

The Work Life Balance of Working from Home: The ‘Always On’ Phenomenon and How to Fix It.

With many of us now working from home, the discussion surrounding our experiences of the changes in work environment have been varied. Our Working from Home survey illuminated some of the common discussion points that many had seen as a positive from working from home, including more familial interactions and no commuting (which a lot of people seemed pretty happy about). However, there was also a notable discussion of those who in contrast to the popular narrative, were finding working from home worsened their work life balance in what we have labelled the ‘Always On’ phenomenon, as a direct quote from one of our survey participants.

Despite many stating that working from home has benefited their personal lives, providing them more time, there are also those who have found that this has worsened. There are a number of reasons as to why this may be happening and we wish to discuss them in the hope of alleviating some of these problems.

No Off Switch

With your workplace entering home spaces, work and personal spheres are merging. The traditional workday had a strong series of practices and rituals that allowed people to establish a clear distinction between work and home. That dreaded commute that we are now free from is actually very beneficial for many as a reset to enter back into their personal sphere and have some much-needed personal time. Whether that be listening to their favourite playlist, or reading a new development book, these commuting activities provided a form of transition time. The clear structure of the work day extends beyond the commute; from our physical spaces to our clothing and whilst many of us do love working in our slippers, even our weekend attires are creeping into our working practices. All of these factors add up to the same conclusion, people are beginning to extend their work day and unable to switch off from their work which has followed them home. The lines between the personal and professional are bleeding together and whilst this may initially enable you to get more work done, in the long term it could limit productivity and lead to burnout.

Overcompensation

The other main component of the always on phenomenon is work overcompensation. With the fear of reduced productivity when working from home, some people may find themselves overcompensating and overproducing to quell the uneasy feeling of underproductivity. The obvious issue with this, as is fairly similar to not being able to switch off, is work burnout. However, it is also important to consider how this may be counter-productive for productivity itself. More work does not equate to good work.

Overcompensation can reduce work quality and lead to burnout, so long term it is most likely a lose-lose situation. It is important to note, that feeling like you are spending less time at work because of lack of commute and a host of other things does not mean that you

need to consistently spend extra hours producing significant volumes of work and getting everything done now.

It is important to consider that these issues and the 'Always On' phenomenon does not affect everyone and certain groups within the workplace may be more likely to experience this. Our survey revealed that working from home negatives were more likely to affect younger and more junior members of the workforce, primarily due to living situations. However, it is also clear that high levels of management are feeling pressure and struggling with the 'Always On' phenomenon. With the pressures of a turbulent world and changing work environment, there is a possibility that high level managers are absorbing this pressure, therefore overcompensating and working longer hours. Moreover, with many saying they utilise their commute as a reset, there was a notable thread of those struggling to switch off and leave their desks, with no separation between work and home. Despite lots of work from home conversation revolving around the positives, it is also key to consider the negatives beyond lack of social connection and isolation. In considering these issues, some answers, tips and tricks also appear.

1. Work Flexibly

To make your day the most productive and make it work for you, try to work flexibly within the timings that are suited for you. This has to exist within reason; if you have a role which requires you working certain hours then you must uphold this, but where there is flexibility make it work for you. If you're a morning person, get up at 5am and maybe start some work, if you get your best work done later, consider starting later and working into the evening. This solution comes within the boundaries of your work hours, but by making work more flexible it will allow a more optimised work day that works for you and will show the possibilities for manageable flexible work, a practice which should make working from home work the best for you.

2. Recreate your commute

If you are struggling to reset at the end of the work day having previously used your commute as a some well-deserved you time, consider reimagining your commute. Whether that be going out for a walk with your favourite podcast you would have listened to, doing a workout, or watching your favourite show, recreate that reset. This will hopefully enable you to turn off and transition away from the working day and allow you to value and signpost what is personal time and what is work time. Also, if you don't have the luxury of a spare room for a home office, consider a set up that allows you to pack and hideaway any work materials to signify the end of the work day. Don't forget to turn off notifications during this reset!

3. Planning is key

Clear and effective planning will not only help achieve a maintainable and structured workload, but will also create a sense of clarity and purpose to your working day. Planning

will also allow you to dispel the feeling of underproductivity that drives overcompensation, with clear actionable steps to target and complete. Don't forget to plan breaks, even if they are small. Consider planning as a team and with your manager to make sure you are on the right track and doing the right things at the right times. A structured day is a productive day, and will help your productivity.

Ultimately, working from home, as with most things, can be both good and bad. As working from home looks to be here to stay, it is important that we consider the 'Always On' phenomenon moving forward, so that the future of working from home is as productive and satisfying as it can be for all.