

Remote Working

The Definitive Guide for Businesses & Employees



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1. Introduction

Remote working, a growing trend and a desired objective for 82% of professionals (1), is testing the digital maturity of companies around the world, who are fighting for, at best, an advantageous position for when the coronavirus crisis has been overcome or, in the worst-case scenario, survival.

This sudden acceleration of remote working implementation means a giant leap forward in terms of digital transformation, but the process is now being introduced at a forced pace. Until recently it was going to be a gradual process, a privilege for a few or even an incentive to attract talent. Now organizations have had to put their foot down overnight, with a series of risks that have multiplied exponentially and will test all those business decisions on digitalization that have been taken, or postponed, in recent years.

Organizations must consider, anticipate and address the following issues:

New sources of cyber-risk

Potential security gaps have been multiplied by the number of employees working from home. Organizations should call for employee accountability with regards to their work equipment and internet connection, and provide them with the tools, protection, connection systems, or any system or policy needed to ensure that they can work securely. Remote workers can be an unforeseen and uncontrolled vulnerability, especially when a very high percentage of the workforce is involved.

Security culture

IT departments must create a culture of responsibility. Working with a laptop from the comfort of a Starbucks sounds great, especially for posting an Instagram selfie. However, as we all know, connecting to a public and open Wi-Fi network is a bad idea, especially when working with sensitive information. Likewise, creating secure passwords, having the operating system up to date with the latest version, checking that there is an "S" in the URL of a payment gateway, being wary of an email from a colleague with an attachment of a strange name or file format, etc., are issues that were already important before the coronavirus crisis and that should be a priority today.

Confidentiality awareness exercises

Something as simple as locking a computer when taking a break will prevent strategic plans, personal databases or profit and loss statements from being seen by third parties living under the same roof, thus breaching important employee confidentiality agreements with the company, and the company with stakeholders.

Home discipline and routines

Human Resources departments should make an effort to care for the health of employees, and this includes recommendations on how to disconnect from work. Although working in pajamas from your bed or couch may be tempting, all experts recommend setting a strict work schedule; grooming and dressing as if you were going to the office, watching your diet, doing some exercise and finding an independent space to work remotely. There is already a lot of research linking remote working to depression, loneliness and anxiety. It is a case of changing the concept: from working at home to working from home.

New platforms, new communication

It's not the same to talk to a colleague in the canteen as it is to talk through Slack at 10:30am. In some cases we're blind to each other's stress and we can be annoying. Moreover, if we need something from someone, we must appreciate the pressure which that person may be under and the amount of messages they may be receiving from others. With so many messages it can be easy for things to be missed or misunderstood. Contextualizing and getting to the point are two ingredients of effective communication via chat or email.

Project and delivery management

There are many task management platforms (Planner, Trello, Basecamp, Monday), as well as methods (Agile, Scrum) to organize tasks in order to meet deadlines. In any case, organizing a production and delivery schedule, as well as encouraging proper time management, is the best way to maintain efficiency levels.

Excesses and defects

There are remote workers who won't leave their seats until the job is done. There are others for whom the bark of a neighbor's dog or a roommate's noise will distract them. There are solutions for everyone: for the former, the consideration that it is not possible to do a good job without an interesting life; for the latter, there are gadgets, such as environmental noise cancellation headsets, and even apps to disconnect their phone from social media activity for a while and prevent likes from an Instagram post from breaking the concentration needed to do something important.

Healthy mind, healthy body

Eye injuries or those resulting from bad posture and even lack of rest are a new challenge for occupational risk specialists. Not being able to go to the gym or do other physical exercise forces us to take drastic measures in two regards. Firstly, regarding food: we should try to avoid, where possible, precooked and processed foods.

Secondly: a good chair and work surface or desk, adequate height for your screen, proper lighting and just 20 minutes of physical exercise a day can help keep our bodies in good condition, and avoid cardiovascular problems, arguably just as dangerous as coronavirus itself.

Administrative management

Human Resources and Administration departments are more familiar than anyone else with the regulations across the world regarding clocking in and out, overtime and sick leave. However, doubts are rife when it comes to how to manage these issues when working remotely.

It is not possible to do a good job without an interesting life.



In the following pages we will address all these issues, with as much detail and as many references as possible, with the aim of being useful for companies of all sizes around the world.

It is also intended that employees who are not used to remote working can take action to make the experience of working at home healthy, effective and enjoyable.

The advantages of remote working, as part of a process of organizational transformation, necessary and in line with the times and challenges already faced, are many:

- + Remote workers will feel the confidence that is placed in them to carry out their work without “Big Brother” watching them. This means that, in the absence of a fear-based culture, employees will be accountable to each other, not to management.
- + It increases employee happiness and loyalty to the company (2). Creativity, innovation and out-of-the-box thinking are not possible without people who are satisfied with their life and work.
- + Studies show that employee performance increases when working from home by 13%, breaks and sick leave are reduced (3), which translates into a reduction in turnover of 25% compared to companies who do not offer remote working (4), total productivity improvements of 20% and savings of thousands of dollars per employee can be made (5).
- + The advantage of being prepared for what is coming: new generations understand the possibility of remote working as a ‘must’. That’s why recent studies say that, since 84% of millennials confess to being ‘burned out’ from their current job, 73% of departments will have people working from home by 2028. The current system will be rethought and improved as millennials move up the hierarchal ladder (6).

This international trial of (compulsory) remote working will make it possible to eliminate some prejudices, and to accept that it is not only possible, but also beneficial, for employees to shape their personal lives to a certain extent with their working life, especially for those cases where coming and going to the office means a commute of up to two to four hours a day, considered by many as time lost.

