# THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO
# REMOTE WORK

## Secrets to Thriving When You're Not in the Office

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# The New Normal

Twenty years ago, only a very, very small percentage of people worked remotely. Of course, twenty years ago we all had dial-up internet and America Online was top dog. To say that a lot has changed since then is an understatement.

Now we have broadband internet, smartphones, and videoconferencing. We store files in the cloud, collaborate with each other in real-time, and discuss projects over Slack. The way we work has fundamentally changed.

The result is that it's much easier to work from home, which large numbers of people now do. Check out these statistics:

- 43% of Americans work from home on occasion. Since the pandemic nearly a 1/3 say they plan to continue.

- 5.2% of Americans work from home full-time.

- 82% of professionals would like to work from home once a week.

- 52% of professionals desire to work from home a minimum of three days per week.

In 2020, millions of people around the world were forced to work from home for the first time during the COVID-19 crisis. What many people don't realize, however, is that working remotely is very different than working in an office.

Many of the rhythms and routines that help you thrive in the office don't work as well at home. You can't just pop into someone's office for a conversation. You can watch Netflix without fear that your boss will suddenly show up. Your kids can waltz into your office at any time.

**If you're going to thrive as a remote worker, it's important to learn a new set of skills and strategies, such as:**

- Being productive in a totally different environment than you're used to

- Knowing what things to focus on and what to let go

In this guide, we're going to give you proven tips, tactics, and strategies that will help you work effectively from home.

Ready? Let's dive in.
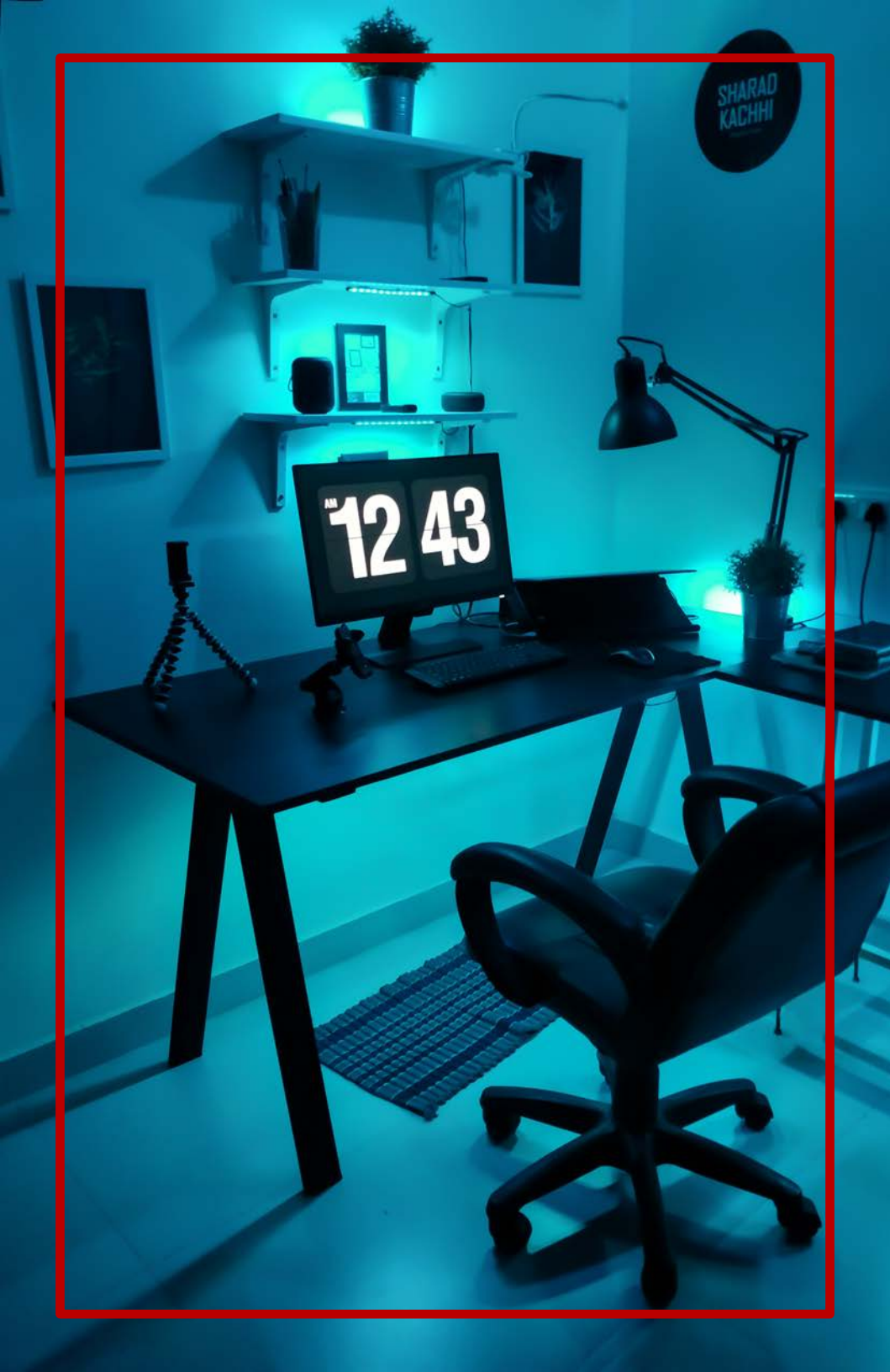
# Avoid Doing These Things

Before we talk about things you should do, let's talk about a few things you should avoid when it comes to remote work.

