

REMOTE WORKING 101—TIPS FROM THE FIELD



The global coronavirus pandemic has triggered immediate and sweeping changes to the way we live and work, and if you're among the extremely fortunate who aren't on the medical front lines or part of the service industry, you've perhaps transitioned to working from home. I'm among those extremely fortunate—I've worked from home since 1997 thanks to employers, including BMC Software, who've recognized and supported that not all jobs are geared toward bullpens, shrinking office space or shared workspaces.

I consider myself very lucky, and a pioneer, if you will, of this way of working, so it's not been a massive work/life balance shift for me. I recognize, though, that for some out there, it is, and alongside all the other changes in people's lives, this one may be an added stressor instead of a blessing in disguise.

It's definitely an acquired skillset that requires not only the right technology, but also the self-discipline to stay focused amid the lure of family (two- and four-legged), the fridge, and entertainment at the ready. I've compiled some helpful, unique, and funny pointers that have worked for our BMC team and me. Whether you're having trouble adjusting to the new work-from-home normal or are a remote work veteran who's just had their "home alone" situation blow up into a workspace filled with partners, parents, and children, these tips and tricks may help you adapt.

Listening to a bit of [@SchepsOlga](#) whilst [#workingfromhome](#) for [@BMCSoftware](#). [#WFH](#) [#BMCLife](#) [#StayHome](#) pic.twitter.com/qQoJiYGf1H

— Marcus Davage (@spufidoo) [March 25, 2020](#)

Communication is key

A lot of the world has ground to a halt, but a lot hasn't. You may still need to get out for groceries and medical appointments and the like, which means disappearing from your communication/collaboration systems like Skype for a few hours. Put those banks of time on your calendar so you're transparent about your availability. If being at home with family is causing you to shift your schedule, say so. Some of my colleagues are split-shifting with a spouse and rotating childcare schedules—switching up to working during evening hours and early mornings when the kids are down for naps.

Office chatter isn't typically a thing if you've worked remote for a while, but it might be something you're missing if you're a new adopter. It's easy to stay connected in real-time with tools like Skype and Zoom, so use that opportunity to schedule a quick-connect coffee break with the colleague—or colleagues—you're missing from across the aisle. When you do jump on a meeting, take time to ask how everyone is. Keep the personal engagement going. If your company has an internal community, use it to stay in touch.

Keep moving

Gyms were one of the first things to go with social distancing, but several businesses have compensated by putting their classes online for free. [Les Mills Bodyflow](#) is my jam—it's been a weekly staple for seven years and they've released one of their best offerings online for everyone. If a yoga mashup isn't your thing, a simple scan of social media and Google turns up [online classes](#) for whatever gets your heart rate up—there are even some IG live options!

If you picked up a [Peloton](#) bike last Christmas, you can do their workouts and create a small workout group and ride live with friends. The [CDC](#) says it's perfectly fine to get out and go for a walk. Just keep that six-foot distance in mind—walk in the neighborhood instead of the park. And there are quick workouts you can do [at your desk](#) between calls. Or, you can be an overachiever and “have laptop, will travel around the house” like our friend here:

Use the right gear

All remote work hinges on your Internet connection, and several of our folks highly recommend staying connected through an Ethernet cable whenever possible to head off dropped Wi-Fi signals or dead zones in the house. With so many of your family members online for work or streaming their shows or games, a wired connection helps ensure you have the best, fastest connectivity available. One colleague recommends bookmarking [Down Detector](#) to see how your Internet Service Provider is faring.

Web conferencing is the only way we're meeting these days, which means you're likely on a headset for hours on end. One BMCer recommends adding a hands-free speaker to your

setup—bearing in mind that may not work for you if your home office is now shared with a WFH partner or kids doing virtual classwork. Or, switch to wireless devices so you and your new co-workers don't get distracted by the cables.

#WFH #BMCLife My funny co-worker at home - Choco - curious about all that I do on my laptop.

During my tea break, Choco playing the cat n mouse game pic.twitter.com/ryqulB5bZM

— Ashwini Mathad (@ashwinivm) [March 23, 2020](#)

One employee also reminds us that Skype for Business lets you transfer audio for a meeting to your cell phone so your laptop and Internet connection are only buffering the video. And about that—if your company prefers you to be on camera, do a test capture so you see what they're seeing, and remind the folks sharing your space that you will be on camera so you don't, ahem, "share," more than you meant to.