So, in all probability, when the global coronavirus crisis has been overcome, many organizations that had not yet accepted digitalization as a competitive advantage will have to reconsider.



Sources:

(1) LinkedIn Survey – Remote Work 2019.

(2) State of Remote Work 2019, by OwlLabs.

(3)&(5) “Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment”. By Nicholas Bloom, James Liang, John Roberts y Zhichun Jenny Ying.

(4) State of Remote Work 2017, by OwlLabs.

(6) Third Annual “Future Workforce Report” Sheds Light on How Younger Generations are Reshaping the Future of Work. By Upwork.



2. Establishing a Working from Home Policy

If a worker tells a manager at 8:55 am that he or she plans to work from home for the rest of the day, this is where the problems for both parties begin.

To avoid false expectations and allowing employees to take advantage. It is essential that organizations, whatever their size, write their own Remote Working Policy, with guidelines and recommendations so that both parties can capitalize on the benefits and not give in to all the drawbacks.

Outline of an effective remote working policy:

A. Duration, applications and notices

It is important for each company to decide how many days an employee can choose to work from home: once a week, several days a month. It will depend on each case.

Establish a common online calendar (or a person responsible from Human Resources who receives the requests and accepts them, or not), where employees can request those days in advance. This means that organizing a face-to-face meeting is not an impossible puzzle to solve.

In this sense, it is recommended to mark certain days in which it is NOT possible to work from home, to avoid calendar complications.

B. Obligations of the teleworker

It is a question of establishing a minimum standard of requirement. The teleworker must:

- + Be even more involved than when they are in the office.
- + Be more available than at the office through the usual channels.
- + Understand that teleworking is not a day off.

This type of measure avoids confusion and misunderstanding, while ensuring the proper functioning of working from home, to start talking about increases in productivity, efficiency and ability to concentrate.

C. Humanization of work

It is important to establish mandatory contact between colleagues via webcam, not only through chats or email. This is because seeing each other's faces will make employees feel more connected to the group, rather than the coldness of text which, over time, can make them feel like email processing machines rather than value-adding professionals.

The remote worker is part of a whole of which he is indispensable as a professional but much more so as a human being, and any initiative that feeds into this will improve their KPIs.

D. Remote working location

The place doesn't necessarily have to be home. There are people who concentrate or feel more creative in various places, such as parks or cafes.

This requires specifying what the measures are in terms of cyber-risks and providing the necessary tools to make them work just as securely as if they were in the office.

E. Technology

It is necessary to list the appropriate tools needed for optimal performance and to provide the instructions needed to install them.

In this case, it is preferable that the team choose their favorite tools, precisely so that they use them more, instead of forcing them to use others that may be cheaper, but ultimately more rudimentary.

F. Incentives

The employee working from home is responsible for the costs of his or her Internet connection, mobile phone, electricity, gas, etc. As such, it is the company's decision, if it wants to encourage remote working, to include incentives in the payroll, since the employee who is at home does not consume office resources.





3. Home Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is not about whether a hacking attempt will happen or not, but when and how it will happen. At this point, the worker is one of the most vulnerable access points. Therefore, the best form of protection is awareness.

Working away from a secure office environment opens the door to cyber vulnerabilities, even despite the use of a VPN (Virtual Private Network), which is the most common option offered by companies to their teleworkers.

A VPN is a virtual network system that securely connects an external computer to the office network. However, no system guarantees 100% security and it is precisely this channel between the employee's computer and the office that makes the remote worker an ideal target.

In order to maintain a minimum level of security, it is necessary to:

Put in place firewalls (a system for blocking unauthorized access to a network).

Ensure updated anti-virus systems are in place for both the office and remote workers.

Avoid unsecured systems.

Provide specialized training in remote working security for both network administrators and remote users.

Ensure security policies and guides.

However, it is necessary to understand the context of the environment you are working in so that we can avoid the home office being compromised. Therefore, we will go through a step by step guide of "must have" features for working at home in order to maintain a minimum level of digital security, as well as some recommendations for safe and responsible navigation.

Securing the router

The router that has been behind the TV for four years without being turned off except for holidays, needs a simple security check, especially if on the bottom of the router it says WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy), not WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access).

If it is a WEP connection, the user should contact their technical department or their Internet service provider to request a change to WPA and assistance in changing the password, if the user is unable to do so alone.

In both cases, it is also possible to request a change of password and for the name of the Wi-Fi network to be invisible to others, meaning only those who know the name chosen by the remote worker can connect to it.

Internet connection points in the home are a key concern when it comes to security when working from home.

Updated operating systems

For both Windows and Mac users, operating systems must always be up to date. Many of these updates are solutions to security breaches detected by the manufacturers.

Also, those users who have a mobile phone connected to their work email and other office communication tools, whether for Android or iOS systems, should check that their operating system is up to date.

Antivirus systems

Prices for antivirus systems on the market are very competitive and certainly cheaper than the cost of a hack.

Antivirus protection will avoid many of the dangers that users are subjected to in their daily lives, when they browse websites, even with normal navigation. There are usually cases of advertising in the form of banners that hide malicious code, not necessarily for hijacking, but to install some type of malware that could slow down your computer, consume more resources or deteriorate over time.

Does my Mac need antivirus? Yes, it certainly does. Many years ago, there was a myth that viruses were only designed for Windows environments, but that was because Apple computers were in the minority. Today, viruses are spread across all operating systems.

