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# Working from home: does it really work?

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In this brave new world of technology, things like video conferencing, email, scanning, telework and webcasts have changed the way that we do business. Companies are allowing people to work from home and many small businesses are starting up in the comfort (or discomfort) of the owner's home. I am one of those small businesses that used to run itself from the confines of my personal abode.

In this article, I am going to tell you the essential things you need to have in setting up an effective home office, how to be most productive when working in the home environment, what some of the benefits can be to you personally and professionally and how to get your employer to buy into those benefits. The key to working in a home office is to ensure that you are meeting the expectations of your employer or yourself (if you are the company owner). Many companies are skeptical of having employees work from home, so you need to focus on getting (and exceeding) the results that are expected of you. My guess is that you will find that the environment can be more productive, but also very challenging as well.

**Where do I start?** In order to set up an effective home office, here are a few essentials:

**Space** – you need a dedicated space to work out of whether it is a dedicated room in your house or a corner of your apartment. You need a place to keep files, computer accessories, office supplies, etc.

**Computer**– you need a computer that houses all of your files needed for work. Laptop or desktop makes no difference, it is your preference. I prefer a laptop

because it provides freedom of movement both in the house and out of it.

***Dedicated phone line*** – if you are going to be doing business from your home, you need a dedicated phone line for your business. No one cares that you work out of your home unless you are juggling phone calls from your in-laws and your clients at the same time. Also, make sure the phone you use has a speakerphone or a headset so you can take notes and move more freely while on conference calls.

***High speed Internet connection*** – spend the extra money to get a high-speed Internet connection. This will help when sending large files, researching websites and scanning and printing documents.

***Printer*** – I recommend purchasing an all-in-one printer that copies, faxes, scans and prints. When working from home, you will find that you use all of these features regularly.

**Mommy, Daddy, come play** Here are some pointers to ensuring that you can be productive when working from home (assuming you have others living under the same roof):

Establish work hours just as if you were in the office – these are times when you are not to be disturbed short of an emergency. Close your door to enhance the point. It is not very professional when you are on the phone with a customer and a dog is barking in the background or there is a child crying.

Take advantage of quiet time first thing in the morning or late in the evening (depending on when you work best). These hours can be the most productive hours of the day because your household is quiet and you are able to focus completely on your work. This time is best used for reading email, writing and reviewing documents or catching up because these do not require others to be in the office.

Take periodic breaks to keep you engaged. Just as you take a lunch break or a coffee break at the office, take breaks when you are working from home. Take the dog for a walk or have lunch with your children. This will help to keep your battery charged.

**Can I work in my pajamas?** There can be some major benefits to both your personal and professional life when working from a home office. Below are just a

few:

**Wardrobe** - you can dress however you like as long as you get the job done. Some people prefer to work in “comfy” clothes.

**Taxes** – working from home allows you certain tax benefits including writing off the cost of your office square footage and other related home office expenses.

**Time flexibility** – you have the flexibility to take extra time at lunch or spend a few minutes with family in the middle of the day.

**Time saved** – you will actually have more hours in the day to work because you will be saving commuting time to and from the office.

When discussing the advantage of working from a home office, Alan Weiss, owner of Summit Consulting Group and author of 25 books including bestseller *Million Dollar Consulting*, summed it up perfectly by saying “my longest commute is from my office to the bathroom, and sometimes I run into traffic.”

**But boss, it really does work** Convincing your boss to allow you to work from home may be the most difficult part (unless of course you are self-employed, that would be an interesting conversation). If you are interested in working from home then you need to ensure that your job lends itself to that type of work. If you are expected to see customers all day, then working from home may not be an option with your company. You need to identify the benefits to your employer in the form of increased productivity, reduced costs and improved employee morale. If your employer is hesitant, convince them to do a three-month trial period where results will be tracked. The key is ensuring that you are at least as productive as when you were working in the office, but a more compelling argument would be if you provided additional value as a result of your new work environment. If the organization sees immediate benefits, it only increases your credibility and ability to perform in the eyes of your organization’s superiors.

Working from a home office can be a productive and rewarding experience, but it should not be taken lightly and can never replace the collaborative feeling of meeting with colleagues, customers and suppliers face to face. You need to understand what works best for you and best for your company. Do you need to be social and converse with your colleagues throughout the workday or can you handle endless hours on your own? Companies and employees need to strike a balance between working from home and maintaining contact with key stakeholders. Companies must also be aware of the fact that some jobs do not lend well to working from a home office. Working from a home office needs to be a strategy that companies use to reduce costs while becoming more productive or one that small businesses use to keep their operating costs low. Either way, there are many successful businesses and workers that are run out of apartments, condos and houses all over the world. It is definitely something worth considering if done right.