

The “Secret Sauce” to Make Your New Work-At-Home Situation a Success

With the current worldwide pandemic, working from home has become the new standard for today’s work force. To ease the transition, two seasoned, work-from-home women share their tips that will help those thrust into telecommuting adjust to their new working environment.

Jacy McConnell, a Digital Marketing Manager, has been working remotely for 18 years. Dawn Klym Cowan is a Graphic Designer running her own home-based design practice for 16 years. Both women have discovered that they share many of the same qualities that allow them to stay on track while working from home. Jacy also has the added challenge of having 2 boys, ages 7 and 11 now home on a full time basis.



Here is the “secret sauce” that has allowed them success in a home-based situation:

Routine

Both women agree that routine is vital to success. Get up every morning as though you are going to your workplace. Show up to your home office on time, just as you would your regular office. Your co-workers or clients are counting on you. The only thing that has changed is your commute. Be ready to communicate at any time through video or phone. Jacy’s tip for ladies – keep a scarf near your computer. You can dress up a t-shirt really quick if needed! Continue to take your usual scheduled breaks and lunch and keep regular office hours.

Dedicated Space

Again, both agree that a dedicated space is paramount. Realizing that not everyone can have an office with an actual door, consider a table in the corner of the living room or in an extra bedroom. Both at one point have stood at the kitchen counter and commandeered a portion of the dining room table to work on projects. You do what you have to do to make it work. The dining room table is not very ergonomic and not recommended. A supportive office chair is a must, as is having everything you need situated close by. The key is that you have a space that is solely for work and when you are in that space you are working. When you are not in that space, it’s down time. Do your best not to bring your work out of that dedicated area.

Boundaries and Distractions

When you set your boundaries, distractions can be minimized. Your “office hours” are the first boundary to set. With everyone at home now, it’s possible to fall into the 24 hour work day. For your own well-being, it’s important that, at some point, you call it a day and shift into down time. This means not checking emails, answering texts during your off hours. This is job

dependent of course. The same applies for your spouse/sister/bff etc. who may think you are available and can chat anytime.

The other thing to let go of during your work hours is everything to do with your home. The dishes that didn't get done before you started work – leave them. You would have left them if you had to be at your job at a certain time. The pile of laundry or a closet that needs to be cleaned? Save that for your off time. Let the distraction of home-work go during your working hours. Without boundaries, you will not make the break between work and home.

Kids

How do you keep kids busy so you can focus on work? Jacy shares that as long as her boys have been old enough to understand, she has set expectations with them. If there is a big meeting coming up, she lets them know that they will need to be quiet. Having understanding co-workers is a great bonus, in case someone forgets and comes in to ask for a snack during the meeting. If the meeting is scheduled near a mealtime, be sure they have the direction they need to make lunch. Sometimes a movie is recommended. Most mornings, she gives them a list of things that they can do in their own time. Depending on your child(ren) time blocking is an option. Jacy lets her boys choose time spent on activities. Rigid time blocking doesn't work for her oldest, and she would like to set the day up for success, so she works within their own strengths.

Choose challenges and tasks that speak to their interests, keep them busy, and spark their creativity. Include a good mix of things like physical activity, literacy and comprehension, creative writing, building challenges (Lego or Minecraft), and culture.

Don't put pressure on them to complete the challenges, but if you've been mindful to choose things they enjoy, kids will generally get things completed. Make sure the challenges are things that they can do together or independently. As much as work-at-home parents would love to sit and do a big, messy science experiment or art project with their kids, they cannot...at least not during work hours.

Having said that, Jacy does make sure that she gets up from her desk for little breaks throughout the day. Getting up out of the chair and walking around is necessary for wellbeing, and with the kids home, it's a great opportunity to engage with them to see what they are working on. It lets them know you are still there and even though you have to work during work hours, you're glad they are home with you.

Mental Adjustments

Dawn's previous routine was to pick up a coffee on the way to the office. This was her mental cue that she was starting the work day. When she launched her home-based business, she continued this for the entire first year. The difference being that she drove back home and went straight to her home office. Her other tip, as silly as it sounds, is to wear shoes. You don't

wear slippers in your office and if you're struggling with the adjustment of working from home, try putting your shoes on.

Is everyday working from home sunshine and rainbows? No. But both Jacy and Dawn agree that you need to be realistic with expectations for both those who are in your home and yourself. It's the only way we going to stay sane in this uncertain time.

About the authors:

Jacy McConnell is the Digital Marketing Manager at FlagHouse Inc. where she develops and oversees online initiatives, manages projects, and builds strategy to drive revenue and provide a great customer experience. Working as a satellite employee for nearly 18 years while raising her two young boys, has required her to become a bit of a master juggler. Drawing from her degree in Child and Youth Studies (Brock University) and experience as an Environmental Educator and Summer Camp Director (Carolina Raptor Center), she's always finding creative ways to engage her sons so that she can work efficiently while they are at home. Jacy holds a post-graduate certification in Interactive Multimedia (Niagara College) and earned her Digital Marketing Manager certification in 2017 (University of Toronto). Jacy may be reached at jmccconnell@flaghouse.com.

Dawn Klym Cowan, R.G.D. has been helping business fight the "feast or famine" syndrome for more than 20 years. As owner of the Hip Mama Communications Company she provides design & marketing services, digital and commercial printing, and social media strategies to companies from start-up to large government institutions. Dawn was granted the Registered Graphic Designer designation in 1997 and is a graphic design instructor. Dawn's husband Jeff has recently joined the team and her daughter is currently in her 2nd year of the Graphic design program at St Clair College. Dawn can be reached at dawn@hipmama.ca