How to survive the lonely homeoffice time

Working from home can be a real challenge. Here are some ideas on how to survive the homeoffice time…

1. Get started early.

When working in an office, your morning commute can help you wake up and feel ready to work by the time you get to your desk. At home, however, the transition from your pillow to your computer can be much more jarring.

Believe it or not, one way to work from home productively is to dive into your to-do list as soon as you wake up. Simply getting a project *started* first thing in the morning can be the key to making progress on it gradually throughout the day. Otherwise, you'll prolong breakfast and let the morning sluggishness wear away your motivation.

2. Pretend like you *are* going into the office.

The mental association you make between work and an office can make you more productive, and there's no reason that feeling should be lost when telecommuting.

When working from home, do all the things you'd do to prepare for an office role: Set your alarm, make (or go get) coffee, and wear nice clothes. Internet browsers like Google Chrome even allow you to set up multiple accounts with different toolbars on the top – for example, a toolbar for home and a separate toolbar for work.

3. Structure your day like you would in the office.

When working from home, you're your own personal manager. Without things like an in-person meeting schedule to break up your day, you can be quick to lose focus or burn out.

To stay on schedule, segment what you'll do and *when* over the course of the day. If you have an online calendar, create personal events and reminders that tell you when to shift gears and start on new tasks. Google Calendar makes this easy.

4. Choose a dedicated work space.

Just because you're not working at an office doesn't mean you can't, well, have an office. Rather than cooping yourself up in your room or on the couch – spaces that are associated with leisure time – dedicate a specific room or surface in your home to work.

5. Don't stay at home.

Is your home office just not getting it done for you? Take telecommuting a step further and get out of the house. Coffee shops, libraries, public lounges, and similar Wi-Fi-enabled spaces can help you simulate the energy of an office so you can stay productive even when you don't sit in an official workplace.

6. Make it harder for yourself to mess around on social media.

Social media is designed to make it easy for you to open and browse quickly. At work, though, this convenience can be the detriment of your productivity.

To counteract your social networks' ease of use during work hours, remove them from your browser shortcuts and, according

to Fast Company, log out of every account. You might even consider working primarily in a private or, if you're using Chrome, an "Incognito" browser window. This ensures you stay signed out of all your accounts and each web search you conduct doesn't autocomplete the word you're typing. It's a guarantee that you won't be tempted into taking too many social breaks during the day.

7. Commit to doing more.

Projects always take longer than you initially think they will. For that reason, you'll frequently get done less than you set out to do. So, just as you're encouraged to overestimate how much time you'll spent doing one thing, you should also overestimate how many things you'll do during the day. Even if you come up short of your goal, you'll still come out of that day with a solid list of tasks filed under 'complete.'

8. Work when you're at your most productive.

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. Verily Magazine calls these tasks "small acts of success," and they can help build your momentum for the heavier projects

that are waiting for you later on.

9. Save calls for the afternoon.

Sometimes, I'm so tired in the morning, I don't even want to hear my own voice — let alone talk to others with it. You shouldn't have to give yourself too much time to become productive in the morning, but you *can* give yourself some extra time before working directly with others.

If you're struggling to come up with a reasonable work schedule for yourself as a telecommuter, start with the solitary tasks in the morning. Save phone calls, meetings, and other collaborative work for when you've officially "woken up."

10. Focus on one distraction … like a baby!

There's an expression out there that says, "if you want something done, ask a busy person."

The bizarre but true rule of productivity is that the busier you are, the more you'll actually do. It's like Newton's law of inertia: If you're in motion, you'll stay in motion. If you're at rest, you'll stay at rest. And busy people are in fast-enough motion that they have the momentum to complete anything that comes across their desk.

Unfortunately, it's hard to find things to help you reach that level of busyness when you're at home — your motivation can just swing so easily. HubSpot's principal marketing manager, Pam Vaughan, suggests focusing in on something that maintains your rhythm (in her case, it's her daughter).

11. Plan out what you'll be working on ahead of time.

Spending time figuring out what you'll do today can take away from actually doing those things. And, you'll have planned your task list so recently that you can be tempted to change your schedule on the fly.

It's important to let your agenda change if you need it to, but it's equally as important to commit to an agenda that outlines every assignment before you begin. Try solidifying your schedule the day before, making it feel more official when you wake up the next day to get started on it.

12. Use technology to stay connected.

Working from home might help you focus on your work in the short term, but it can also make you feel cut off the larger operation happening in the office. Instant messaging and videoconferencing tools can make it easy to check in with coworkers and remind you how your work is contributing to the big picture.

13. Match your music to the task at hand.

During the week, music is the soundtrack to your career (cheesy, but admit it, it's true). And at work, the best playlists are diverse playlists — you can listen to music that matches the energy of the project you're working on. Video game soundtracks are excellent at this. In the game itself, this lyric-free music is designed to help you focus; it only makes sense that it would help you focus on your work as well.

Want some other genres? Take them from startup marketer, Ginny Mineo, who offers her own work music preferences below.

14. Use laundry as a work timer.

You might have heard listening to just two or three songs in the shower can help you save water. And it’s true; hearing a few of your favorite songs start and end, one after another, can remind you how long you’ve been in the bathroom and shorten your wash time.

Why bring this up? Because the same general principle can help you stay on task when working from home. But instead of three songs off your music playlist, run your laundry instead.

Doing your laundry is a built-in timer for your home. So, use the time to start and finish something from your to-do list before changing the load. Committing to one assignment during the wash cycle and another during the dry cycle can train you to work smarter on tasks that you might technically have all day to tinker with.

15. Communicate expectations with anyone who will be home with you.

Of course, you might be working from home but still have “company.” Make sure any roommates, siblings, parents, spouses, and dogs (well, maybe not dogs) respect your space during work hours. Just because you’re working from home doesn’t mean you’re home.

16. Take clear breaks.

It can be so easy to get distracted as a telecommuter that you avoid breaks altogether. Don’t let the guilt of working in the building you sleep in prevent you from taking five to relax. Rather than just opening YouTube and watching some comfort clips, however, use your breaks to get away from your desk. Go for a walk outside or spend time with others who might also be in the house.

17. Interact with other humans.

Remember: You’re working from home, not the moon. Interacting with other people during the day is allowed, even if they’re not your coworkers. In fact, it’s a good idea to see another face during the day when most of your work day is solitary.

18. Prepare your meals the night before.

When you’re in your own home, it can be tempting to spend time preparing a really nice breakfast and lunch for yourself, chopping and cooking included. Don’t use precious minutes making your food the day of work – cook it the night before.

Preparing food ahead of time ensures you can actually use your meal times to eat, and that you aren’t performing non-work tasks that spend energy better used at your desk.

19. Pick a definitive finishing time each day.

You might be under the impression that working from home establishes more work-life balance, but be careful with that

assumption. Working from home can also feel like being at a casino – you can get so caught up in your activity, in a relaxing environment, that you lose complete track of time.