## Avoid: Trying to Prove You're Always Working

When you work in an office, it's easy for your boss to see that you're working. They know when you're in the office and when you're not.

Because this isn't the case with remote work, you may feel the need to prove to your boss that you're working by immediately answering every message that comes your way.

**The issue with this is that it prevents you from being able to focus for extended periods of time, limiting the amount of work that you actually get done.** A better alternative is to let your work speak for itself. If you consistently produce great work, your boss will be totally satisfied.

## Avoid: Always Being Available

Another big temptation with remote work is feeling like you always need to be available to your boss and coworkers. You feel obligated to respond to messages even if they come in during non-work hours. As a result, you don't really have much downtime. Even when you're not working, you still keep an eye on your phone.

As much as possible, try to avoid responding to messages when you're not working. Sure, there are exceptions to this. **But the more you respond during off hours, the more you train others to always expect that behavior from you.**

Let everyone know when you'll be working and only get back to people during those hours. If necessary, create an autoreply that tells people when you'll get back to them.

## Avoid: Being Hard on Yourself

If you're new to remote work, it's especially important to cut yourself some slack. Working from home is very different than working in an office, and it's going to take you some time to get

your bearings. There will be days when you aren't as productive as you want to be, and that's okay.

Over time, you'll get better at working from home. You'll start to find rhythms and routines that really work for you. You'll figure out how to be productive. In the meantime, don't be hard on yourself. Treat yourself with compassion.

# Stick to a Schedule

One of the great advantages of remote work is that you have more flexibility to set your schedule. You don't have to rush to get ready in the morning or deal with a long commute at the end of the day. You can sleep in a bit later if you want and have more time at home at the end of the day.

However, the absence of a defined schedule can also be a downfall. It can be tough to get motivated to get started. It's easy to forget to take breaks. Work time and downtime start to bleed together.

Dr. Thuy-vy Nguyen researches solitude and the effects it has on people. She says:

> *Usually our time and the structure of our day are influenced by other people. You're going to experience your day as lacking the normal structures that you usually have. People might have a hard time dealing with it. So one of the things that we found in our trying to understand solitude, is that time spent alone is better if it's structured.*

**To keep yourself on track, try to maintain a schedule as much as possible.**

Determine in advance:

- When you'll start work
- Break times
- Quitting time

Maintaining a predetermined schedule will add much needed structure to your day. It helps you organize your morning so that you start on time and provides a tangible finish line at the end of the day. It also prevents overwork, ensuring that you take needed breaks throughout the day.

Communicate your schedule to all the relevant parties, like your boss, family, friends, or anyone else who should know. Establish clear boundaries regarding when you will and won't be working. This keeps work and rest from bleeding into each other.

**Consider creating pre-work routines that will get you in a productive mindset.** Think about the things you do prior to starting work at the office. Maybe you listen to an audiobook during your commute. Maybe you make coffee or exercise.

Think about ways you can duplicate these routines at home.

**Google employees Kim Mok and Gabriel Manga [write](#):**

> *When you work in an office, the daily routine of getting ready and commuting helps your brain get ready for the day. When you're working remotely, you can create "start the day" triggers that get your head ready for work in a similar way, like exercising, reading the news, or making coffee.*

As tempting as it may be to spend all day working in your pajamas, take the time to actually get dressed. When you get dressed, it's a signal to your brain and body that you're transitioning out of relaxing and into work. This makes it easier to get started.

**It's essential to take breaks while working from home.** When you work in an office, your day tends to be broken up with meetings, conversations with coworkers, and other items. At home, many of these things don't exist. If you're not careful, you can end up working for hours without giving your mind a rest — a sure recipe for burnout.

Schedule activities that will refresh you mentally, like going for a walk, drinking coffee on your porch, or calling a friend. These things aren't time wasters. They actually make you more productive.

**It's also important to establish clearly defined boundaries about when you will and won't be working.** If your quitting time is 5:00 PM, do your best to completely quit. Don't use your smartphone to keep monitoring your email or Slack messages. If you don't have a clearly defined quitting time, work will quickly take over.

Your goal is to be fully present whatever you're doing. During work hours, you want to be able to focus on doing your job as much as possible. When work is over, you want to be able to give your time and attention to your family and friends.

