

Working from home

COULD IT WORK FOR YOU?

HOMEWORKER AND AUTHOR JUDY HEMINSLEY OFFERS SOME POINTERS

Millions of people in the UK are now enjoying the savings in time and money that working from home brings, according to TUC statistics. Many are passionate advocates of home working, and you might be tempted to join them. It undoubtedly has many benefits, but also presents its own challenges, so what do you need to know in order to make such a big decision?

When you work in an office (or any kind of workplace away from the home, such as factories, studios, workshops and so on), you are part of a system that demands your participation - you arrive at a predetermined time, take your breaks and schedule your work to fit in with your colleagues, and pack up at closing time.

When you work from home, you are in charge of all of those factors yourself, which can be either a cause for celebration or a source of intense stress. Which one it is for you depends on your personality, and so knowledge of your own traits, habits and needs is crucial to working from home success.

For example, Fiona, a massage therapist near Helston, says: "Too much time at home draws me into domestic rather than work tasks. I need to mix quiet, restorative time at home with networking and promotional work in-between client appointments."

In the pressure of office life, you may never have given much thought to when and how you are most productive. If you are to work from home, either full or part-time, prepare by observing what is going on when you are pleased with your output, and also when you

are feeling blocked and frustrated.

Are you a morning person, always the first in the office? Or do you drag yourself in and need a couple of coffees before you feel properly awake? You might like to work as part of a team, or prefer to be left alone. Some people rely on their own judgement, while others like to ask for their colleagues' opinions. Do you like peace and quiet so you can concentrate, or does the buzz of a busy office motivate you?


Fiona has devised her own simple solutions for the times when she needs a quick top-up of energy or some space for reflection: "If I'm flagging a bit, I ring a girlfriend. It doesn't cost anything and I may only need a few minutes. On the other hand, I take advantage of the beautiful places where I visit clients to take time out for me, sitting with a take-out coffee and enjoying the view."

Knowing your preferences also helps to decide where to work at home. Many people believe having your own room is essential so you can close the door on domestic distractions, but others feel shut away and excluded from the rest of the family, and prefer to work at the kitchen or dining room table.

Wherever you work at home, you will probably have to deal with some overlap between home and work commitments. Susy is a writer and editor living near Falmouth: "My writing room is next to the greenhouse, so I always feel like I should be watering and sowing. The washing machine's in the room, so I feel the necessity to deal with that too. And the girls know I'm in there, so after school come to show me things they've made or to tell tales on each other. However, I still love working from home - in offices, I used to get drawn into gossip and meetings; it's so refreshing to ditch all that."

Depending on the type of work you do, there may be boundaries you need to draw between business and family for the sake of your professional life too. Emma runs a plumbing business with her husband in mid-Cornwall, and believes that "little things" can make a big difference to how a customer perceives your business.

"People calling about a plumbing job don't want to speak to a child, so we have taught our daughters not to pick up the phone when it rings. They are also very good about being quiet when I'm speaking to a customer. All these things can have a big impact on your professional reputation."

The most important factor in deciding to work from home is therefore to appreciate that it involves much more than a change of location. There may be aspects of home working that do not suit you, but the great thing is that you are the one in charge. Unlike those who share a workplace, with a little time, patience and imagination, you can create the ideal working environment for your own temperament and circumstances. 

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