Most remote workers rely on a laptop, but now that you're home for the foreseeable, invest in a monitor and external keyboard and mouse if you need a little more room to navigate your work onscreen, and a little more flexibility for your wrists and hands. Check out LinkedIn, too, for 13 hours' worth of [resource guides and tips for working from home](#).

Set a schedule

While it might be tempting to surf your social feeds to see how everyone else out there is coping, don't do it when you're working if you know you're prone to rabbit holing and losing chunks of your day. Save it as a treat for the end of the day. To that end, if WFH is new for you, and setting goals is typically how you navigate your day in the office, maintain that discipline at home. Start the day with a checklist of what you absolutely must get to by EOB. And then honor the EOB. Keep those clear differentiators between home life and work life.

I'm as guilty as anybody of working vampire hours, but I balance it out. If I had to tap out earlier in the day and come back online in the evening to finish, I still worked a full day—just not a 15-hour day if I can help it. If you were already working 15-hour days, hopefully working from home will help you trim that down because you don't have the commute to, from, and within the office for multiple meetings and can just lock in and get your work done.

If you're typically in an office and your team is used to popping by with questions, one of our employees recommends putting quick virtual 1:1s on the calendar so staff know they'll get a guaranteed window with you and are less likely to ping you throughout the day or chase an answer on IMs.

Take time out for self-care

The term's a little buzzy these days, but it's important to remember our humanity in all of this. The threat of a viral infection bearing down on you or your family members isn't easily buried or pushed away, and for some, it can be crippling, reigniting dormant anxieties or amplifying other concerns. If you need help—ask for it. I'm super grateful that our management has put people first during all of this. If you're in management, reiterate that with your people, particularly if remote is a new situation

and everyone is on the same learning curve.

If you've had a home office for years that's been a corner of a room and you kept meaning to make it a proper work-friendly space, do it now. Take advantage of being home with your family and your pets. Pair up two perks and get your exercise by taking your dog out for a walk—and leave the phone on your desk so you can genuinely enjoy the break.

Remote working - don't sit too long in your chair. Take frequent breaks. Here's one way to do that. His name is Murphy, and he's 11 weeks old. He survived parvo virus 3 weeks ago. [#WFH](#) [#BMCLife pic.twitter.com/jwtXHJ6gXC](#)

— Dave Hobbs (@hobsterD) [March 23, 2020](#)

Have coffee at your kitchen table with your partner. Eat lunch with your kids. Finally enjoy your kitchen and practice your cooking or baking skills. That said, also be mindful not to graze all day; or just make healthy choices if you do.

Should the silence of working from home alone be deafening when you prefer the bustle of public spaces, there's an app for that! You can stream ambient noise for everything from busy airports to coffee shops to the train on [Soundrown](#), [Coffitivity](#), and [YouTube](#).

Keep the kids busy

Some school districts weren't set up ahead of time for virtual learning, so you may have kids at home who aren't in classes, and boredom is quickly setting in, along with the potential for work disruption. Luckily, there are several free online classes to keep them occupied. [Exploratorium](#) even has a selection of lessons on COVID-19 that might be more helpful at laying out the basics than anything you've seen on the news. [Live Science](#) compiled several options, including virtual classes, museum trips, science experiments, and arts and crafts.

And finally, remember that we're all in this together. There are things we can control—staying home to protect ourselves and our loved ones, continuing to do our work—and things we can't, like how long the social distancing will last. This infographic from [TheCounselingTeacher.com](#) puts a very good perspective on things.

I CANNOT CONTROL

(So, I can LET GO of these things.)

IF OTHERS FOLLOW THE RULES OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

THE AMOUNT OF TOILET PAPER AT THE STORE

I CAN CONTROL

(So, I will focus on these things.)

THE ACTIONS OF OTHERS

MY POSITIVE ATTITUDE

TURNING OFF THE NEWS

FINDING FUN THINGS TO DO AT HOME

HOW LONG THIS WILL LAST

HOW I FOLLOW CDC RECOMMENDATIONS

LIMITING MY SOCIAL MEDIA

MY OWN SOCIAL DISTANCING



PREDICTING WHAT WILL HAPPEN

MY KINDNESS & GRACE

HOW OTHERS REACT

OTHER PEOPLE'S MOTIVES

Clipart: Carrie Stephens Art
TheCounselingTeacher.com