You may want to experiment with your schedule a bit to find what works best for you. Some people are more productive when they start early in the morning. Others do better starting later in the day and working into the evening. There's no right way to schedule your day. You just need to

be available to your boss and coworkers for a chunk of time.

Obviously, you don't have to stick to your schedule 100%. If something important comes up, roll with it. If you need to work longer or end early, that's okay. That's the beauty of working from home. But a schedule is a powerful weapon in your productivity arsenal. Use it wisely.

# Create a Working Space

Similar to a defined schedule, a designated working space can help keep your work life and home life apart. When you enter your working space, you know that it's time to get down to business. When you leave, you know that it's time to relax.

**As much as possible, try to make your workspace feel separate from the rest of your living quarters.**

This doesn't mean you must have an entirely separate room to work in. If you live in a small home or apartment, that might not be possible. It simply means that you primarily use that space for working and not leisure.

Any area will do:

- A separate room
- A table in the corner of a room
- A closet
- A window nook

Choose an area of your home as a working space and try to use that space consistently for work.

The more you work in one area, the more your brain will associate that area with your job. As the association in your brain strengthens, entering your workspace will act as a trigger, signaling to your brain that it's time to work.

**Make your workspace as free from distractions as possible.** This probably means being separated from your family or roommates. As fun as it is to interact with them all day, they'll distract you and keep you from getting your work done.

If you can't physically separate yourself, using noise-cancelling headphones can also reduce distractions. Listening to relatively peaceful music or background noise can help you block out what's going on around you and focus on your work.

Some listening options to consider:

- Brain.fm
- Noisli
- myNoise
- Deep Focus on Spotify
- Ambient Deep Focus on Spotify

**It really helps if you can make your space comfortable.** Remember, you're going to be spending a fair amount of time there. If you're working in a dark and dingy spot, the thought of starting work will make you cringe.

Get a comfy chair and maybe put a few decorations around you. If you can, work in a well-lit area, preferably illuminated by natural light. Get creative with your space!

When the day is over, "close" your working space. Shut down any work-related items on your computer (browser tabs, email) and avoid opening them until the next day. Tidy up your space so that it's ready for tomorrow. Doing these things will help you mentally "leave" work so that it doesn't bleed into your down time.

As with your schedule, feel free to experiment with your work area. Try a few different locations to see what feels best. You don't have to work at a desk or table. You can sit in your favorite chair or on your back porch if the weather is right. The choice is yours.

# Use a Task List

One of the challenges of working from home is ensuring that you're doing the most important tasks related to your job. After all, you can't just pop over to your boss's office for a quick conversation and you probably have fewer meetings with your team.

Consistently maintaining a task list helps you focus the lion's share of your attention on the things that matter most. You also gain a sense of progress as you check items off your list.

**At the start of each day, take a few minutes to review the items on your list.** Rank your three most important tasks and then focus on getting those things done that day. Don't move on to your second most important task until you've completed your first. At the end of the day, you'll feel confident that you did what was most important.

In his book *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results*, Gary Keller writes:

> *Getting extraordinary results is all about creating a domino effect in your life.*

*Toppling dominoes is pretty straightforward. You line them up and tip over the first one...Highly successful people know this. So every day they line up their priorities anew, find the lead domino, and whack away at it until it falls.*

Regularly working from a task list helps you create a domino effect in your own life. When you make progress on your most important task, it has a ripple effect. **Success creates more success.**

There are a number of effective ways to keep a task list. Obviously, there's the old-fashioned pen and paper method. There are a number of planners that are specifically designed to help you identify and accomplish your most important tasks, including:

- Full Focus Planner
- Best Self Planner
- Bullet Journal

**If you want to maintain your list on your computer and smartphone, check out these apps:**

- Todoist
- Microsoft To Do

- [Omnifocus](#)
- [Google Tasks](#)
- [Things](#)

It may take you a while to find the task management solution that works best for you. Play around with different methods and apps until you determine what works best with the way you work.

If you simultaneously want to stay on top of your schedule and your task list, you may want to try using the Pomodoro technique.

It works like this:

- Identify your most important task.
- Set a timer for 25 minutes.
- Work on the task for 25 minutes (one Pomodoro session).
- Take a 5-minute break.
- After four Pomodoro sessions, take a 15-20-minute break.

By working in focused, undistracted bursts, you're able to make significant progress on your most important tasks. And because there are scheduled breaks, you're also able to give your brain a rest and restore your mental energy.

# Stay in Communication with Coworkers

Even though you're working from home, it's still essential to stay in touch with your boss and coworkers, especially if you're collaborating on projects. There needs to be regular communication regarding what everyone is working on, challenges people are facing, directives from your supervisor, and much more.

It's better to over-communicate than under-communicate. With remote work, there's an increased risk of miscommunication and misunderstanding. To keep this from happening, work hard to keep all the channels of communication open. Regularly let your boss and coworkers know what you're working on.

