

Working Hard or Hardly Working



by Celeste Gudas, CEO, 24 Seven Inc.

Whether working freelance or full-time, telecommuting has its benefits—freedom and flexibility are typically cited as the biggest perks of working from home. But those very perks can also lead to telecommuting's biggest pitfalls, like waning self-discipline, loss of focus, blurred lines between personal and work tasks, and more. So here are a few steps you might take to ensure that the time spent working at home is as productive as possible:

Create a work-friendly space—it's always a good idea to designate a spot in your home as your work zone. Even if you live in a tiny apartment, dedicate a corner where all your tools, materials, media connections, outlets, papers are at the ready. This will serve as a visual and psychological signal that it's time to get to work. Sure, sacking out on the couch or on your bed with your laptop is fine once in a while, but chances are you'll get more done in an organized space. If you share living space with others, make sure you communicate the importance of your work zone—and that if they see you occupying that space, they should leave you alone (read more below about limiting distractions).

Plan your time—the most productive freelancers we know tell us one of their secrets is to create to-do lists for both the week and each day. This keeps them on track with major deliverables while helpfully breaking projects down into smaller daily chunks,

making deadlines more achievable. "My list is how I manage myself. My frame of mind is that the day is done when the checklist is complete—that way I stay disciplined early on to free up my day later," one professional explained. To help juggle deadlines and keep track of your time, consider using project or time management software—many are available for free or at a very low cost.

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Establish regular work hours—freelancers enjoy the freedom of deciding when they work. Some are night owls who prefer to crank projects out while the rest of the world slumbers. Others are happy with traditional work times. Whatever your preference, decide when you're "on the clock" so that clients know when they can reach you and personal contacts know when to leave you alone (read on). "Getting in a regular routine keeps me productive," one freelancer explained, "Without that discipline I've found that one of two things happen. I procrastinate and then am in a self-created, stressful crunch to get things done. Or I start to feel like there's never any downtime."

Set boundaries and limit distractions—with no one looking over your shoulder, it's a challenge to stay focused and motivated or to keep others from interrupting your work flow. The traditional workplace once restricted your accessibility, but now friends, family, pets, frivolous screen time, and household tasks compete for your attention. Set rules for taking personal phone calls, doing the laundry, or checking Facebook during work time. Be clear with family and friends that even though you're home, you're working and you'll be happy to connect with them when your work day is done. "I have two phone lines—one for home and one for my office," a freelance writer reported, "During my office hours, my rule is that I don't answer the home line. I only pick up my office phone because only clients have that number." Another helpful suggestion is to set specific times for checking email so that the diversion doesn't impact critical deliverables for the day.

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Stay in contact—as a remote worker it's critical that you stay connected, both from a client accessibility standpoint and to stave loneliness that sometimes accompanies being a solo act. Today's technology makes working from anywhere that much easier—so make sure you are equipped with the fastest Internet connection possible and latest communication gear that enables a variety of ways for clients to reach you. Phone, email, Skype—stay connected to keep clients happy and your project pipeline humming.

For some lucky work-at-home pros, establishing boundaries and routines are unnecessary for success. But for the rest of us, taking steps to increase the likelihood that we'll stay engaged, focused and professional will ultimately improve our work performance and inspire confidence in our ability to deliver remotely.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR Celeste Gudas is a leading authority on workforce strategy for creatively-driven companies. A distinguished entrepreneur and recruiting industry innovator, Ms. Gudas has grown 24 Seven from a single New York office to 13 global offices, spanning 25 countries including the UK and Asia. Today 24 Seven is the go-to talent source supporting the world's top teams in Fashion, Retail, Advertising, Marketing, Design, Interactive & Digital, E-commerce, Beauty, Events and Sports & Lifestyle. A certified Women's Business Enterprise by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council, 24 Seven is also a recipient of the prestigious Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award. For more information about how you can create a successful workforce strategy for your company call your local 24 Seven office or email CEO Celeste Gudas at cgudas@24seveninc.com. Follow Celeste on Twitter @celestegudas.

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