Safe surfing

By following these simple precautions, you can avoid further problems:

- + Do not download any files from sites you don't trust completely.
- + Do not access download websites of a dubious origin. In particular, P2P downloads are a Russian roulette with regards to what the downloaded file may contain.
- + Make sure the site's URL matches the website you want to visit, as it is also common practice for hackers to make a clone of a website and upload it to a similar URL, waiting for an unsuspecting user to access it and give away their credentials.
- + When shopping online, making sure the URL is secured and starts with **https://** is a good habit to get used to doing.

If in doubt, Google has a service for users to check whether a website is secure or not. [Check here.](#)

Oh look, a lost pen drive!

It's one of the simplest hacker tricks: leave a USB stick in a visible area (next to a worker's car in the office garage, or at the door of their house) and let the user think it's his lucky day because he has found a nice pen drive that he can use for his personal life and work.

Simply inserting the USB stick into the computer can be enough to lead to infecting the device with a virus, and that is why many large companies prevent the use of pen drives.



Phishing

When faced with an unsigned email from a colleague, with hardly any text and an attachment, it is advisable to be suspicious and recommended to contact the sender by another means and ask directly before opening or downloading anything.

There are many different options for trying to trick a remote worker. The most common practice by email is called 'phishing' and emulates contacting from a person, company or organization that could be familiar to the user with an attachment or strange instructions.

It is therefore imperative to have all systems up to date and a strong awareness of this to prevent this type of practice.

It is also important to remember that a smaller business provider with fewer resources dedicated to security could more easily become infected and inadvertently send a virus to the remote worker.

Passwords

Email passwords, the code to access a locked computer, social media, applications and personal email systems are common targets for hackers.

In recent years, with the boom and diversity of platforms, users tend to have one single password for everything. This is very dangerous because, of course, once one password is discovered, all passwords are discovered, and the damage could be enormous.

Most attacks try what is called a "dictionary attack", that is, they try to enter all the words that exist and combinations with numbers.

That's why the best password is "A&Ahe&tfbed", which, although it seems impossible to remember, is easier if you think of the following: "Alfred and Anna have eggs and toast for breakfast every day".

In general terms, it is recommended to change your password every two months.

You should be suspicious when...

Is your computer going slower than usual?

Has an additional toolbar appeared in the browser?

Do pop-up windows appear when you open a browser?

Does your mobile phone overheat more than usual? Does it not function as well as it usually would, and does it use up more battery power? Do advertisements and pop-ups appear where they shouldn't?

On the other hand, analyzing data consumption can shed light on what is happening to a mobile terminal. If there is an application that has triggered the consumption, there is a clue.

Users are the ones who know their equipment: if it starts doing strange things, it must be brought to the attention of a superior or IT department, whether they are working at home or in the office.

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4. The Workspace

A workspace must live up to its title, however obvious it may be. It is a matter of building a place of concentration, correctly lit and comfortable, so that the experience of remote working is a pleasant one.

Your ideal workspace

Whenever possible, it is advisable to establish a separate workplace, so that you can close the door and keep your home and work life separate.

If this is not possible, the best option is a corner of the largest room in the house. If it is not realistic either, the best

place is usually the kitchen, as it has a door and, in principle, is only used during specific hours, so it is the best place if you are going to make phone calls and video conference calls. In addition, it is usually one of the best lit places in the house.

Your desk

The reason to look for a specific computer cabinet or desk is because it is designed to be at the right height, matched to the most comfortable chairs for working, as well as being strong and spacious enough to hold the equipment and leave room for documents and other gadgets.

However, the fact is that more and more computers are being made lighter and more and more professionals work from laptops, increasing the range of possibilities when it comes to choosing a good desk.

But how do you know how good a desk is?

There are several tricks: look underneath the main table to see if it looks the same as the surface. If there are staples to hold parts together it is a sign of poor quality. If the corners are rounded the range is higher.

On the other hand, desks should ideally be height-adjustable, which allows you to work standing up. This facilitates concentration and has a positive effect on your health. There are electronic, mechanical and crank-lift systems which allow this.

Your chair

This is the one element of a workspace where you shouldn't look to save money. A comfortable, ergonomic, reclining and adjustable chair will be the best investment, especially if you spend long periods in front of your computer or on the phone.

Your screen

Laptops often lead to bad postures which usually translates into back pain and cervical and shoulder problems, so it is recommended to use a stand for a laptop and an accessory keyboard. The easiest option, recommended by professionals in the field of prevention of hazards at work, is to place a package of sheets under the laptop if there is no alternative.

The correct position for a monitor or screen is that the top edge of the screen is at the user's eye level when correctly seated.

Wiring

Modern desks have cable routing to avoid discomfort or tugging. A cable that crosses the user's path to their seat is an occupational hazard and overloaded terminals are an electrical hazard.

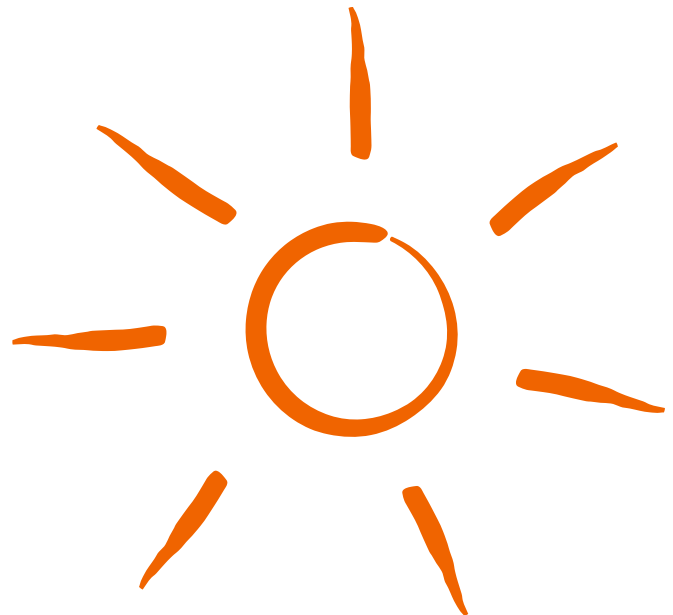
It's worth investing in professional electrical work to avoid wires sticking out all over the place and to make sure that the cables are safe and do not disturb you, although a homemade solution may be to stick the cables through the bottom of the desk.

