



# The Homeworker's

# Bible

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# Introduction

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**There are lots of reasons why you may find yourself working from home.**

Homeworking might be your normal - you might be a freelancer or running a business from home. Perhaps you usually work in an office but choose to work from home once a week or once a month, a change of scene making you more productive.

Others among us don't choose to work from home but are sometimes forced to do it anyway. The big reason at the moment is coronavirus, but you might also be affected by public transport strikes, the weather or childcare problems.

**Whatever your reasons for working from home, this book is for you.**



## **In it, we'll cover:**

- Why so many people love working from home
- Being wise to the downsides
- How to manage your time when you're working from home
  - How to stay motivated
  - Combating distraction
    - Teamwork
- Managing a team of homeworkers
  - Staying sane and healthy



# Why so many people love working from home

Many people who have worked from home for years love it. Those who choose to do it once in a while love it too. If you've been forced into homeworking, the best thing to do is embrace it and see just how productive you can be!

We asked our business family what the main advantages of working from home are and this is what they said:

## **Wear what you like**

Keep your suit for best and spend the drying cleaning money on something you love! Wear your comfy old slippers, and wrap up or strip off as the weather dictates.

## **No office distractions**

No one interrupting you with a birthday whip-round, or appearing at your desk to introduce you to someone you don't really need to meet. You won't go to make a cup of tea and get stuck in kitchen conversation from which you can't escape, either.

## **Choose your own environment**

Your home office can be as quiet or loud as you like, or as tidy or messy as you are! No one is going to shush you, and you're not going to be disturbed by co-workers' habits either.

## **Make calls from a quiet space**

You'll always sound professional and be able to give your client full attention. No need to wait until your swearsy colleague has gone to lunch!

## **Flexibility**

You can manage your own time, eat lunch when it suits you and fit your working day around the times you know you're at your best. You can also work longer days and then take time off mid-week – a great solution if you have to have meetings with the solicitor or the bank, and you can volunteer for a school trip with your children once in a while too.





# The disadvantages of homeworking

**So all in all, we love homeworking. But there are some downsides.**

If you don't yet love homeworking, you may have encountered some of them. Does anything on this list sound familiar?

## **No Routine**

Whatever your office routine is, it can be hard to re-create it at home. With no commute you've got a different start time, and no one's keeping tabs on lunch breaks either.

## **It can get lonely**

Your colleagues may drive you mad, but most of us benefit from a bit of human contact.

## **Distractions**

Housework, TV, pets, social media, people coming to the door; each one a test of willpower!

## **No boundaries**

Some of us struggle to stop working, and without an office cleaner bustling around, reminding us we've overstayed our welcome, it can be difficult to know when to down tools. If this is you, you might find you're working into the evening without really achieving anything, or it might start affecting family life.



If any of these problems sound familiar, it's time to look at the different areas of homeworking, find out where the problems lie and make changes for the better



# How to manage your time when working from home

You know when you sit down at your desk to start work, with a lovely clean fresh day stretching out ahead of you, and you feel so motivated and productive...and then you suddenly realise it's noon, the morning has gone and you've not got anything finished?

One of the hardest things about time management when you're working from home is that it's all up to you – there's no one to drag you off to lunch or spur you on by working faster than you are.

Fortunately, this can all be avoided, with discipline, will-power and our top tips:

## My to-do list

### Write a to-do list you'll actually do

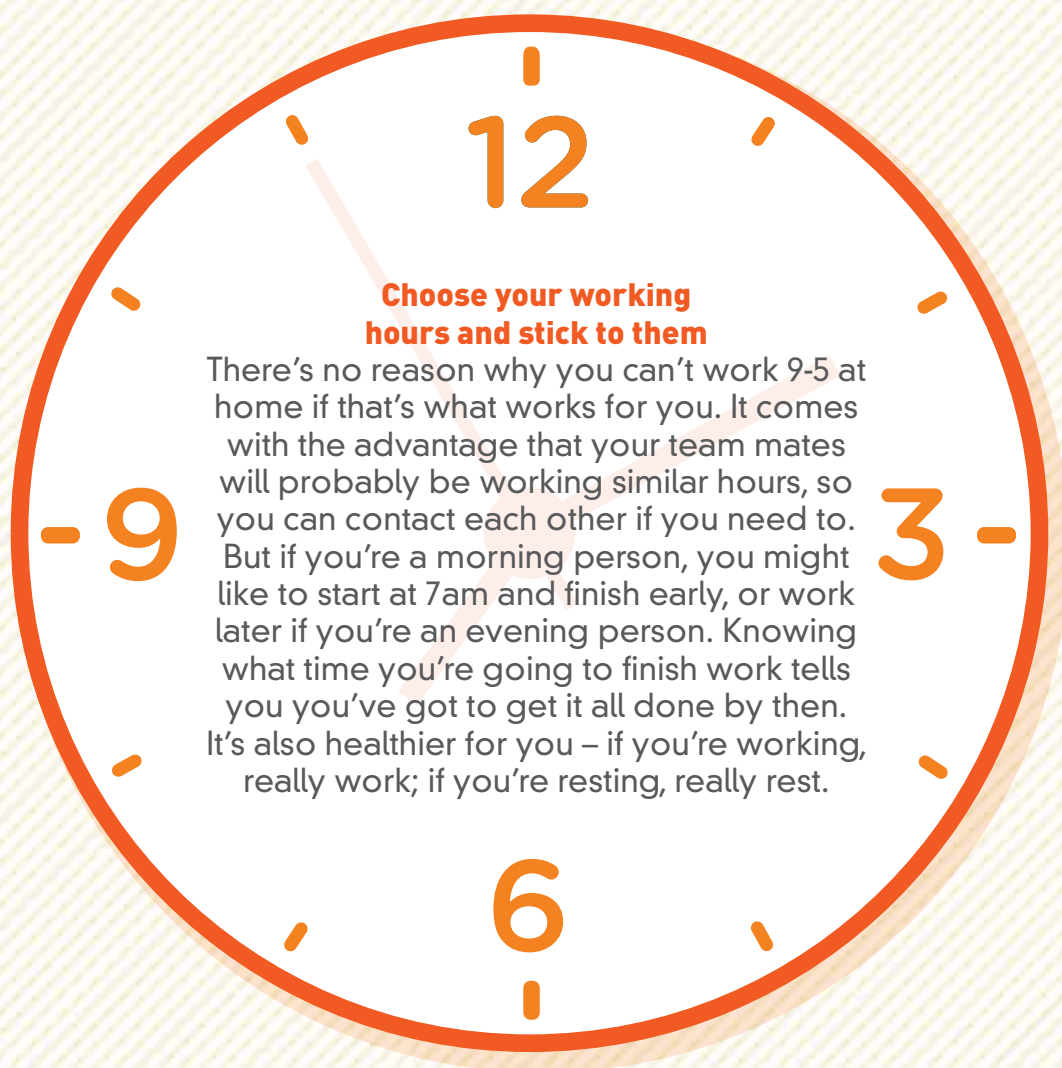
Write your to-do list for tomorrow at the end of the working day. You can hit the ground running when you start work in the morning, because you've already planned what you're going to do. It is also easier to keep your commitments under control – if someone contacts you at 9am to ask you to do something, you can refer to your list and tell them whether or not it's going to be possible that day. This prevents you from over-promising and ending up stressed and unproductive.

### Do the worst task first – eat the frog!

Alternatively, prioritise some quick wins to make you feel super-productive. Looking at your list ten minutes into your working day and seeing three things already ticked off is a great feeling.







**Choose your working hours and stick to them**

There's no reason why you can't work 9-5 at home if that's what works for you. It comes with the advantage that your team mates will probably be working similar hours, so you can contact each other if you need to. But if you're a morning person, you might like to start at 7am and finish early, or work later if you're an evening person. Knowing what time you're going to finish work tells you you've got to get it all done by then. It's also healthier for you – if you're working, really work; if you're resting, really rest.

**Don't put all your tasks on your list for today**

Unless they're all urgent (very unlikely) allocate them to different days of the week to keep the pace even. Looking at a shorter list is also less daunting.

**Number the items on your list so you can go from one to the other without having to re-evaluate the priorities each time**

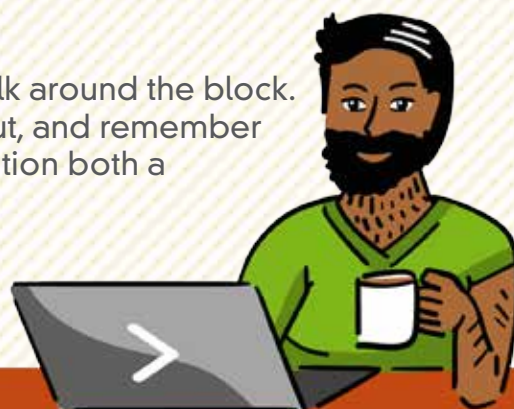
If you have something important to do for Real Life, like bake a birthday cake or pack for a weekend away, make sure that goes on your list too.

**Don't stay at your desk**

Schedule in small trips out, even if it's just a walk around the block. Make yourself finish a task before you head out, and remember that the exercise is doing you and your motivation both a lot of good!

