Whether you have been instructed to work from home due to a global health crisis, are a remote employee, your office has been closed temporarily for renovations, or you have a broken ankle and can't commute, there are a number of ways to ensure you are productive, remain connected to your colleagues, and maintain your company culture. Here are a few that have worked for us at Koya Leadership Partners over the years.

1. **Get Ready for Work**

Get ready for work in the morning just as you would when going into an office. Set your alarm, get up with plenty of time to do your morning routine, and put on work-appropriate clothes.

2. **Maintain Your “Commute” Time**

Create a “commute” to give yourself a few minutes to warm up to the day and to wind down before entering the responsibilities of home life in the evening. Many of us have relied on this time to make calls, listen to podcasts/music, or just enjoy the silence. If you can, try to get outside in the morning for a walk, run, or your morning coffee (provided it's healthy and safe to do so).

Set your working and lunch hours and stick to them. When working from home, it is easy to lose track of time and keep working through lunch or into the evening, after traditional work hours have ended. When it is appropriate to do so, log off and shut down for the night. If you have a home office, when you are done with work, close the door until the morning.

3. **Have a Dedicated Work Area**

Work in a designated area with a chair and desk rather than your bed or couch, and when you need breaks, step away from that area. If possible, use a room with a door to keep out home distractions. Close the door when the workday is done. Ensure that the area behind you appears professional for the video calls you will surely be doing.

4. **Set Rules for Sharing Space**

Sometimes you aren't the only one working from home. Schools get canceled, kids are sick, family members are also working from home. To ensure the most productivity and least number of interruptions, talk to family members or roommates about the new norms for working from home, including when it’s OK to interrupt and when not to (because you’re on a work call, for example). One of our colleagues has a door-hanger, with one side green and the other side red. When the hanger is on red, everyone in the house knows not to enter the office.

5. **Check in with Your Colleagues**

Dedicate a few minutes at the beginning of virtual meetings to “check-in,” especially if you’re a manager. Ask colleagues: How are you doing? How is it going? Are you comfortable with your setup? What does your day look like working from home? This gives people permission to be honest about the newness of working from home, their feelings about it, and any stressors that may be bothering them.

Working from home can get lonely for some. Check in with co-worker friends by scheduling virtual “coffee chats” to catch up, just as you might in-person in the office.
6. Continue to Meet Face-to-Face, Virtually
Video makes such a difference in maintaining connections and minimizing miscommunications because you can see people’s faces, read their body language, and hear their voice. Having all company meetings via video is a great way to keep in touch with the organization as a whole, for smaller team meetings, or one-on-one check-ins.

7. Develop a Virtual Watercooler
Online chat tools (Slack, MS Teams, Skype, Chatter, Yammer, intranet software, etc.) are great facilitators for the conversations and questions you might normally have had over the lunch table, around the cubicle wall, or walking down the hall. Work gets done much easier when you can still ask a colleague a quick question, or indicate you are busy and not free to chat by setting your status as “on a call” or “away.” Create channels for workstreams, all company announcements, crowdsourcing, and fun, such as an office book club or updates on pets.

8. Support Your Culture
Celebrate wins, accomplishments, or new clients through online chat tools, emails, or all-company video meetings. Give visibility to colleagues who have been particularly helpful or gone above and beyond for clients by giving them a “shout-out.” Chit-chat is perfectly OK and fun is good—they build empathy and strengthen relationships, making it easier to engage on work topics and negotiate conflict with colleagues.

Schedule social time, even if it’s virtual—move your Friday happy hour to video, schedule virtual lunch tables with colleagues, and celebrate birthdays or work anniversaries with home cupcake or flower delivery.

There are a number of benefits of working in an office, including culture and relationship building, quick face-to-face meetings, and focused attention on work. But all of those things can be translated online and virtually to the home office. We hope these suggestions have been helpful. What has worked well for you and your organization?