

CHEAT SHEET

Your guide to homeworking

Let's make home...work!

COVID-19 saw millions of employees decamp from a workplace to their homes, with often only a few hours' notice. But a new [survey from O2](#) suggests that when the pandemic is over, lots of employees won't be going back to the office. Nearly half the workforce think flexible working will increase, and 81% expect to work from home at least one day per week.

Many employees are finding that they enjoy a better work/life balance and are saving money on travel. Businesses, meanwhile, are pleased to be cutting commercial property costs and also helping the environment by reducing commutes.

But shunting employees home in a rush to deal with a global health emergency is very different to a planned strategy. With homeworking now becoming a realistic and commercially sound long-term solution, this cheat sheet explains how to make it work.

Who's doing it?

Businesses of all sizes...

Creative and brand agency [Echo](#) (with a team of 25) says it's creating some of its best work since heading home. Andy Capper, Creative Director, says: "Isolation has offered me the peace and time to really get under the skin of a creative challenge. And I have the freedom and opportunity to be flexible in my work day." Rather than piling into meeting rooms to brainstorm, Echo's creatives do their own thinking before discussing and sharing work on digital platforms.

[Gallagher](#), the insurance firm, moved a 5,000-strong workforce from 70 offices across the UK into a homeworking context in late March. Insurance is a relationship-led business, plus – unsurprisingly – service requests are currently high, given the pandemic. The company has managed to deploy homeworking without reducing ability to service or quality of contact.

“In a decade's time, ‘Working from Home’ won't be a dirty word. The majority of office workers will be doing it, and we will be healthier for it.”

[Deloitte](#)

Top Tech

Sage will, of course, be at the heart of your financial and operational management but a host of other technologies will make life easier for homeworking teams: you'll likely need one of each of these:

Video Conferencing

Connect with homeworking employees



Microsoft Teams



BlueJeans



Lark



Google Meet

Project Management

Keep work on track



Trello



Scoro



Asana



Podio



Monday

Collaboration

Share information to stay efficient



Office 365



G Suite



Dropbox



Slack

Time Management

Allocate time and stay productive



Toggl



Harvest



Everhour

Five ways to be a better manager

1 Don't micromanage

Give your team the freedom to perform and they will exceed your expectations. Remote teams don't slack off (and the few people that do will soon be found out). A manager's job is to co-ordinate and enable, not to create new forms of reporting.

2 Stay in touch, but not too much

Early on in a homeworking regime, there are meetings for everything. But when a team is comfortably humming along, reduce your meeting overhead. Focus on problem-solving, or one-to-one conversations with more meaningful outcomes.

3 Give everyone the information they need

The Harvard Business Review reported:

"Newly remote workers are often surprised by the added time and effort needed to locate information from coworkers. Even getting answers to what seem like simple questions can feel like a large obstacle to a worker based at home." Managers must facilitate these important connections between people, information and resources.

4 Be human

An office is a uniform space, organised for work first. Our homes are complex spaces, organised for family first. Managers must appreciate those complexities (children, cooking, available space, pets, etc.) before making demands. In any case, COVID-19 has taught us all to connect and communicate in a more human and empathic way.

5 Focus on outcomes, not effort

Inc. reports: *"It's not possible to manage every aspect of the work done by a remote team... Instead of focusing on activity or hours worked, focus on the outcomes and measure your team accordingly."*

Five ways to be a better employee

1 Have a routine

You don't have to stick to the nine-to-five, but it's tempting for bedtime to creep into the early hours and work to start at 11! Put routines in place (times and places, around both work and home commitments) and you'll find it easier to concentrate and deliver.

2 Discover focus

Homeworkers are not distracted by colleagues (the downside to this, of course, can be loneliness). This is the chance to focus on one job at a time. Switch off alerts and notifications, and put 30 minutes into a single task. You'll be incredibly productive.

