is the least of your worries, then practice 'Prefer' statements: "I would prefer it if I had some control of this situation, but it's OK, it will be all right". While you might not believe the statement is true, you are activating your coping brain simply by saying it.

## **Classic Tip #4 Take Yours and Others Home Context Into Account**

Everyone's home context will have its challenges over the coming months, and it will help you to not only understand your own but those of your team and colleagues. This applies whether your team members are working from home or self-isolating after work.

If you feel comfortable, we encourage you to privately ask up front and early on about each of your team members' home situation. Do they live alone, with housemates, a partner, parents, their family, and even in which context – an apartment, house with garden, in a friendly street or on a rural property. This will help you to be in their shoes, suggest practical or relevant strategies if they need help and, possibly, forecast some of their future issues or risks. We encourage you to have this conversation by sharing your own situation first, taking care not to sugar-coat or overly dramatize your situation. In the words of Social Researcher, Professor Brené Brown, vulnerability can be a powerful leadership resource.

Once you know a bit more about your team members' living situation, here are some tips for you to share as appropriate or use yourself. Quite a few are relevant regardless of situation as well and for now we will look at Living Alone, Living in a Shared Household and Living in a young-children family home.

*Living Alone, in an Apartment?* This is possibly one of the most challenging situations your people may face, especially if it is a studio apartment.

- Can their desk be set up in a space that faces a window and, if possible, away from their bed (to help with sleep hygiene) as a priority?

- Can they use material, a scarf, sheet to cover their desk when they are not working?
- If they have a balcony or window, can they interact or wave to others nearby?
- Are they face timing/skyping friends or family for virtual coffee/drinks catch ups/meal times/inhouse exercising?
- Are they getting out of their apartment at least once a day, and if so, can they meet with a friend or apartment neighbour for a 1.5 metre distanced walk around the block, run, even if they do not converse?
- What did they previously enjoy about living on their own? Perhaps they have forgotten about this or have lost the ritual in their daily/weekly lives and all the change. Are they able to share pictures or film of themselves doing that thing again (e.g., playing their guitar, dancing, enjoying the quiet whilst reading, sharing how they have their apartment set up for working at home)?
- Do they have an online/free-to-air program that they can watch in tandem with friends or family – using texting/social media to share their comments, dissect characters and story, create plot changes or alternatives?
- Can they simply facetime/skype in a friend or a colleague for companionship whilst working or eating; developing a Work and Non-Work Buddy to get them through this time?
- Do they like writing or journaling – can they create a personal Mastery goal of capturing their time in isolation or sending emails to loved ones. If they are somewhat interested but don't know where or how to start, there are plenty of sites that will help, but in short, the 4 key principles are: 1) start by writing for 5 mins only without regard to content, just write whatever is on your mind, a moment in your day, or describe something you see; 2) don't worry about grammar, spelling or even making a sentence – you can use bullet points if you like; 3) don't worry if you don't enjoy it at first. It takes time for a new activity to become a ritual, and even longer for that ritual to become a habit. Just agree to give it a try for 4 days across one week and then see how you feel; 4) don't read what you have written until that first week is up, then if you want to, review what you have done with the intention of self-kindness and curiosity

*Living in a Shared House?* Depending on how well your team member gets on with their house mates, this situation may be loads of fun, deliver plenty of angst, or be unsettling especially if not all housemates are employed etc.

- As above, are they able to work/have a place for themselves that they enjoy and can either look out a window or face away from their bed?
- Can they review their household arrangements or schedules to give each member some time in the shared spaces alone, create house-date nights, share shopping, ensure housework/hygiene is meeting COVID-19 standards, make sure electricity and other essential services/equipment is being used relatively fairly, create silly mini-films or photos to share with friends about their in-house antics or context?
- Are they talking/working together about things like tenancy requirements, giving notice to each other/the landlord about moving out or not being able to pay the rent or bills on time especially if work and income is uncertain? Note the Federal Governments hold on tenants being able to be evicted and encourage your team members to know their COVID-19 rights
- Can they instigate 'COVID-19 & Other Negative Stuff free nights' or lunch times if they are all working from home to help with detachment from negative information

*Living in a Young Person Family Home?* Depending on how young the children are at home, working and self-isolating in this context might just be the busiest of all scenarios, so unlike the situations above, the challenge here is getting some time to chill out and keep the parental relationship humming.

- Third Space it! Dr Adam Spencer termed the concept '3<sup>rd</sup> Space' to highlight the wellbeing benefit of creating a physical, emotional or time space between one

important context and another. It's typically used to create some downtime between work and home, but also equally applies between work from home and engaging with home life, having time for self and time for the family, and between time for the family and time with your partner. 3<sup>rd</sup> Spacing can simply mean having a 'work' outfit that you wear during the work day and another one that you change into at the end of the day, taking a walk around the block to distinguish between time on a videoconference and time cooking for the family, or sitting in your car for 5 minutes after you have done the shopping before heading back inside.

- Can you make a schedule for you and your partner and children to quarantine blocks of time to meet your individual and collective needs? It is probably asking too much for your children, whatever their age, to distract themselves or keep focussed on school work throughout the day, so agreeing to a set time where you go for a family walk or share blocks when one of you can be left alone and not distracted while the other person is more available to help or umpire inhouse conflict or issues.
- Take it Outside. Can you introduce a new family shared hobby at this time? Maybe get a Bee Hotel, plant some seeds in little seedling boxes, give your children space to nurture some plants or encourage them to learn about a plant species or cloud type to share. Of course not all children are willingly engage in parent suggested activities, so consider some of the following cool things young people are doing right now, like using the HouseParty App to help your children walk with their friends virtually, Scavenger Hunt Apps or Websites (downloadable for real time fun with external goals), or finding great outdoor photos to upload to websites like [createjigsawpuzzles.com](http://createjigsawpuzzles.com) which for a relatively small fee will give you some jig saw puzzles to solve as a family

### **Classic Tip #5 Workstation Set up & Personal Hygiene**

Having WFH Guidelines give you clear direction on how to set up your desk or standing desk but like those 1980's photos of crazy occupational health and safety photos of people hanging by their knuckles whilst painting a roof, a picture tells a thousand tales. First, set your workstation like you think you are a champion of ergonomic principles, creativity and posture... then take a photo! What does it look like? What can you improve? While plastic cake containers, coffee books and bathroom towels are getting a rework to elevate your desk top. a quick trip to an office stationery shop might create a more professional and ergonomic tone for a minimal, likely to be tax deductible outlay. It might be worth a small investment to make it feel more professional and ergonomically sound. Don't forget to clear and clean your surfaces daily or every other day and clean your mouse and keyboard at least weekly with a clean, lint-free microfibre close that has been lightly dampened with water only, avoiding getting moisture in any of the openings. Avoid spraying Glen 20, your favourite Spray and Wipe Antibacterial aerosol or even water directly on any IT surface. To remove debris from your keyboard, either use a can of compressed air or turn it over and very gently tap the keyboard against your desk.