Your company may already have tools in place to keep everyone connected. If they don't, you may want to consider using the following.

## Chat Tools

There are times when you want to fire off a quick question to a coworker without getting into a full-fledged discussion. In these moments, chat applications are incredibly useful. They enable quick back-and-forth discussions. Some of the best chat apps are:

- Slack
- Chanty
- Rocket.chat
- Google Hangouts
- FlowDock

## Video Conferencing Tools

Video conferencing tools are essential for when you need to have a meeting but aren't in the office. Everyone can come together in a "room" and hash things out. Some of the most effective apps for video communication are:

- Zoom
- Skype
- Jitsi
- Google Hangouts Meet
- Microsoft Teams

There are also what are called "asynchronous" video communication tools. These tools allow a person to record themselves and share that video with others. A good example is when a person records their computer screen. Some of the best asynchronous video communication tools are:

- [Loom](#)
- [Screencastify](#)
- [OBS Studio](#)
- [ScreenFlow](#)

## Collaboration Tools

The best collaboration tools allow you and your coworkers to easily work on projects together. Changes can be easily made and tracked, and notes can be attached to any item. Some of the best collaboration tools are:

- [Office 365](#)
- [G Suite](#)
- [Zoho Workplace](#)

## Project Management Tools

Project management tools ensure that projects keep moving and that the right people work on the right tasks at the right times. The best project management tools allow tasks to be assigned, deadlines to be set, reminders to be sent, and more. Some of the best project management tools are:

- Asana
- Trello
- Wrike
- Basecamp
- Teamwork

## Be Consistent

Once you choose your tools, it's important to be consistent. If you constantly switch back and forth, everyone will get confused. Deadlines will be missed, different versions of the same thing will be produced, and many people will experience a lot of frustration. If you find that the tool you initially chose doesn't work for you and your team, switch to another one. Just ensure that everyone is on the same page regarding how things will be done.
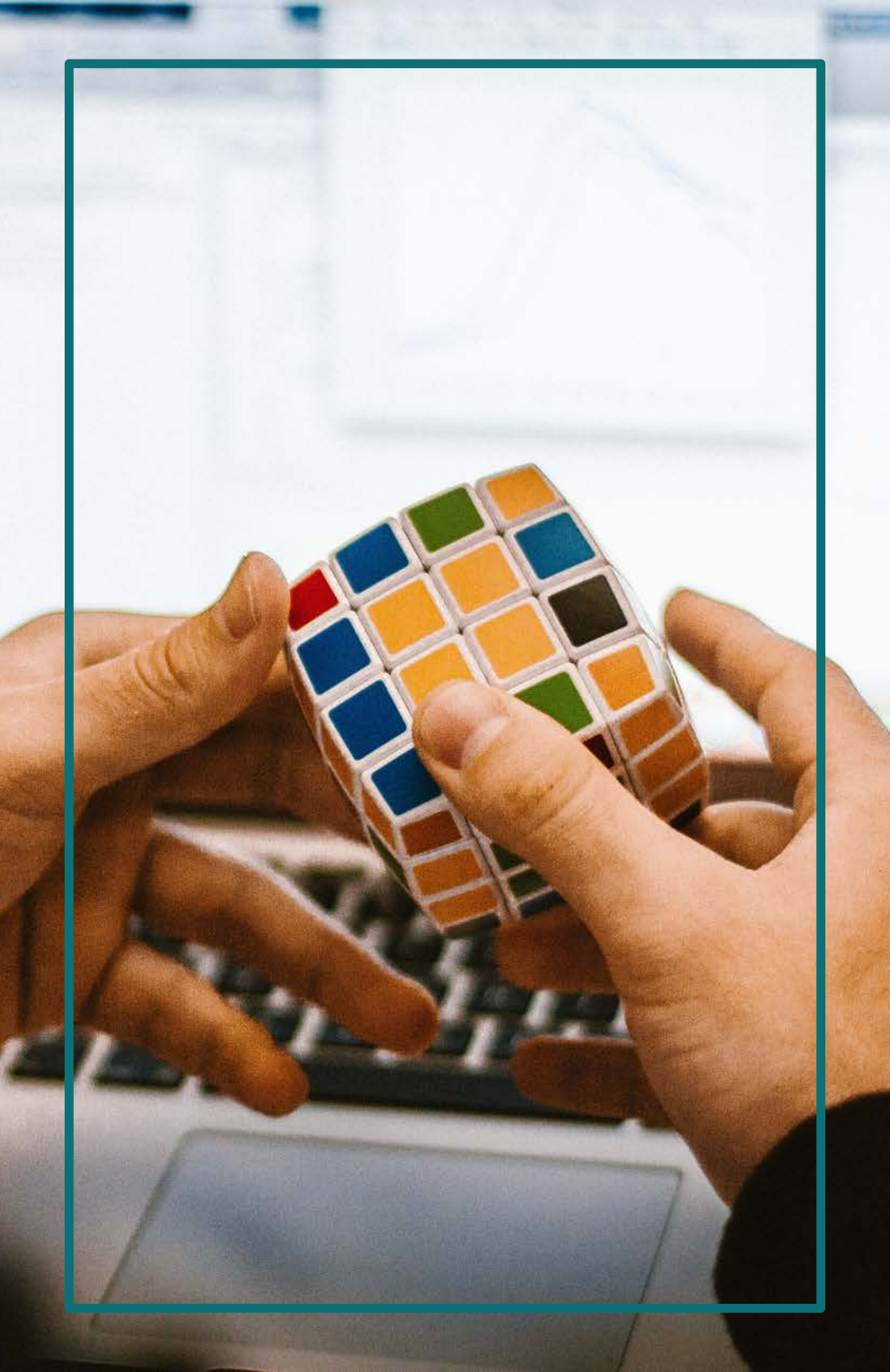
# Reduce Distractions

