

Office space

Making working from home work

By Candace Leigh

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Working from home is a pretty cushy gig. You can make the coffee just the way you like, type in your underwear, and even get those reports finished at 3 a.m.

The pleasure that comes with autonomy is hard to deny. But if you're not actually getting any work done, you might want to re-evaluate your routine. Not everyone is cut out to work from home, but the lucky few who do so successfully are both self-motivated and well-organized.



The freedom of this arrangement far outweighs any detriments. Just don't take advantage of it. Use little pockets of time to accomplish what you normally wouldn't have time to return to an office to do. Because *you* make the rules, set a schedule that compliments your style. There's nothing wrong with a mid-afternoon siesta. Get ahead of the game whenever possible. When that *Kids in the Hall* marathon does air, you'll have banked enough time to flop down on the sofa and enjoy it.

What do you need?

Though logistics vary for freelancers versus corporate commuters, many basic requirements apply.

■ Make a dedicated workspace. If you're more comfortable working at the kitchen table, that's fine. Just keep it clear and house your papers nearby. The more you fidget while getting things together, the more you're apt to procrastinate. Ideally, you'll have a separate room. Either way, organize all the elements so that wherever you are working becomes an office space. Invest in a comfortable chair.

■ Create closed storage areas. Open units offer distraction and also look cluttered. For the picky, color block desk accessories so that elements look intentional. To free valuable desk space, use wall-mounted organizers and keep frequently used items within arm's reach. Sort regularly! Keep work files separate from personal ones, with special attention to receipts or invoices. Take advantage of some of the tax benefits your new work situation offers.

■ Sharing a space? Be sure to invest in a separate phone, fax, or online account. When it's time to get things done, you don't want to have to wait for someone else to be through. You can also arrange for online services like banking and postal metering online to avoid running around town. For personal comfort, keep the stereo remote nearby. Add some favorite photos or even cheesy quotes for inspiration.

What Are The Rules?

It takes a little of the fun out of it, but you *do* need a routine. Keep a posted schedule for friends and roommates. Your office hours at home should be as respected as much as, well, office hours. Though you do have more flexibility, you shouldn't be expected to be available for anything anytime. Just as you probably shouldn't play hooky every time you get a little spring fever, also respect that those who do work inside the office probably don't want to deal with business matters in the off hours. Creative types especially benefit from being able to go to work in the wee hours of the night, or whenever inspiration hits. Just expect not to get a reply until 9 o'clock Monday morning. It's a delicate balance when you're left to your own devices. Being in your own digs should make things more efficient and more comfortable, but you must be prepared to be professional when you do have those outside appointments. Starting the workday at approximately the same time, after you've showered and dressed, helps remind you that it's still a job, after all. Don't forget to schedule social interaction! Even though you're working from home, you still need grown-up play dates, both for networking and sanity. Though water cooler banter isn't usually intellectually stimulating, you will miss being in the loop of your peers unless you get out of the house.

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