

Smart Working

How to work from home effectively

March 2020

The coming months are going to be extremely uncertain for us all.

Covid-19 presents us with both personal and professional challenges and we will all need to change our behaviours to respond to the threat

As part of this, all of us will be spending more time working remotely

Working Remotely

This will be a big shift for many individuals and teams. We want to support our leaders and colleagues to establish the most effective ways of working both in terms of business results and individual health and wellbeing. To this end we have created the following toolkit

There are many ideas, suggestions and resources here for you to try. We hope that you will find these a useful prompt. The most important piece of advice is to be open to feedback and experiment. Share what's working and what's not with each other so you can fine tune your approach as you go

Let's use this as a learning opportunity for future remote working practices

The reality is we are all going to be working virtually to a certain degree in the future, to access skills and talent around the world, to balance our personal and professional commitments and to protect our environment

Let's get it right now!

Learning from this experience will mean we'll all be able to continue improving how we do our best work

Tips for individuals

Distinguish between work and home

Make sure you set up a physical 'home office' even if it's just a part of another room. Introduce new routines in the morning and evening so that you clearly switch on and switch off from work.

Keep a structured day with a clear start and finish

Take breaks and be active

You will miss out on a lot of exercise by not travelling to work or walking between meetings, to lunch etc. Build in some alternative way to take breaks, plan exercise and move around so you are not stationary for the whole day. Also be conscious about building in routines for healthy eating; some people end up eating all day and some forget to eat altogether!

Be creative

Think about how you can introduce the more sociable element of work into remote working. Don't miss out on birthdays and other social events – think of ways to do this virtually both one to one and in teams. Schedule a video 'coffee chat' with a colleague or arrange a remote lunch with a few of your peers. It may feel odd but it will be welcome relief during these challenging times!

Tips for individuals

Communicate

Build in strategies to reach out to your peers on a regular basis to update them on your progress and get their input. Keep your availability status up to date, take an active part in remote meetings. If things are not working for you then speak to your manager so that you can share ideas and resolve frustrations

Build your virtual community

This will be internal and external contacts who you can reach out to for support and inspiration. This generally happens quite naturally when we are face to face with a lot of people regularly but when we are working remotely we have to be more intentional. Think about identifying your peers, a mentor, a confidante, technical gurus and creative partners

Know your tech

Ensure you have access to, and are fully trained on, all of the technology that is available to you. Review the online guides and practice with tools that you have not used before. Try out new ways of working together and sharing documents

Tips for individuals

Commit to learning and development opportunities

Less travel and more cancelled events may mean you have more time to reflect on your career goals and development needs. Sign up to a Virtual learning programmes.

Look out for yourself and others

This period will be a risk to mental as well as physical health. Please reach out to peers if you are concerned and use tools such as Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) and free resources from organisations such as Mind:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/>

Tips for leaders

Make time to be personal

Introduce time in your team meetings for people to talk about what's on their mind rather than going straight to the agenda. Arrange one to one calls with your direct reports and colleagues to check in; a 'coffee break' call with no work agenda, the priority is to keep connected

Know your tech and use it well

Don't just use the video facility, (but do make this mandatory, instead of just audio as people will make more effort) use sharing screens and resources that allow you to co-create documents together to feel connected. The better you know your tech, the greater the opportunity for collaborative working

Set ground rules for meetings

Set ground rules for virtual meetings. Simple things like don't talk over each other, signal to the chair (via chat, is a good option) if you have a comment. Add in pauses to calls to ensure everyone is able to contribute. If possible, agree for people not to go on mute as we don't have that facility when we are face to face

Tips for leaders

Reduce screen time

Virtual working can mean you can fit more meetings in as you don't need to factor travel, and that includes walking to the meeting room. But more isn't always better. Ensure your teams build in time to exercise, have screen breaks, and take their lunch hours. Calls are intense, don't schedule long meetings, split up the subjects into bite sized sessions

Establish a team charter

Discuss with your team to agree how you will work together. Ensure that you encourage regular feedback on what's working well and what needs to be improved so you can develop and fine tune this over time

Coach

Take time to coach your direct reports to help them make best use of this new way of working; to help them with prioritisation and setting boundaries, to provide them with regular feedback, to help them assume positive intent when receiving emails, to recognise that mood will be affected by trivial things, to make best use of moments when they do connect

Establish a team charter

Work through this as a team and ensure you regularly review and update in line with your experiences of what is working and what can be improved

Contactability	How do we let each other know where we are and our availability? How flexible will we be reworking hours? Core hours or flexible dependent upon personal commitments?
Where is our work?	How do we let others see our work including work-in-progress? Any specifics for updating workflow, project management or other systems?
Keeping in touch	What expectations do we have for contact with managers and other team members? Should we add quick, daily / weekly catch up meetings just to share updates? When is it better to just have a short interaction with one or two colleagues and what is the best way to do this?
Methods of communication	Any preferred communication channels for particular types of teamwork or customer facing work? When to use video, voice, screen-sharing. Use of messaging / chat.
Remote Meeting ground rules	Agreement on participation and chairing/hosting meetings. Sharing of information beforehand. Should attendees be there all the time? Can we use mute?
Team Building & Socialising	How is team cohesion and identity to be maintained? How is socialising to be encouraged or restricted using new ICT tools?
Spotting problems & looking out for each other	How will we ensure we are all happy and thriving in our work? How will we spot and deal with potential issues? Whose responsibility is this?
Other collaborative activities	How will activities such as training, performance reviews and development conversations, mentoring and coaching be done through remote interaction?

Where to go for help

'How Coronavirus is Transforming Work & What You Can Do About It'. Mind Gym Webinar recording

Coronavirus: How to be productive if you have to work from home The Independent, Sophie Gallagher

Leading From a Distance: Ideas for Supporting Your Remote Workforce in Times of Change Dr. Gabriella Kellerman, BetterUp's Chief Innovation Officer

Coronavirus: How to work from home the right way BBC work Life, Bryan Lufkin

About us

Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing work with clients of all sizes – both in the UK and globally - to provide dedicated employee benefits & wellbeing consultancy. We've won many industry awards for our work and are widely recognised for our innovative and creative approach to benefit design.

We remain committed to supporting clients and the wider HR community during these challenging times. If you want to know more or simply to have a chat about ways you can support your employees, please get in touch with your consultant or contact us:

Tel: +44 (0)20 3327 5700

Email: info@howdengroup.com

Visit: www.howdengroup.com/uk-en/employeebenefits



Thank you

This document or any portion of the information it contains may not be copied or reproduced in any form without the permission of Howden.

Howden Employee Benefits & Wellbeing Limited is part of the Hyperion Insurance Group. Registered in England and Wales under company number 2248238, with its registered office at One Creechurch Place, London EC3A 5AF. Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.