When you work from home, distractions are everywhere. Netflix is always available, you have easy access to your refrigerator, and your bed is close by. Combined, these distractions can make it really tough to get things done. The more you can reduce distractions, the more productive you'll be.

So how can you minimize the number of distractions you experience?

## Know Yourself

Most distractions arise internally. You get bored, hungry, or tired, and your mind wanders. If you know when these kinds of distractions tend to arise, you can plan accordingly.

For example, if you get hungry each morning around the same time, have a snack ready. If your energy starts to flag in the afternoon, schedule a brisk walk.

**When you anticipate your distractions in advance, you can devise ways to effectively combat them.**

## Shut Things Down

As wonderful as communication technology is, there are times when it becomes too much. An abundance of incoming emails, Slack messages, and texts makes it difficult to focus. Sometimes the best solution is to shut all of these things down for set periods of time.

Consider only checking your communication tools at set times during the day. Rather than having your inbox constantly open, only check and respond to emails for 20 minutes at the beginning and end of each day.

Instead of being constantly distracted by new messages, you can have extended times of focus.

## Block Distracting Websites

There are a million time-wasting distractions on the internet. With just a few clicks, you can read the news, watch YouTube videos, check your social media feeds, explore Reddit, and a

thousand other things. Even the most self-controlled person can find themselves tempted.

One of the most effective solutions is simply to block all the websites that tend to suck you in. Physically prevent yourself from wasting time. There are a number of apps that will prevent you from accessing sites you specify:

- Freedom
- RescueTime
- OffTime
- Flipd

In a sense, these apps force you to be productive. Because you don't have the option of browsing the internet, you're pushed to do things that really matter.

## Work During Your Peak Times

There are certain times of the day when you're more energized, focused, and productive. Maybe it's first thing in the morning or when you come back from lunch. Maybe it's toward the end of the day. **During these times, you have more willpower and are less prone to distraction.**

As much as possible, use your peak periods for your most important work. Don't waste these times on things like email, which you can do even when your brain is tired.

Writing for HubSpot, Erik Devaney says:

> *Nobody sprints through their work from morning to evening — your motivation will naturally ebb and flow throughout the day. When you're working from home, however, it's all the more important to know when those ebbs and flows will take place and plan your schedule around it.*
>
> *To capitalize on your most productive periods, save your harder tasks for when you know you'll be in the right headspace for them. Use slower points of the day to knock out the easier, logistical tasks that are also on your plate.*