Lighting

Natural lighting is great and psychologically it increases your well-being. If not, or as a complement to natural lighting, the best artificial lighting is zenithal, indirect light and even a desk lamp.

Good lighting prevents eyestrain and helps make the environment a pleasant place.

In addition, there are desk lamps that incorporate a wireless charging station for mobiles, which help remove a cable from the equation.



Posture

Poor posture and other bad habits are often unconscious acts. A backache after several hours of work is only the first indicator of an upcoming injury.

When seated, the correct working position is:

Feet on the floor. If needed, a footrest is a good idea.

Knees at a height similar to your hips.

Thighs and hips parallel to the floor.

Hands, wrists and forearms straight and parallel to the floor.

Elbows close to the body and bent at a 90 to 120-degree angle.

Shoulders relaxed.

Back fully supported by the backrest, preferably with lumbar support.

Head in line with the torso, facing forward.

Regardless of how good your posture is, it is not recommended to maintain it for long periods of time. For this reason, it is recommended to:

Get up from your seat to talk on the phone and take short walks.

Move your feet from time to time.

Stretch your arms, neck and legs.

Make adjustments to the backrest to change position slightly.

Change the tilt of the keyboard with the tabs that are usually on the bottom.

To be avoided:

Cushions, gel pads, wrist bands and armrests between the user and the keyboard, unless the keyboard is higher than normal.

When working in a standing position, the correct position is:

Legs, torso and head in line, vertical, and feet slightly apart.

One foot can be raised from time to time.

Getting down to work: Distractions

For those users who are easily distracted by noise from the street, neighbors or roommates, purchasing noise-canceling earphones may be the best option.

You can also work with music to avoid interference from disturbing noises. In applications such as Spotify or YouTube there are hundreds of playlists that users have created specifically for remote working.

Tidiness and cleanliness

There's no worse feeling than starting the day by picking up slices of pizza, empty soda cans or a greasy keyboard. The first impression you have when you turn on your computer to start a working day is decisive for the rest of the day.

That's why five or ten minutes must be freed up at the end of each day to clean and tidy up the work area:

- + Collect all the documents, sort out what is needed for the next day. Throw away or recycle what is not.
- + Collect pens and return them to their place.
- + Eliminate post-its of finished tasks and keep those that are pending well organized.
- + Pick up and wash coffee cups or glasses.
- + Pick up and sweep up all trash accumulated during the day.
- + Open the window to let the room air out for a while.

Recommendations for cleaning:

- + Turn your computer off before cleaning.
- + Clean from top to bottom, so that dust and other dirt do not accumulate in the upper areas. Clean firmly, but gently, especially on the screen surface.
- + Once cleaned of dust, apply specific products for the keyboard and screen:
 - To clean between the keys and connectors, you can use a compressed air spray. There are also gadgets that work via USB, although they aren't as effective as sprays.
 - To clean the screen, there are specific products such as duster or microfiber towels and special liquids for plasma screens and others.
- + Steps which are should be avoided at all costs:
 - Corrosive products, with alcohol and/or ammonia.
 - Dirty or hard cloths, which can damage screen pixels.

The aim is to make the first impression of the new day as pleasant as that of when you first started remote working.

The first impression you have when you turn on your computer to start a working day is decisive for the rest of the day.



5. Physical & Mental Health

In addition to correct posture while working to prevent injury and discomfort, a certain amount of dietary rigor and physical activity must be maintained. Equally, it is necessary to establish a series of social, cultural, leisure and disconnection from work routines to avoid falling into states of depression, anguish or feeling of loneliness, recognizing the emotion and working on it, but, above all, establishing prevention systems.

Food

Working from home doesn't mean eating poorly, eating snacks and drinking soda all day. It requires a certain amount of discipline, but, as with any effort, the effects are very positive.

Firstly, it is recommended to store less healthy products in an area that is difficult to access, in order to give the brain time to think about what you are about to eat. Sometimes, you go to the kitchen and just pick up the first snack or food you see, but making it a conscious decision makes it less likely to be impulsive.

To avoid this, cooking for several days, and rationing in a smart way, is recommended: one advantage of working from home is financial savings, you can prepare a huge lasagna

or a whole chicken and save Tupperware rations in the fridge, as if you were going to organize the next few days of work in the office. This way, you know you've had enough when all the food from one container is gone.

There is no reason to change eating habits: a strong, healthy and varied breakfast, a reasonable lunch to keep you going and then a delicious and rich dinner. Topping up every two or three hours with a dairy product or piece of fruit is always a good idea.

However, if you have little time to eat, instead of resorting to a snack, you can prepare some kind of homemade smoothies or shakes, a much better option than resorting to pre-made ones.

There are hundreds of recipes on the Internet that only require a pot, water, vegetables and hours of simmering time so that at lunch time you can have a delicious and healthy dish ready.