3 Take breaks

Josh Bolding, Co-Founder of fitness business **Vivo Life**, says: *"Taking breaks when you need to throughout the day isn't a luxury. It's a necessity. We need them to do our best work and, most importantly, for our physical and mental health. Please, let's be kinder to ourselves during this time. Put lunch breaks, walks in nature, workouts and yoga classes in your diary and treat them with the same level of priority that you would an essential business meeting."*

4 Speak up!

ACAS writes: *"Changing to homeworking may be a challenge for many managers and employees... it's important to build up a healthy relationship of trust and confidence. Employers and managers should make sure that everyone working from home knows what's expected of them."* That will only happen if you are as honest and vocal as your management team.

5 Communicate the little things

Because they'll be seen as bigger things than they actually are. If you can't make a meeting because your children need to be picked up from school, or you're running late, communicate that fact early. It will be appreciated.

Five ways to communicate effectively

1 Pick the right tools

Not every meeting needs to be a video conference. In fact, above around five participants, many people will defer to the leader. Sometimes one-to-one is better: try picking up the phone.

2 Be extra clear

Especially in emails, it's easy to be misinterpreted, or to come across as brusque. Take the time to be civil, human and check that you're being clear before you hit "Send".

3 Be open to responses

Working remotely, leaders often like to send email updates to everyone or run "town hall" meetings via video conference. These are fine, but they are one-way communication methods. Make sure you're open to receiving responses by email, phone or whichever medium suits your team.

4 Don't forget the silent majority

Face-to-face, you know who is in a meeting room. With a remote team, some of your most talented people may be silent. Conversations can be monopolised by the loudest voices. Make it your job to help less confident people participate.

5 Make technology simple

Not everyone is an expert on Teams or Slack. Giving training on communications tools means nobody looks stupid, and saves everybody's time when meetings come round.

Health & Safety and Wellbeing

Health and Safety regulations apply to homeworkers. A business is meant to assess its homeworkers' environments to make sure they are safe. For office-based jobs, that likely means the sort of furniture that won't cause back, wrist and eye strains; for other types of work, the risks may be different.

Clearly (and understandably), very few companies managed to conduct Health and Safety assessments prior to the lockdown. Mark Stuart is Chair in HR Management and Employment Relations at the University of Leeds. He says: "The sudden exodus to working at home made a murky area even murkier. Health and Safety assessments were never made, which is both understandable and entirely reasonable – work had to continue. So companies have room for manoeuvre here, but they should get assessments done as soon as possible."

Where employees are in complex working conditions – for example, a home with children and no separate office space – you should consider the wellbeing of employees, too. Linky Trott is Head of Employment and a Partner at London law firm [Edwin Coe](#). She says:

"It is well documented that working from home brings its own mental health challenges which will vary from employee to employee but are likely to include: the impact of lone working, (or conversely, the impact of not having a dedicated and quiet working environment), an actual or perceived lack of supervision or 'abandonment' and/or a sense of isolation. All of those risk factors should be identified, assessed and addressed by employers and the employer should clearly signpost how employees can access advice and support for mental health challenges. If there is a failure to address these risks, employers will find it more challenging to deal with individuals who become disabled (as defined under the Equality Act 2010) as a result of a mental impairment, than implementing preventative measures in the first place."

Security

If you rushed your people home due to COVID-19, you might not have thought through the cybersecurity implications. Here's a basic checklist.

- Antivirus or similar onboard protection for everyone.
- Implement a password regime. Give everyone a password manager (such as Dashlane, 1Password and LastPass).
- Use two-factor authentication where available for signing into any digital account.
- Theft is a greater challenge at home than in an office. Install remote-wipe device management as protection.
- Prepare, even with hindsight. Give your team access to IT support when they need it.

Read more

- [Flexible working guides from the CIPD](#)
- [Remote working tipsheet from PwC](#)
- [Advice from the HSE on protecting home workers](#)
- [All the technology you could ever need for home working, from ZDNet](#)
- [Preparing for a new era of work - McKinsey](#)
- [Security advice from the National Cybersecurity Centre](#)

About Sage

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“This is a good time to ‘be the change you want to see’ and do tasks that are helpful to your co-workers that you haven’t been asked to do. By raising your hand for tasks outside your job description, you are not just giving to your team, but opening the door for people to reach out to you and let you know your efforts are meaningful and appreciated.”

Julie Bort, [Business Insider](#)