If you work on your most important tasks during your best times in the day, you'll find yourself much more productive.
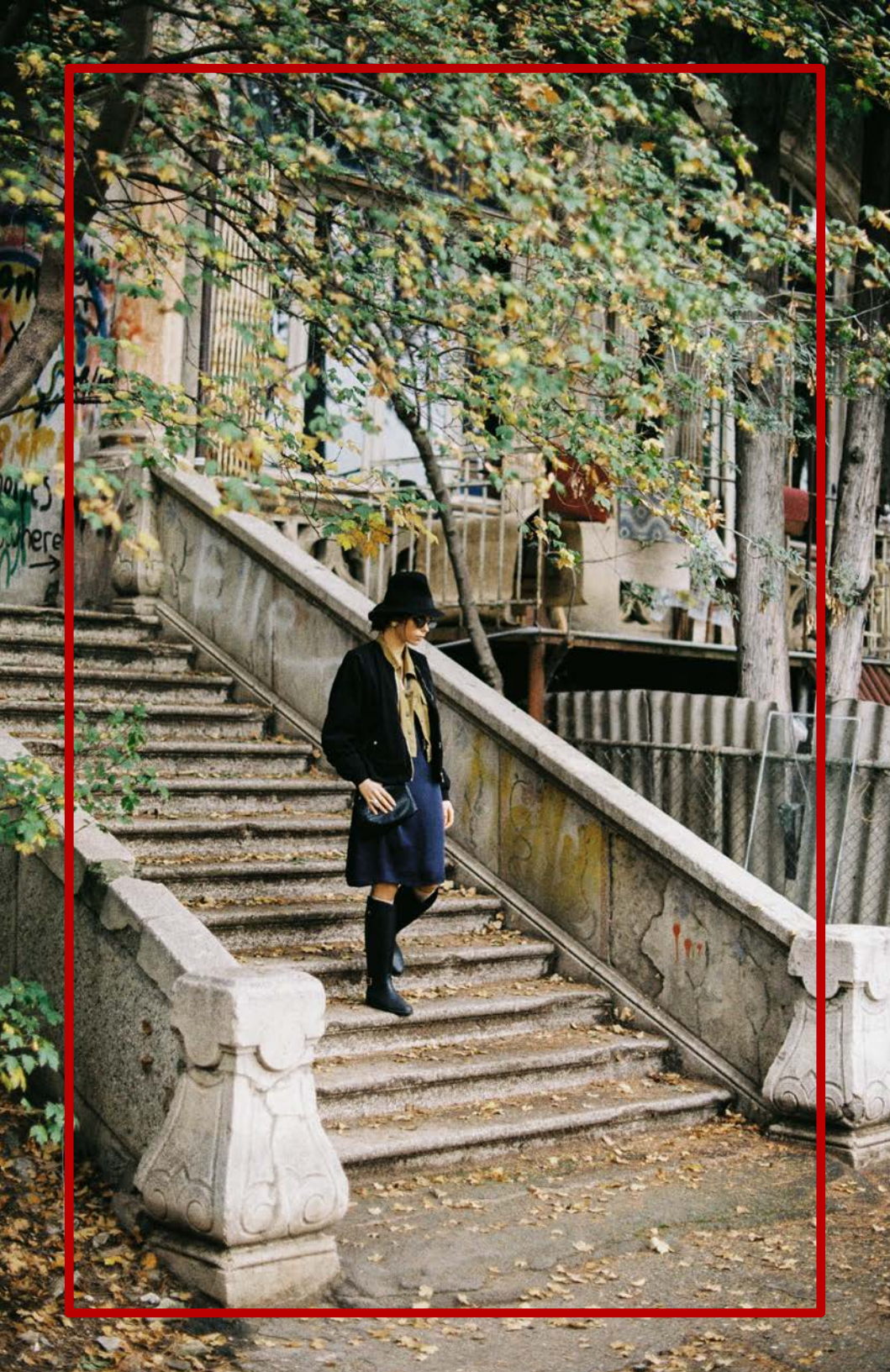
# Get Moving

When you work from home, you're in one location much more than normal. You don't have a commute and all your meetings are done virtually. If you don't change things up, you'll probably find yourself feeling pretty cooped up after a few days.

To combat claustrophobia, **try to get outside each day.** You don't have to go deep into the woods or anything like that. Simply get out in the sunshine and fresh air for a while.

Simple outdoor activities you can do include:

- Walking
- Biking
- Playing a sport like basketball
- Fishing
- Picnic
- Garden

The benefits of being outside are well documented. It increases energy levels, reduces pain, boosts your immune system, increases Vitamin D levels, and much more. It also helps

you to clear your mind, enabling you to work more productively and efficiently.

**In addition to just getting outside, try to exercise several times per week.** When you work from home, you tend to move less and eat more, which is a recipe for weight gain. Consistent exercise helps you keep the pounds off and increases your overall sense of well-being.

If you don't have easy access to exercise equipment, there are a number of apps that will provide you with guided workouts, such as:

- The Nike Training Club app offers more than 190 different workouts, all for free.

- If you use a Fitbit, consider using the Fitbit Coach app, which recommends workouts based on your activity.

- If you're pressed for time, the 7 Minute Workout app guides you through a quick cycle of proven exercises.