The sooner good eating habits are established, the easier it is to follow them.

Establish a different eating zone: Eating at the computer, just like eating in front of the TV, makes you lose track of how much you are eating, and you miss the slight body indicator of being full.

Use snacks as a reward: Has a deadline been met? Received a compliment? A good project result? Then it's a good time to make some popcorn and celebrate with a video conference with colleagues!

Hydration: There are various theories about how much water you should drink during the day. In general, there is talk of the eight-glass-per-day rule, or two liters, although there is no scientific proof of this. But there is one theory that does not fail: drinking water when you are thirsty. A healthy body asks for water when dehydration starts.

Physical health

Specialists recommend getting up from the workstation every hour or so. Applications such as Slack allow you to activate automatic reminders. Setting aside a daily time to exercise is a very healthy habit, even if it's only walking around your home for 15 minutes.

If you have been sedentary for a long time, it is a good idea to start slowly with your physical exercise routines. The first day you start a quarter of an hour is enough, gradually increasing until it reaches one hour. Your body will automatically ask for it as it becomes a habit.

There are exercises that can be done almost without leaving home, such as going up and down the stairs of a building, jumping rope, turning up the music and dancing or walking the dog.

On YouTube there are many professionals who have uploaded videos for all levels, if you feel motivated to start working out at home, even without gym equipment, to do push-ups, sit-ups, yoga or Pilates.

The ideal scenario is to establish a written workout routine and stick to it every day.

It is also important to stretch. Stretching your muscles is as important as exercising them.



Mental health

It's not uncommon to feel a sense of guilt about working from home while colleagues are at the office. It's not uncommon to feel anxious to prove yourself, to question yourself, and it's even common to have a particular sense of stress and anxiety that only comes from working remotely, from self-imposed pressure to look busy. It's easy to become obsessed with being online permanently or demonstrating productivity when it is not necessary.

All these emotions are normal, so being aware of them can be overcome without too much difficulty.

However, it is important to note that for those who have experienced depression or have a history of mental health struggles, remote working may not be a suitable option. It is a personal decision and it is a responsible one, and you have to take into account your current life situation, personality, work culture, habits and type of daily work.

There are also cases of professionals who are unhappy with their work and working from home only serves to further exacerbate the situation.

Remote working should be a choice resulting from personal maturity:

- + Because you can be more efficient.
- + Because you concentrate better.
- + Because you're happier, or feel more fulfilled and responsible.
- + Because you want to have a better work-life balance.
- + But certainly not because you don't like your job or my colleagues.

There are three essential components of preventing mental health risks while remote working:

Independent space

As we pointed out in Chapter 4, finding a work area that separates the personal from the professional is extremely important for keeping your mind in order. It helps to focus, to be more productive. Above all, it helps to leave that space when the day is over.

Time management

In order to avoid putting off work (which generates anxiety) and overloading (which leads to mental fatigue or obsession), following a schedule is key.

Establishing clearly defined working hours, getting up at regular times – even at the same time as going to the office – and showering, getting dressed, washing up, it all helps to prevent the mind from straying away from routines.

When it comes to work, there are programs and apps for time management. Generally, the simplest things work best: Start by writing a list of everything that needs to be done during the day, and then list the tasks by priority. This will make it easier to go step by step and avoid getting lost along the way to procrastination. The feeling of crossing out tasks and moving on is very satisfying.

In addition, knowing the nature of each task allows you to organize the tasks based on the fun or boredom that each one causes. Some people prefer creative tasks during the first two hours of each day. Others, however, prefer to tackle the most tedious task at the outset, to lighten the load of the day.

Time for yourself

Within that schedule, a space must be established for physical or recreational activities. For example, reserving an hour before dinner to meditate, read a book, play on a games console or play sports will facilitate disconnection from work, which is essential for feeling renewed.

Decoration also helps. Remote workers can put candles or other such ornaments on their desk to create a calm ambience.

Getting out for a while, or at least opening the window and breathing fresh air for a few minutes, even if it's cold, is also restorative.



Switching off and managing rest

According to a 2019 survey of 2,500 remote workers worldwide, 22% felt that the most difficult thing about working at home is to switch off (1).

If, in addition, we add up the consumption and dependence on our cell phones — the first thing we consult as soon as we wake up and the last thing we check before going to sleep — the situation is difficult to manage, but not impossible.

Sleep

Every adult requires between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night to rest and perform optimally the next day. Less than that - or more - will mean a drop in productivity and an increase in physical and mental health problems.

It is also important to emphasize the quality of sleep. An uncomfortable bed or pillow, a noisy, wet or cold area, will mean that sleeping conditions become impractical.

Getting into bed tired from physical exercise will make it easier to sleep. Having an enjoyable dinner, reading a book, avoiding your phone, reducing the intensity of the light and relaxing the atmosphere with quiet music has a direct effect on the quality of rest.

Work is not everything

Those who work from home may end up thinking that their work that defines them. Nothing could be further from the truth. People are complex, with many aspects making up our identity.

Exploring all of the elements that define us helps to confront experiences that every human being will have at some point in their lives, such as failure, stress or depression.

Scheduling time to contact friends, nurturing relationships, organizing hobbies and cultural activities, and giving free rein to other interests adds value to our personality and, consequently, to our work.

Making plans for a certain time usually has an impact on productivity and speed, leaving everything done in time to fulfil other interests, which are as important as your working life.

Close the door

Closing the door in physical terms represents a closure in psychological terms as well. That's why it is important that there is a door between your workspace and your home life.

