



HOW TO HANDLE THE WORK-FROM-HOME TRANSITION DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC

Whether you have been fortunate enough to be able to work from home for 4 weeks or 10 years, you are likely using audio/videoconferencing and other technology tools to stay in touch with clients and co-workers. I feel very fortunate to be able to continue to work in this manner, but there have been some unanticipated challenges in the transition.

The pros

Buying/learning new technology-I enjoy learning new technology as long as it's not too complicated. It's good for my aging brain and opens up so many new opportunities!

Working in sweatpants-I may never wear real pants again!

Having pets around-I love having my dogs in my office with me, and most people that I Zoom with enjoy seeing them as well.

Having family around-It's nice to be able to walk out of my office and see my family.

The challenges

Buying/learning new technology- Not everyone can afford the equipment necessary to work at home. Others may have anxieties about learning new technology.

Having pets around-While pets also enjoy having us around, they may want our attention while we are trying to work. Barking, needy pets may cause an unwelcome intrusion into your work.

Having family around-Maybe you and your family members are all vying for the same private space or internet. Or maybe your family members are sleeping in or bingeing Netflix and you feel a little envious.

Lack of adequate private space-Not everyone has a private space to work and this can cause problems, especially if the things you're working on require confidentiality.

Internet issues-I've had to update my modem and buy special routers and I still experience interrupted internet. This can be so frustrating when it causes frozen or dropped Zoom sessions.

Social isolation-Not everyone has family or pets around to talk to during the day.

Lack of routine and boundaries-Working outside of your home provides structure to one's day. Working from home relaxes that structure and may result in a blurring of boundaries between work and home life. I've had a difficult time leaving work behind, while others may have trouble getting motivated.

Body aches-Sitting in front of a computer all day, especially if you are reclining on the couch or bed, will lead to discomfort in your neck, back, shoulders or wrists.

Zoom fatigue-It really took me by surprise that sitting in front of my computer zooming all day was draining. The perceived pressure to be more animated, more present and maintain the conversation leads to increased mental energy output.

Pandemic stress-We cannot underestimate the stress we are all feeling. Each of us will be affected by COVID19 by way of our health, health of a loved one, or financially. Trying to maintain our work amidst this type of stress can be tremendously difficult.

Recommendations

If you must purchase or learn new technology, be sure to ask for help! Hopefully your company can provide you with IT support and they may even be able to suggest less expensive options. Plus, most equipment comes with online tutorials. Give yourself some time to explore them.

You may need to set limits on your pets by closing your door, using a training collar or muting your audio during a teleconference meeting. Taking a break and spending quality time with your pet may also help.

Try to work out a schedule with your family members. This may include scheduling when each of you needs a private space, to who is going to walk the dog or make dinner. Unspoken expectations will lead to disappointment and resentment.

Run a "speed test" on Google from different areas of your home to check how your Wi-Fi is working. You may need to call your internet provider (more than once!) to upgrade equipment or internet plans. Expect these phone calls to be long and tedious, but hopefully worthwhile in the end.

Try to spend time with people. Facetime with friends and family or join a private group on Facebook to have interesting conversations. Many games have online components that allow you to play and chat at the same time. Drive to someone's house and talk from an acceptable distance. Consider adopting a pet.

Establish a work routine as you would if you left the house. Try to wake up and go to bed at around the same time each day. Create a definitive work schedule and leave your computer for meals or short breaks to stretch or tend to your pets or family.

Try to set up your workstation using a supportive chair and desk or table. Laptops are not ideal for long-term use, so if you can hook up an external mouse and keyboard, even better. Arms and wrists should be supported while typing.

Avoid having back-to-back Zoom meetings if possible. Take breaks in between to step away from your computer and walk around, even if just for a few minutes.

You may be tempted to rely on substances during this time. While initially numbing or distracting, these are only temporary fixes and could do more harm than good. Here are a few healthy coping skills to try: *go outside *stay active (go for a walk or try some YouTube yoga or exercise) *talk to people *learn a new skill *eat regular and nutritious meals *take a hot bath *play a game or do a puzzle *organize or beautify your home *color *read *listen to music or a podcast *write in a journal. And if none of these work, consider getting some therapy. Many therapists are working with telehealth, and while it's not the same as in person, it can be very effective.

Finally, be proactive with your coping. Practice them as preventative measures rather than waiting until you feel bad. You will become more skilled and they will work better in the long run!