

7 Tips on Working From Home Like a Pro During COVID-19 Social Distancing:

In my last role, when I wasn't traveling (which was about half the time), I often worked from home and spent several hours a day on calls and video conferences. As anyone who's done it can tell you, working from home has its pros and cons. Here are a few steps to take to make the most out of working from home:

1) Exercise:

- a. Maintain or (ideally) increase the frequency of your exercise routine. It will do wonders for your physical and mental health. If you have space for it, get an exercise bike. Once you're used to it, try doing intervals (1-minute max speed, 1-minute more comfortable speed) for 15 to 30 minutes a day. And, it does not have to be an expensive Peloton. When we lived in an apartment in Boston, we had a foldable exercise bike that you could store in a closet that we bought for under \$200 bucks, and it worked just fine.
- b. True confessions: when I'm traveling or working from home, I have, on occasion, taken work calls on the exercise bike and just typed my notes on my smart phone (just a few words/bullets, which I fleshed out when I'm off the bike). Of course, this only works if you bike at a comfortable enough speed so that you can carry on a conversation, so, this is not the time to do intervals!

2) Watch your diet: For some reason, when I work from home, there is a temptation to snack...constantly. Even though I snack at work, there's something about working from home that just brings out the "Super Snacker" in me. If this is true for you, too, just make sure you have lots of healthy snacks. I don't want to make this into a food column, so, I'm not going to offer detailed suggestions, other than to say what I tell myself: Julian, eat fewer cookies and more veggies and high-protein nuts (e.g., almonds). This will be even more important given the stress of the current COVID-19 context. One last thought here: Fill up a 1-liter water bottle, and make sure you drink it at least once, if not twice, over the course of the workday. You'll feel better, and you'll snack less.

3) Go outside everyday: Do not book your calendar with calls from 8 am to 5 or 6 pm every workday. Leave yourself at least 15 to 30 minutes during the day to go outside, while maintaining the appropriate social distance from others (6 feet if possible). If needed, do one of the calls outside. Even if you're just standing outside of your building or house or going on a quick walk, just get the fresh air. Of course, follow the CDC guidance about maintaining the appropriate distance and not gathering in large groups. However, that guidance does not mean that you cannot leave your apartment or house at all.

4) Even if you have a desktop office set up, change up your location within the house. If you can take a couple of calls from other rooms during the day with your laptop, do that. It will help to mix up your routine. If your office doesn't have a window, but, some other room in your house does, try and spend some of the workday in that room to try and get some additional light.

5) Set a time limit on how much COVID-19 related news you read and watch: If you spend 10-15 minutes in the morning and 10-15 minutes in the evening reading, listening, or watching COVID-19 related news, that will be more than enough to make sure that you don't miss any key local or national updates. Right now, this may be the hardest piece of advice on this list to follow, but, ultimately, it may be among the most important for your mental health. When you're done with work or taking a break, listen to music or read other things.

- 6) **Have kids at home and need to home school while working?:** I am not an expert on this topic, but, I found this article to be incredibly helpful:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/16/health/homeschooling-during-coronavirus-wellness/index.html>.

Highlights from the article include: recognize home school is not school, make a schedule, include kids in the discussion about how to structure the day, acknowledge that kids have different needs that may be difficult to meet at home (including special needs), build in recess, include arts and crafts, and, finally, don't be too hard on yourself.

My only adds based on conversations with friends are as follows:

- a. If possible, build breaks into your work calendar to fully interact with the kids and support them in their schoolwork and other activities, including play (e.g., 15-30-minute breaks every 2-3 hours). If your kids are old enough to do some work independently, this will give you a chance to check in and give direction/answer questions, and, potentially increase the likelihood that you have some work windows with few interruptions.
 - b. If either two adults or an adult and an older child can tag team to help younger kids, consider taking shifts, allowing you to concentrate on calls that require focused attention during your "protected work shifts."
 - c. The ideal structure will need to be customized depending on the age and temperament of the child, the type of work you do, etc.
- 7) **Watch something grow:** Whether you live in an apartment or a house, watching plants grow is a great way to pass time when you're at home more frequently than usual. I don't just mean buy a house plant that's just going to sit there and look the same week after week (although, my wife would tell you, I have plenty of those and derive a tremendous amount of joy from taking care of them as well). I mean actually planting some seeds or bulbs indoors or outdoors. Yes, there are bulbs that will grow indoors in nothing but water, like paper whites. They are beautiful and smell amazing! But, if you're planting indoors, pick something that doesn't flower if folks in your household have allergies. There's just something about watching something grow from nothing into a real plant that is very soothing.