In this sense, you can develop a ritual of disconnection when you finish working, starting with: writing a list of things to do the next day, closing tabs, turning off the computer, lowering the screen if it is a laptop, cleaning the work area, visualizing what will happen the next day and what needs to be done and, then, closing the door.

The question of the cell phone

It's hard to recognize an obsession. But if you are constantly checking your work email on your phone, you should consider buying a second cell phone.

Although it may seem a contradiction, it makes a lot of sense if we use one of the two devices for work and the other for personal life, so that once the day is over, the work phone is simply switched off until the next day. Simple.

Creative minds

All jobs, to a greater or lesser extent, require creativity, as creativity is the ability and ingenuity to solve problems. Key to creativity is setting a distance from your work.

In this sense, finding spaces of solitude, when it is literally sought, has benefits: it is about spending time alone with the brain, for example, asking to be alone to prepare dinner, taking a 15-minute walk, listening to a podcast, reading a book. Meditation, for example, is an exercise that allows you to escape from reality and return with a healthy approach.

Being alone with thoughts helps to disconnect from work, rest properly, and recharge one's capacities to face later challenges.

The power of play

All adults need to play. For example, scientists who spent their days trying to crack secret Nazi codes during World War II spent their free time playing chess. The game allowed them to disconnect from work and, in doing so, they gained new perspectives.

Setting aside some time for hobbies, crossword puzzles, sudoku or even video games is not only reasonable but also necessary.

Learning something new

Our brain is always willing to face new challenges, but it needs to be understood to make the most of it. Learning a language, training and specializing in something, developing a hobby or taking an interest in history all widen the capacities of our mind.

(1) State of Remote Work 2019. How remote workers from around the world feel about remote work, the benefits and struggles that come along with it, and what it's like to be a remote worker in 2019.





6. Effective Communication

More effective emails

Before writing an email, we must be clear about the objective of the communication and be in some way empathetic to the unknown situation of the recipient. Is help sought, information shared, something urgent notified, material needed? What is the level of urgency?

In general, it is not possible to achieve several objectives with one single email, so it is important to acknowledge that, in digital life, one action equals one objective.

Writing the subject

In the 'subject' of the mail, it is advisable to take a moment to summarize and describe the content of the message. Or, in other words, give the recipient a reason to open and read the email.

That said, it is **not** recommended to:

- Send mails without a subject.
- Exaggerate: "Read! Very important!"
- Begin with the likes of: "Quick question", "Hello".

It is advisable to:

Write the 'subject' as if it were the headline of a news story.

For a meeting, it is preferable to indicate the date and time of the meeting, as well as the subject matter, rather than simply to put "Meeting tomorrow".

In some cases, it may be a good idea to include the estimated time for reading the email.

Include who you are writing from if the message comes from a third party.

Online marketing experts recommend spending just as long on writing a good 'subject' as writing the body of the email.

Writing the body of an email

Above all, you need to know how to structure the information you want to share.

After the usual greeting and courtesy, it is important that at the beginning there is a brief explanation of the objective sought with the email.

If the email is long, a small summary can be made so that the recipients can choose to read what really interests them according to their responsibility or degree of involvement. For example:

1. General project status
2. Problems encountered
3. Delivery dates
4. New ideas and contributions

This will also allow the author of the email to structure their thinking when writing the rest of the mail.

Using images in the body of the email is a good idea to make the consumption of the text more pleasant. From screenshots of the project to photographs (or even animated GIFs) that illustrate the message, idea or tone with which you are trying to communicate.

Take care of grammar: A typo is one thing, but spelling mistakes are another. It is unpleasant to read emails with spelling mistakes as our brain has to work harder to process the information. To write well, you have to read a lot. Even if you don't have the books or time to do so, you can always use a spell-checker.

Avoid large paragraphs. The shorter they are, the more pleasant it will be to read.

Empathize with people who have a heavy workload and **mark in bold the key words or phrases** that will allow them to take in the essentials.

Watch your tone. Sometimes remote workers are in stressful situations, oblivious to the person they're speaking to. It is better to think twice before sending an email when angry or stressed. It is better to take a break and to go for a coffee and to think about what reaction you are looking for with the email, especially if you expect collaboration from the other party.

Besides, right from the beginning of the email, the tone is evident to the other party. It is not the same to start a mail with "Hello, Steve" as "Steve."

In both cases the tone is radically different. In particular, the second option transmits the feeling of a warning. It is one thing to say things in words and another thing to write them down and expect them to be read with the same intention as they have been written.

Finally, it is good to remember that maintaining a positive spirit when writing an email is usually rewarded with a positive response.

Conclusion and thanks. The conclusion of the email should act as a reminder of what is expected from the recipients (a response or a contribution, for example) and, finally, you can never be too polite. It is essential to thank others for their time, to say please or apologize.

Finally, once the email has been written, it is time to add the recipients. It is not advisable to do so before because mistakenly sending the email halfway through reflects badly on you and puts pressure on yourself to quickly finish the email, which can lead to further errors.

BCC: Using the hidden copy is a guaranteed way to avoid responses from people who should be informed, but don't need to join in any conversations and prevents a chain of emails from becoming a disaster.

Answers

If you are too busy to respond to a request for help, it is better to respond by explaining the situation, rather than not responding at all, so that the sender will not halt their activities waiting for a reply.

On the other hand, when the recipient has done what's needed of them (to send a document, to resolve an issue or whatever it may be), it is good practice to be grateful for their efforts.

The more pleasant the communication experience is between two users, the more effective it will be.