**Schedule your tasks (but be realistic!)**

Allocate specific time in your diary for each task to keep you on track.





# How to stay motivated



**Get dressed** – it sounds like such a little thing but it really does make a difference. You'll feel more professional and like what you're doing is serious. If you're filling in a spreadsheet in your pyjamas, then subconsciously, you may well be feeling that you're just squeezing in a bit of work before you go and do something more important. Work on your spreadsheet when you're dressed and the spreadsheet becomes important.



**Work in 25-minute chunks followed by a 5-minute break.** You can't work indefinitely without your productivity taking a hit, and taking breaks is important for your motivation too. Keep your break under control by setting a timer, or – more friendly - listen to two favourite songs back to back. There are also apps available – we like Focus Keeper but there are others out there too.



**Change your social media profile picture.** If you're having a bad day and feeling vulnerable to distractions, take down that picture of your pet or your wedding or whatever you usually have, and put up your business headshot instead – it'll help you see yourself as a serious person with a job to do (you can change it back tomorrow!)



**Take your breaks.** Remember that if you work an eight-hour day and take two short breaks and fully stop for lunch, you'll achieve more than if you worked straight through. Sitting at a desk and hardly moving is not good for your mood and is not good for your motivation either.

## Reward yourself

After you've eaten that frog and got the worst task out of the way, you might have room for a cream egg or some other little treat. Go for it! Or you could put on some upbeat music and do a celebration dance around the kitchen. You might want to send a text to someone who cares about you, tell them how proud you are of yourself and how you hope they're proud of you too – you'd be surprised how touched your friends can be that you included them in your success.





# Combating Distraction

**This is one of the hardest parts of working from home!**

Addictive spatial awareness games, the TV, social media, clients with totally different requirements from what you're working on today are all there to take your focus away from your work. And what about the housework...?! Necessary activities turn into distractions when we can't get them done properly. Fortunately, being aware of what they are and addressing them pro-actively can be key to keeping them under control.

## **Turn off what you're not using**

Close all the tabs on your computer that don't relate to what you're doing now, so you can't be tempted to scroll social media or browse for new sunglasses. Closing tabs will also force you to save documents promptly and keep your folders in order, so it's a win-win.

It's also a good idea to turn off audible social media and website notifications – there won't be anything that can't wait.

## **Put the home jobs on your list**

There is no denying that housework needs to be done. Remember to put the washing up and the laundry on your to-do list as well as your work tasks. Many people find it helps to jump between work and home responsibilities - after you've finished that business proposal, give your brain a break and go and empty the dishwasher, for example.

## **Put worthwhile activities on the list too**

Some of the distractions are important for our well-being. If you work better after a bit of weeding or some piano practice, put it on the list so it's a planned activity, not a distraction. It's a good idea to use some kind of app or timer to stop time running away with you!

## **Look it up later!**

If blog titles/marketing ideas/song lyrics are always popping into your head, or something on the news sparks your interest, you may find yourself distracted by research that's nothing to do with today's priorities. Instead, jot these things down as they occur to you – they'll be out of your head so you can focus, and you've got a note of them so you can go back to them later.



# Teamwork

**Many homeworkers are team members too.** We all know the value of teamwork but it can be harder to maintain the ethos when we're working from home. Apps and attitude are here to help, as are our top tips:

## **Embrace the opportunities to get together**

Going to the head office for a meeting may not seem like the best use of your time, but it is a good way of maintaining a connection with the rest of your team and there might be more value in it than you think. There's also no reason why homeworkers can't come along to the Christmas dinner, or join in with the sponsored run the office-based staff have signed up for.

### **Never email if you can phone or video-chat**

Maintain that human connection with your colleagues by picking up the phone or using Skype or Zoom to chat. You might also pick up more than just the words – if you have a question, you'll receive a fuller answer if you can hear the tone of your colleague's voice too.



### **Choose a teamworking app**

There are plenty of team working apps available, including:

- **Microsoft Teams**
- **Slack**
- **Monday.com**

### **Be reliable**

Get your work done to the right standard and time frame, and if you can't get it done, be honest about it. This may seem obvious, but when the team's foundation is already challenged by people working in different locations, everyone has to prove their worth by the work they produce. It's hard to be valued for, say, your upbeat attitude when you always keep it at home with you – your work has to speak for you instead.





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Rebecca Newenham founded Get Ahead VA in 2010 after recognising a gap in the market for virtual assistance services that offered the flexibility, value and performance that small businesses and start-ups need in the 21st century, digital economy. The business has been recognised in awards including Flexible Business of the Year and Rebecca has recently been listed in the #ialso list of 100 inspiring female business leaders in the UK.

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