When it comes to going outside and getting exercise, **the key is consistency.** You'll feel better if you exercise 20 minutes each day instead of once a week for an hour.
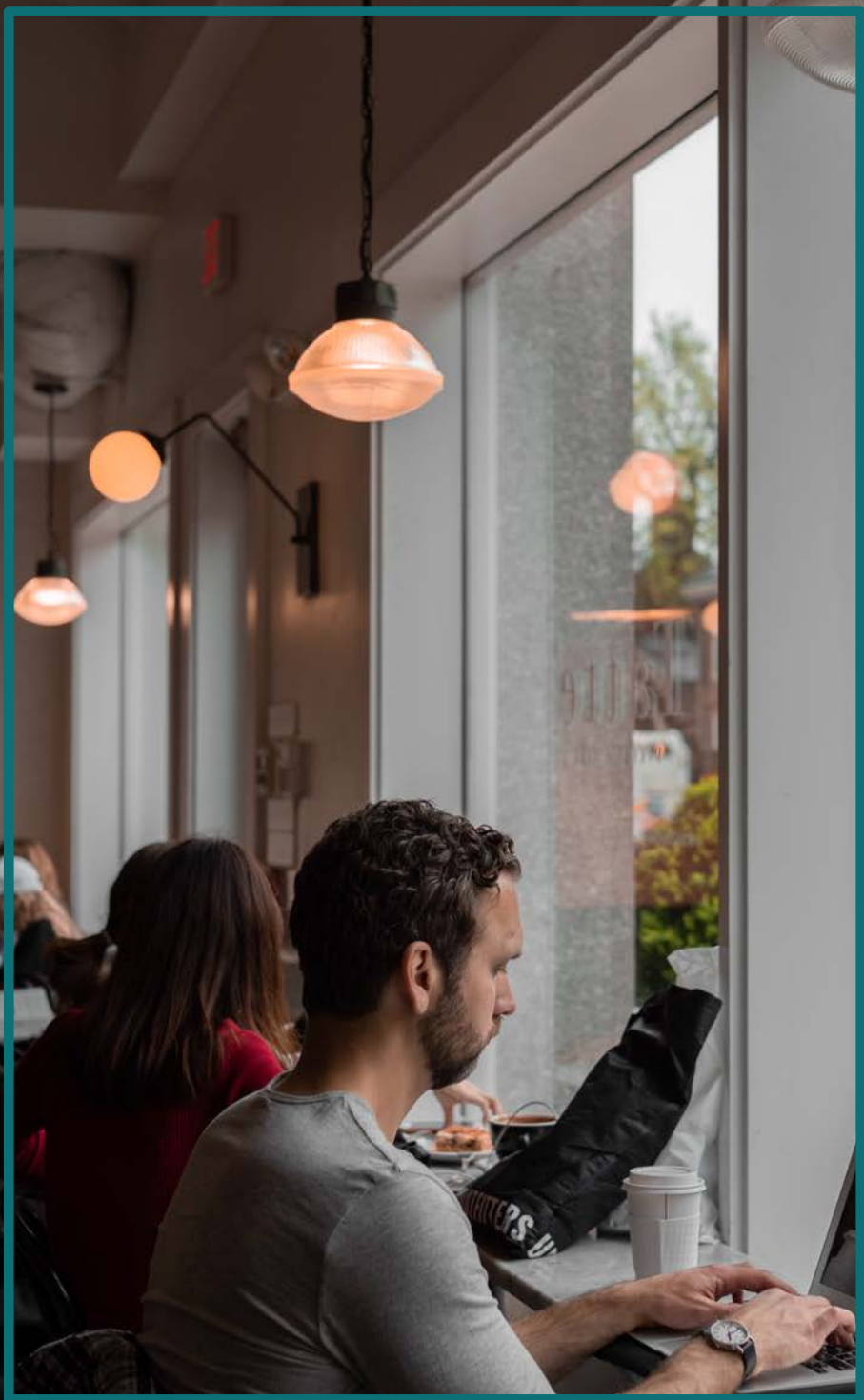
# Connect with Others

Isolation and loneliness can be big challenges for remote workers. After all, your office mates are a big part of your social circle. You see them every day and chat with them about the latest sports news or movies. Even if you're not best friends with them, they still provide you with consistent human interaction.

That all goes away when you work from home. Sure, you still connect virtually, but it's not the same. Nothing can replace in-person interactions. It takes concerted effort to ensure that you get consistent time with others. But it can be done.

**Working at coffee shops or a coworking space can make you feel like you're a part of society, even if you're not directly interacting with others.** Just being around people and hearing them talk can be refreshing.

Taking social breaks can also be very helpful. For example, you could work several hours in the morning, grab lunch with a few friends, and then get back to work. Or you could grab drinks at a local bar after work.

Another option is to join local organizations like the Chamber of Commerce or a softball team. You may also want to think about volunteering somewhere, which enables you to socialize with others and make a meaningful contribution to your community.

The big takeaway is simply to find ways that you can spend time with others. What you'll find is that **regular, meaningful human interaction actually makes you more productive and happier.**

Generally speaking, extended periods of isolation aren't healthy. In addition to loneliness, it can also cause more serious issues, like depression. So, make the effort to be around others. Call up some friends. Chat with the barista at a coffee shop. Join the local soccer club.