Maintaining a positive spirit when writing an email is usually rewarded with a positive response.

More efficient chats

Chat conversations, such as Slack, Teams and even WhatsApp, require specific language to be more effective. In this sense, to respect the work of others and avoid annoyance or misunderstanding, the following simple rules can be followed:

1. **Empathy:** Never send a message expecting an immediate response.
2. **Contextualize:** When sending a message, explain the context.
3. **Go straight to the point:** It is better to avoid messages with a simple "Hello", "Are you there?", "Do you have a second?"

When chatting with co-workers, especially in private chats, it is advisable to go beyond the work context that you find yourselves in. Take an interest in the person, ask them about what they got up to over the weekend and make conversations more humane.

In this sense, if a question has been answered properly and the answer is a simple "ok", it may not feel right. As with email, it is important to be thankful for things. An answer like "oh, that's great", "thank you so much for your help, that's great", "amazing, that's great, thank you" totally changes the spirit of the collaboration and its rewards.

Likewise, applying a sense of humor to a conversation through memes or gifs, if the context allows it, is often well received.

However, work chats also have some qualities that make them unique in a negative sense, for example, gossip.



Anything out of the ordinary is likely to be screenshotted and shared with others and could be read in a different way than was intended and taken out of context.

For this reason, these are some recommendations of what to avoid ever doing in a professional chat:

- Speak negatively about a boss.
- Speak badly of a colleague who is not present.
- Say that a job is not your responsibility and that it was never agreed upon on the day of the interview.
- Spreading rumors.
- Sending personal information.
- Disparaging or trivializing a problem of someone who has come to you for advice or help.
- Rude and disrespectful remarks.
- Talking about matters relating to salary.
- Debates about politics or religion.

In short, you have to understand the context in order to better appreciate its functionality and characteristics that make it unique. There are certain topics that require a certain time and place for discussion. Be cautious, sometimes your fingers on the keyboard go faster than your mind.

More efficient meetings and brainstorming

Meetings, and in particular brainstorming, are probably the biggest challenge when it comes to remote working. This is because brainstorming is all about speed and ingenuity, but at a distance, things can become complicated.

To get the most out of meetings, video conferencing is recommended:

- + Position the webcam correctly. Strange angles, or showing only a piece of your face, are a distraction.
- + Use good lighting, so that it does not feel like you are talking to someone inside a cave.
- + Keep in mind that the camera is capturing what's behind it. The more pleasing it is to the eye, the better.
- + Dress appropriately.
- + Test the microphone before the video conference.
- + Test headphones (better than speakers, as they sometimes generate distortion and echoes that destroy communication).
- + Mute the microphone when you are not speaking.
- + When someone is going to speak, it is better to say your name: "Hi, I'm Ana, I have a question...".
- + Focus on one thing at a time, if you're in a video conference call, focus only on that call.
- + When speaking, it is preferable to look at the camera and not at yourself reflected on the screen, so that you help others to know that you are 100% focused on the meeting.
- + When sharing the screen, it is advisable to have only the document in question open, and not ten other programs at the same time. Also, having a clean and tidy desktop will say a lot about the worker's organization skills.

As for the organizers of video conferences, and given the distances between people, it is advisable to:

- + Prepare the objective of the meeting well.
- + Invite as few people as possible, only those who are strictly necessary.
- + Establish clear points to discuss in the meeting and define the agenda, to give every person a set time.
- + Ask the guests to prepare the subject that corresponds to them before the meeting.

And, specifically, in brainstorming:

- + Establish a person as moderator of the meeting, in charge of taking the minutes and giving each attendee their turn to speak.
- + Ask each guest to prepare a particular topic, looking for 'best practices' from other companies, actions and other references.
- + Respect speaking time and ban interruptions until a user has finished.
- + To request a turn to speak, a direct and private chat with the moderator can be enabled.
- + Prohibit private chats between meeting members.





7. Remote Project Management

Working from home is changing the concept of project management as we know it, and everything points to the end of person-hour measurements. The new organizational structures and models that are being generated are based on achievements and include a distribution of tasks and division of processes based on the talent of each worker, while new communication and control systems mature.

This is where challenges arise as the greatest concern of companies is control over the progress of a project, while the remote worker demands trusts.

Appropriate and transparent project management, favoring empathy and respect between both parties, offering spaces of freedom and treating the remote worker as a responsible professional seem to be decisive steps in achieving all the advantages that have been mentioned throughout this guide.

The figure of the coordinator

Companies must find a person responsible for remote workers and create appropriate structures for managing them. This coordination figure is actually not simple to find. In addition to demonstrating project management skills, they must have solid experience in **motivation**, **conflict mediation** and **collaborative** working environments.

This means that the position of Remote Working Coordinator requires specific human resource skills in

terms of intermediation and diplomacy, along with those of therapist and coach. In other words, it is a matter of choosing a professional who cares about people, who proactively encourages relationships and who makes them feel like an important part of the company.

To do this, it is essential that the coordinator schedules a **regular face-to-face meeting** with those who are working from home. Once a week or every two weeks, it takes the remote worker out of their daily grind of emails and calls for a short while, but, above all, it serves to humanize the people with whom they are in daily contact.

If the remote workers are far away from the usual meeting point, the coordinator can assess the organization of regular meetings in different places, with the coordinator being the one to move around and spend time on the road, renting coworking spaces by the hour and avoiding, as far as possible, cafes or restaurants.

The Agile method

As its name suggests, it is a framework that allows for reduced processing times and improved efficiency. In other words, it is a method designed to increase agility.

