

House Rules: 9 Tips for Working from Home *WITH* Family

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With the onset of COVID-19, organizations are inviting an increasing number of professionals to work from home. I honor the rationale behind the request as it promotes team member safety during a time of anxiety and concern for many.

To help us be the best we can be in a non-traditional office environment, articles and online posts are available to share tips for working effectively at home – including mindset, organization habits, workspace, structures, and many others. In addition to these tips, there is a family dynamic that needs to be addressed. This may include two partners working from home at the same time, and the implications on a family of having a regular commuter now fully present in their space. ALL. WEEK. LONG.

- *How do you stay productive **when you're not the only one home?***
- *How do you set expectations for what makes you successful during the day, **and understand what your partner and family need?***
- *How do you make this a healthy environment **for all of you to live, love and work effectively?***

Talk About the Change

Sit down and have an intentional conversation with your partner and family about working from home. *How are you together going to make this work?* Having explicit understanding of each other's needs and expectations will set you up for success.

- **Request** a conversation to talk about the dynamic of working from home.
- **Share** your excitement and your concerns about this change and what is necessary for you to be effective. Articulate what is different about working at home vs. being home together on weekends, checked-in to family time. Ask for your partner and family to share their perspectives, needs and understanding.
- **Create** "House Rules" for work hours that, when respected, benefit everyone. Having agreements clarifies expectations and reduces tension and conflict.
- **Agree** upon House Rules that make sense for everyone.
- **Hold yourselves accountable** to the rules. Test the plan for a week.
- **Revisit the House Rules** after a week and discuss what is working or not. **Make changes that make sense** and give it another week.
- **Make the conversation a routine** that allows for open dialogue until you come to an understanding that works for everyone. Over time you may find you can relax in some areas and strengthen in others. **Be flexible and fluid as things progress and routines are established.**

“House Rules”

After successes and failures in our household, we have the following “House Rules” in place to support our individual and family success.

1. **Connect at mealtime.** Have breakfast together each day before going to separate offices. Once the dishes are in the sink (or preferably in the dishwasher), the workday begins, and the rules are in place. Having this formal start to the workday creates a boundary to honor and appreciate.
2. **Create separate spaces in the home for work.** Officing on different floors and in different ends of the house is ideal to give physical separation. This allows you to give and be present for clients and colleagues.
3. **Honor a closed door.** If a door is closed, your partner is on a call, a teleconference, or working on something that cannot be interrupted. Do not knock; simply turn and walk away.
4. **Share calendars if possible.** Be aware of each other’s meetings to give absolute quiet. This includes staying away physically, shutting doors for quiet, and keeping the dog secured in case there is a delivery and he or she has something to say about it...as many dogs do.
5. **Mind your volume.** This goes for your voices, your music or any other background noise. Proximity can be challenging in tight spaces and being conscientious about not imposing on the other person is important.
6. **Be conscious of work patterns.** Switch-tasking shouldn’t be a regular part of your day because of in-home accessibility. Exercise self-control around sharing your highs and lows and wait for the right time to take a break that makes sense for BOTH of you.
7. **Keep your workspace contained.** If you are working in a flex space at home, try to keep things tidy as not to impose on others. Make it a practice to clean up at the end of the day or week – which helps productivity and respects the family home.
8. **Schedule a walk.** Working from home dramatically minimizes your number of steps each day. There is no walking from meeting to meeting or crossing the floor to see a colleague and ask a question. There’s your desk, the bathroom, the kitchen. Schedule a time mid-day to stretch your legs. Being outside allows for connection to share about your day in addition to the health benefits of moving about.
9. **Check-in at the end of the day** to make sure it’s *really* the end of the day. As business owners, the end of the day is flexible and honoring your partner’s time makes a difference. When you are done for the day, turn off the lights and put the computer to sleep for the night.



Best wishes to everyone navigating your new situation. Please share any other practices or recommendations as we all can learn from each other’s successes and pain points.

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