You'll be happy you did.
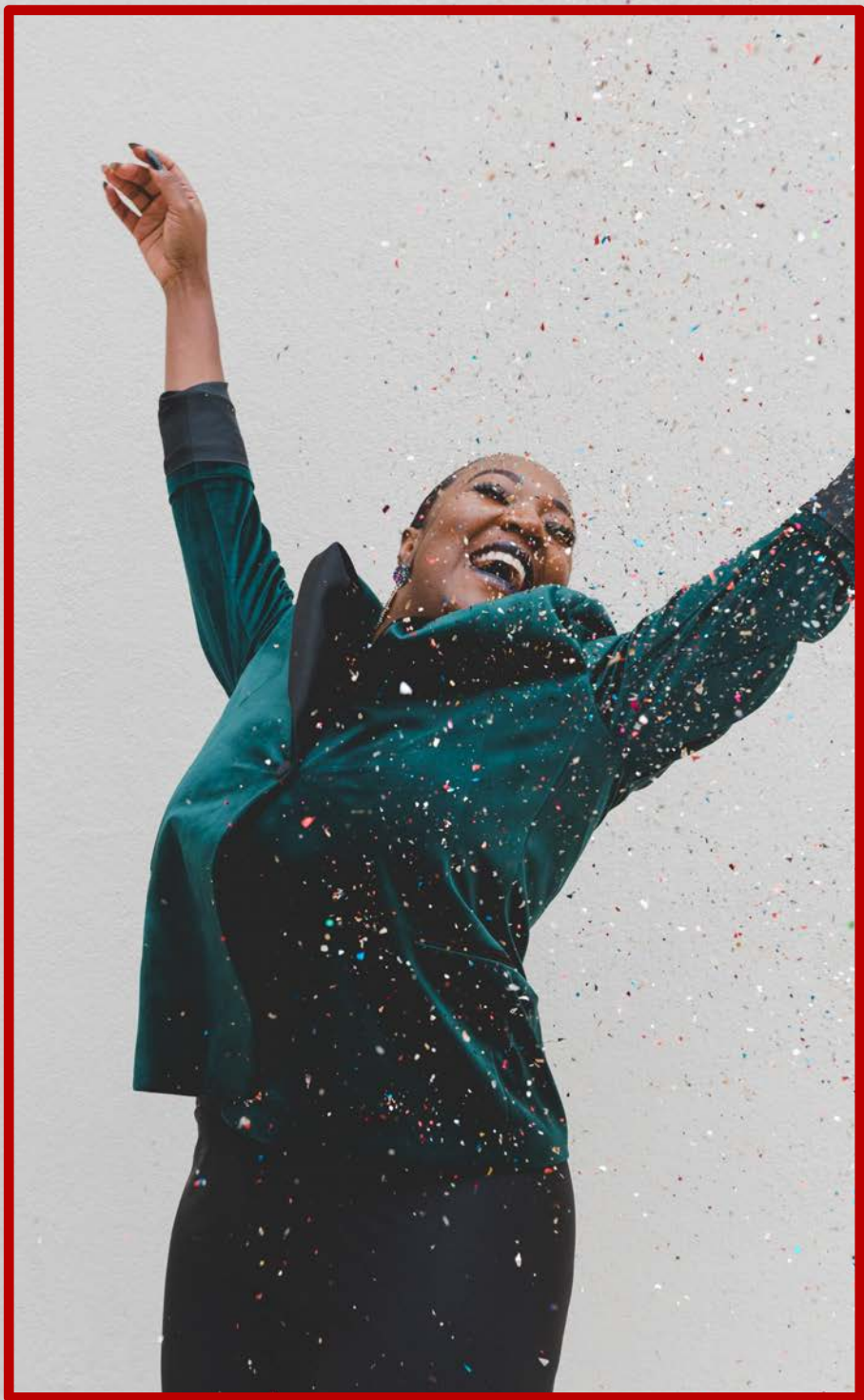
# Go Forth and Be Productive

Some people thrive working from home while others really struggle. The difference is the ways in which they adapt to their new environment.

Those who struggle try to work remotely in the same ways that they worked at the office. Those who thrive understand that working from home is an entirely new ballgame requiring new techniques and strategies.

It may help to think of it like the animal kingdom. The strongest, most resilient animals are those that can adapt to a variety of conditions. Animals that struggle to change and adapt don't thrive nearly as much.

Obviously, there are a lot of differences between your job and the animal kingdom, but the principal remains the same. If you want to succeed, it's important to be able to change the way you do things based on your environment.

We've talked about a number of specific techniques that will make you much more effective as a remote worker:

- Avoid trying to prove yourself
- Avoid always being available
- Take it easy on yourself
- Stick to a schedule
- Create a working space
- Use a task list
- Stay in communication with your coworkers
- Reduce distractions
- Get moving
- Connect with others

If you put these things into practice, your experience with remote work will be significantly better.

**The reality is that working from home can be a wonderful thing.** It provides you with freedom that you wouldn't otherwise have. You can set your schedule, avoid a punishing commute, be more productive, and much more.

It's kind of like being given a smartphone. That phone can totally change your life if you know how to properly use it. On the other hand, if you don't know how to download apps, use the

calendar, or make video calls, you won't find the phone very useful. You may even find it annoying.

**Remote work is a gift.** You just need to know how to use the gift. Using the techniques and strategies in this eBook will help you make the most of working from home, so you can both excel in your work and enjoy your downtime too.

If you want to learn more ways to be a stand out employee in your supervisors mind, visit www.chelliephillips.com/promotion and learn the skills necessary to make you the first one thought of at promotion time.