Agile is not simply a methodology, but a work philosophy, so it is necessary to contextualize its origin and its reason for being.

In the 1990s, IT development companies were slower than the demands of other businesses from them, so it was common that the IT solution to a problem required several years of development and, by the time it was ready to be implemented, the problem had already evolved or had simply changed, so the software became obsolete before it was even tested. These were the days of the waterfall methodology.

In specific industries, such as aerospace or defense, it took even longer to develop complex systems. For example, the NASA space shuttle missions of the 1980s used technology from the 1960s.

Jon Kern, an aerospace engineer at the time, frustrated by the deadlines and the impossibility of reversing decisions made at the beginning of a project, began organizing meetings with 16 other leaders to discuss and design different forms of software development that would rely on feedback and a willingness to change direction.

Finally, after a meeting in Utah in 2001, they summarized the conclusions of their meetings in the so-called "Agile Manifesto", based on four values and twelve principles.

Values:

- + Individuals and their interactions are more important than processes and tools.
- + Software in operation matters more than exhaustive documentation.
- + Collaboration with customers ahead of contracts.
- + The response to change trumps following the plan.

Principles:

1. The top priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
2. Accept that requirements change, even in late stages of development. Agile processes leverage change to provide competitive advantage to the customer.
3. Deliver functional software frequently, between every two weeks and two months, in preference to always aiming for the shortest time period possible.
4. Business managers and developers must work together on a daily basis throughout the project.
5. Projects are built around motivated individuals. They must be given the environment and support they need and be entrusted with the execution of their tasks.
6. The most efficient and effective method of communicating information to the development team and among its members is face-to-face conversation.
7. Software in operation is the primary measure of progress.
8. Agile processes promote sustained development. Promoters, developers and users must maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design improves agility.
10. Simplicity, or the art of maximizing the amount of work deemed unnecessary, is essential.

11. The best architecture, requirements and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to be more effective and then adjusts and refines its behavior accordingly.

In short, the Agile methodology proposes to improve quality, commitment, speed and increase productivity, and today it is applied to all types of projects.

And within the methodology, the **'Scrum'** model (literally meaning the melee that is formed in rugby) is used to be able to reach deliveries with short deadlines called 'sprints' and is organized as follows:

The project is broken down into small tasks by a "product owner", and these tasks will be executed continuously over the next two to four weeks (sprints).

Each team decides how the assigned tasks will work and is led by a "scrum master".

In order to evaluate the progress of the tasks, the teams meet daily for 15 minutes, even if there are no new developments. If an overload is detected, the scrum master can correct it or redistribute the workload on the same day. Three questions are asked in these meetings: What was done yesterday? What are we going to do today? And how are we going to solve a problem?

The sprint is completed with a review of the deliverable assets or materials by the product owner, who can return it for improvement.

Finally, a meeting is organized to make a retrospective analysis in which all the members of the project are present to look for process improvements.

Like Scrum, Agile can incorporate the **Kanban** model, which is a card system that is assigned to departments or individuals to display the resources needed to perform tasks. The first Kanban in history was divided into three columns:

- + To do
- + In progress
- + Done

This system was invented by Toyota in the 1960s, inspired by supermarkets and the management of limited stock to meet demand precisely, to avoid bottlenecks and overproduction. Toyota managers invited their suppliers to adopt the Kanban method to their production lines as well, so the workflow became bigger, but was continuous and uninterrupted.

Today the Kanban method is applied in all kinds of industries, although the first to adopt and improve it were software developers.

The good thing about Kanban is that it does not require organizational changes, configuration or adaptation, as it can be applied to real workflows, whatever the size of the company.



Applications

There are many online applications for project management, including some that are free. In general, all these programs facilitate a schedule, distribution of tasks and indications of achievements and goals.

In parallel, or integrated with the manager, it is essential to have a collaborative document management system, like Content Services or Enterprise Content Management (ECM), so that all those involved know which is the latest version of a document in real time. It is stored in the cloud securely so backups are guaranteed, editing permissions are assigned and there is real teamwork, not a chaos of versions, changes and incompatibilities.

In addition, these types of systems tend to be more complex and add more software components as administrative processes are incorporated, such as the validation of budgets, invoices, payments, contract expirations or personnel additions and deletions, and various positions in a company have to approve and sign documents or payment orders.

Below, we list the most popular tools for managing telework.

Trello is the best-known application for organizing tasks and is based on the Kanban model. Tasks are assigned with cards and ordered in lists. They can be moved according to the progress they have made, and the interested parties receive the corresponding notifications in real time.

In addition, Trello easily connects to PomoDoneApp to optimize the management of time assigned to each task, helping you to be more productive.

Trello can also be used on a personal basis, to organize a weekly menu calendar, exercise calendar, etc.

A simple organization model is **completely free**, but with some limitations, such as 10mb for attachments, 10 team boards, 1 power-up per board, etc.

Other options very similar to Trello include **Kanbanflow, Archmule, Kanbanchi, Asana, Wekan, Taiga or Kanboard.**

Monday is an alternative and more advanced than Trello. Apart from dashboards, processes and tasks can be visualized in lists, maps or spreadsheets. Monday allows for better project tracking but is a pay-only tool.

Other options similar to Monday are **Basecamp and Microsoft Planner.**

For needs beyond the basics, such as cloud storage with high security standards, document management - from capturing, extracting information, indexing, to team collaboration - setting up processes, automating and managing information and data, we recommend taking a look at the extensive product portfolio of Kyocera Document Solutions, a global pioneer in solutions and services for tomorrow's workspaces.



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