



Achieving a good work-life balance when working from home

Working from home is an attractive option for many seeking a more flexible approach to their working day, promising a more comfortable and familiar work environment, and a better balance between work and family life.

The ups and downs of home working

The absence of the daily commute is an obvious benefit, particularly if you would otherwise have a long journey to the workplace. It removes the stress of having to set out early in the morning, being stuck in the rush hour traffic jam, and shelling out on fuel or public transport costs.

In addition, working from home makes it theoretically possible to live anywhere with a phone line and internet connection, so you can put family needs first when choosing your location. Equally, you may be able to reduce childcare costs by working flexible hours, allowing you to spend more time with your children in their early years.



But there are also downsides. Many home workers will agree that it is all too easy to let work spread out of the spare-room-turned-office and encroach on every aspect of your family life, leaving you feeling like you are working a 100 hour week. Equally, it's easy to feel obliged to help out with kids or tackle housework while at home, leaving work piling up unattended.

Avoiding this is a question of planning and discipline, so here's my run down of some of the key pitfalls, and how to avoid them.

Home comforts vs. work addiction

When working from home, without a boss or colleagues to answer to, it can be easy to become distracted by housework, television or the call of the fridge and unintentionally find yourself taking extended breaks. This can lead to a significant reduction in your productivity, and whether working for yourself or someone else this is sure to cause problems. In many

cases, you may find yourself working during the evening to catch up, sacrificing family time for hours wasted earlier in the day.

On the flipside, some home workers find themselves committing too much of their time to work. With your office literally in the next room, it can be easy to find yourself working every spare moment. When office working, you might have shut down your computer and gone home at 6pm, but from home, you might find yourself working into the early hours, eating dinner at your desk and booting up your computer before you're even out of your pyjamas.

The best way to combat this is to have a schedule with allocated breaks and a task list with specific goals. Organising your day in this way can help keep you motivated and ensure you are left with leisure time by the evening.

Distractions of parenthood

Whilst having young children at home during the day can work for some, you need to think realistically about how productive you can be while caring for your child, and how good a parent you can be while trying to work. Many parents manage by working during the children's naps or in the evening, but for some, juggling leaves them feeling torn and exhausted.

Sometimes, it is worth considering part-time childcare, just to get your work-life in order; giving you more time to be a better parent when your children come home.

Cabin fever

Even if you are rather good at remaining productive while still finding time to spend with your family, it can be all too easy to anchor yourself to your desk, barely leaving the house and letting personal and leisure time slip away. The call for after work drinks with colleagues will rarely, if ever, come, and you won't find yourself bumping into friends on the commute home as you perhaps once did.

The key to overcoming this imbalance is discipline. Work out a schedule with time assigned to work, family and leisure pursuits and stick to it to the very best of your ability. Having fun may seem a much lower priority than earning a crust and getting the kids to school, but if you don't take time to breathe the air away from your home, you could begin to go stir crazy, and your happiness and productivity will suffer.

Claim your life back

If you feel too stuck in your current rut to reclaim your work-life balance, take a step back and reflect on the alluring benefits that made you choose home working in the first place. If your current schedule is stuffed full and immovable, no amount of tinkering will fix it.

Start with a blank page, work out your goals, priorities, wants and needs and start drawing up the blueprint for your new life. Yes, some things may have to go, but a good work-life balance is supposed to be the defining factor of home working, so take action today to claim the life you want, not the life you have found yourself living.

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