

A recipe for success while working from home

For any baking recipe to be successful, you need the right ingredients and the perfect amount of time in the oven. What happens when you leave your cake in the oven too long? It gets burnt. How about if you forget baking powder? It doesn't rise. Similarly, enjoying a good work-life balance requires you to have the right mix. Find out what you need to bake *your* best cake.

Answer the following five questions to see if you need to adjust your recipe for working from home.

Throughout the day:

1. **How is your overall energy level?** [1 = low and 5 = high]

1 2 3 4 5

2. **What level is your current physical well-being?** [1 = terrible and 5 = excellent]

1 2 3 4 5

3. **How is your overall mood?** [1 = mood swings and 5 = consistent and positive]

1 2 3 4 5

4. **How are your overall cognitive abilities?** Cognitive abilities are brain-based skills we need to carry out any task (e.g., focus, perception, memory, etc.). [1 = poor and 5 = excellent]

1 2 3 4 5

5. **How is your overall productivity level?** [1 = low and 5 = high]

1 2 3 4 5

If your total score is between 20 and 25, you are on the right track to successfully working from home. Congratulations! However, if your total is between five and 15, you probably need to improve your work-life balance. Follow these tips to help rebalance yourself.

Work smarter, not harder

When working from home, you always want to feel engaged, supportive and productive for your clients and team members. Think about these areas of “working smarter, not harder” for ways you can improve:

- **Having trouble with your Internet? Invest in a faster internet speed.** To be efficient and effective as an advisor, it pays to invest in high-speed internet at home. You don't want to drop videoconference calls or struggle downloading/uploading documents. Being professional means showing up like a professional!
- **Having trouble with distractions during your day? Time block your calendar.** Block off time in your weekly schedule to focus on specific tasks (e.g., client calls or onboarding paperwork) and let your team members know about them.
- **Overwhelmed with all the emails in your inbox? Make rules.** Ask your team to only CC you on critical emails. Alternatively, apply the six Ds of email handling: Delete it, Delegate it (forward it), Do it, Develop it, Defer it or Deposit it (for more details on the six Ds, read: *Free up your time to work*).
- **Are you working longer hours? Don't – keep on schedule.** Whatever you decide your work hours should be, make sure you completely disconnect afterwards (aside from urgent situations, of course). Spend downtime connecting with friends and family. Make your team aware through a communication charter or via email/phone that your personal time is important to you and that you're practising these guidelines to relieve stress after hours. Also encourage them to do likewise.

Build connections with people

Working at home alone does not mean you have to *be alone*. Finding ways to connect with your clients and team members is vital to your business and your well-being. Here are some suggestions on how you can maintain a personal connection with others:

- **Feeling lonely? Connect with people.** By nature, humans are pack animals. We require contact with others to satisfy our basic needs. Try connecting through social media and build new relationships or strengthen existing ones.
- **Still feeling lonely? Try video conferencing with your clients and team members.** While nothing beats meeting someone in person to build rapport, the next best thing is video conferencing. Video-conferencing tools make your interactions with people more meaningful.

Keeping a healthy body and a healthy mind

It's really important to look after your physical and mental health when working from home. Did you know that exercise releases chemicals in the body called endorphins, which trigger a positive feeling? Try and schedule a time in your daily routine to keep active. This could be a lunchtime walk or jog, or a regular workout. Here are some more tips to maintain a healthy body and mind:

- **Finding that your energy levels are low in the morning or afternoon? Know your peak performance hours.** Whether you're an early bird or night owl, optimize your productivity throughout the day. Daniel Pink (author of *"When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing"*) recommends doing the majority of work that requires the most concentration during your peak performance hours.
- **Feeling burnt out? Take breaks.** Research shows that you should take breaks every 50 to 90 minutes for about 15 to 20 minutes*. Breaks can come in the form of moving around or shifting your attention from your current task at hand. A great book to read during your breaks is *"The Corporate Athlete"* by Jack Groppel and Jim Loehr. It explains how you can achieve maximum performance levels by drawing on the parallels between sport and business.
- **Need a distraction? Don't walk to your fridge, you probably aren't hungry.** Don't get into a routine of heading towards the refrigerator every time you take a break. Maintain the same eating schedule as you would in the office and try to eat healthful snacks between meals.
- **Feeling stressed? Listening to music is an effective stress management tool.** It can tap into our emotions and make us calmer during times of stress. On social media, many musicians host live concerts from their home that are both interactive and inspiring. By watching a musician live on social media, you are not only supporting the artist but it will help you relax while satisfying the basic human need to connect with others.

Final thoughts: Bake your best cake

Did you find what you needed for *your* cake? Take the time now to test your ingredients and timing to find out what you need to make working from home a success. Being aware of how you feel and what your productivity levels are throughout the day will help you not only feel better mentally and physically, but will also increase your productivity. As famous chef Julia Child once said, *"No one is born a great cook, one learns by doing."* Bon appétit!

Appendix:

*Ideal time to work and break: <https://www.inc.com/neil-patel/when-how-and-how-often-to-take-a-break.html>

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