10 Must-Have Productivity and Life Hacks for WFH

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At the end of every working day, I turn the sign on my home office door from “open” to “closed,” and then walk down the hall and go fix myself dinner.

I have worked from home for nearly 15 years now. And now, due to the health crisis, I’m less alone in that experience than ever before. While working from home can sound idyllic — cue the visions of working in pajamas all day long — it has its own unique challenges that are sometimes hard to anticipate.

There are two big challenges for most people who work from home.

One is staying productive.

The other is not letting your work take over your entire life.

In the 15 years that I’ve worked from home, I’ve developed an arsenal of 10 hacks that helps me conquer both of these challenges… most of the time. I’ve taught these hacks to many other people in my consulting practice, and they just work!

No system is perfect, but I find that these strategies help be extremely productive working from home while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Guard your time

There is a strange thing that happens when people find out that you don’t go into the office every day. They start to invite you to stuff during the day when you are supposed to be working.

I’ve met a few people that can truly live a flexible lifestyle and not have set work hours, but most people who work from home need to make sure they aren’t saying yes to things that eat into their work time.

Live by your calendar

This ties into the last tip, but is slightly different. Schedule everything on your calendar. I use Google calendar, but you can use Apple Calendar, Outlook calendar, etc. Heck, I know a few people who still use pen and paper calendars.

The key is to block out time for whatever you have on your schedule. If you are working from 8 to 5 with an hour for lunch, put that in. If you are working out 3 times a week, put that in.

Letting your calendar determine what you are doing at any particular time takes a lot of decision making off your shoulders and makes most people far more productive.

Even though I’m self-employed and own my own business, I still have a boss: my calendar.

Get out of your house

When you work from home getting out of your house can often seem like just too much effort. The errands you would usually run on the way home from the office often get put off.

But getting out of your house is important for most people to

keep their productivity levels up.

Take a walk. Sit on your porch with your laptop and get some sun. Do something that you enjoy outside of the four walls of your home.

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Delineate home time and work time

In the intro to this article, I talked about the sign I have on the door of my home office. It says “open” on one side and “closed” on the other. When I’m working I set it to open and when I’m not I set it to closed. You can get an open/closed sign at the local office store. As silly as this sounds… it really works if you commit to yourself that you will not work once the sign says closed.

When you work from home it’s easy to want to look productive and to let your work time bleed into your home life. But the next thing you know you’re burning the midnight oil, wondering where the day went.

Working from home, I’ve found I’m much more productive and happy when I have clear boundaries between work life and home life.

Focus on the task at hand

This one took me a long time to master. When you work at home your environment can be much more distracting than when you work at an office. If you want to enjoy your work and not be stressed out all the time, it’s important to focus on the task you are doing and then move onto something else.

Focus is a skill that can be learned and it is one that is well worth learning.

Get website blocking software

Most people who work from home work on their computers. It’s very tempting to want to quickly check Facebook, watch a YouTube video, or read a quick news story. Before you know it that quick check turns into 20 minutes, 30 minutes, or more. Of course, this doesn’t help you get work done, impress your boss, or make you money.

If you are routinely drawn to browsing the web instead of working, then you should seriously consider getting one of the many website blocking programs that are on the market. There are many extensions for Chrome that work well. I personally like StayFocused for its flexibility.

Get dressed for real

While working in your PJs all day is the fantasy that many people dream about, the reality is that for most people I know, getting dressed as if you are going to work can help a great deal with being in the right frame of mind to work.

I find that if I look presentable I work harder and smarter than if I’m sitting around in pajamas.

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Track your time

It’s VERY easy to waste time when you are working from home. One thing that really helps is using a time tracking app. I’ve found that the simple act of recording the amount of time you spend on every task can help add an element of accountability to where you’re spending your time and help you be far more productive.

I like the Toggle chrome extension. It’s easy to use and gets

the job done.

Get up and move

Slouching over a monitor all day is terrible for your back and your body. Most people do better if they take a few minutes every few hours to take a short walk or squeeze in a quick chore around the house.

If you're using a productivity system like the Pomodoro Technique then this is automatically built into your schedule. I also have my Apple Watch remind me to stand up and take a break ten minutes before every hour.

Take time for joy

Make sure when you are scheduling your calendar that you include things in it that bring you joy. That might be cooking a nice dinner, doing a craft project, or visiting with the ones you love.

All work and no play is no good for anyone. Scheduling in joy will give you something to look forward to and help recharge your batteries so you can be productive when you get back to work.

As I mentioned earlier, the calendar is my boss; luckily my boss demands that I do things that bring me joy.

Whether you've been working from home for years or, like many people, are still adjusting to working from home any of these tips can help you be more productive, create work-life boundaries when working from home, and take time to enjoy life. Try one, two, or all ten and see which ones work for you.

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