



A Realistic View of Working from Home

By Kristen Doyle

I began working from home seven years ago. I left my nice office in the city with dreams of lounging around at home, my laptop in hand, comfy clothes on my body and a very short commute from my bedroom to my makeshift office. For many people, the opportunity to work from home seems like a dream come true. Unfortunately, the reality of the work-from-home lifestyle is not everything one may fantasize about it being. Working from home requires great discipline, a well communicative team and the ability to set specific boundaries between work life and home life.

Natalie Smith, Operations Administrator at American Workforce Companies, has been working from home for two years. Natalie loves her job, but admits that working from a virtual environment can be very tough. “There are a lot of misconceptions people have to overcome if they plan to work from home,” Natalie shares. “People believe it is going to be a glamorous opportunity and that you will have the freedom to do whatever you please, whenever you please. The truth is that with most jobs, working from home is very tough to balance because essentially your job is at your home and your home is your home. Basically, it is much tougher to turn off your work because it is always just a room away; versus when you work from an outside office and you can physically leave the building to signify the end of a workday. At your home office, you have to exercise a lot of self-control. Set up your work hours and stick to them. Your virtual job is just like a real job. You have to remember that when your work hours are up, you need to shut down your computer and realize

that you can finish what you were working on during your next scheduled work hours.”

At her previous role as part of the Director team at the Career Center for Texas A&M University, Natalie was in constant contact with her coworkers. “In my specific job now, I work in an environment where everyone works from home. Many of my teammates are people I have never met in person. That presents a totally different challenge because all of our communication is done via email, instant messaging, phone and video conferencing. It is more important than ever when you work in a virtual environment to really keep the lines of communication open. If at all possible, pick up the phone often to stay connected with your team. Hearing each others’ voices is really an important thing from the very beginning.”

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Jonathan Davis, CEO of American Workforce, a company that has a mostly virtual workforce of talented stay-at-home moms, admits that managing a virtual

workforce produces completely different challenges than managing an in-person office of employees. “The single best lesson I have learned as CEO of American Workforce is that the importance of creating a team environment is so much more important than anyone would have ever guessed. Take communicating via Instant Messaging as an example. It is convenient, but when you use instant messaging as a main form of communicating with your team, people cannot read the tonality of your writing. As a manager, and even someone working on a virtual team, it is imperative that you over-communicate proactively and do not hide behind e-mails and instant messaging. Lack of communication can really poison a team. Make sure everyone on your team has access to phones, and create opportunities for regular internal conversations. At American Workforce, we like to keep our communication flowing through weekly teleconference videos and regular phone calls. Sure, we use Instant Messaging and e-mail, but if we have something that requires more than a yes or no answer, we encourage our team to pick up the phone and contact each other that way.”

One last tip from Natalie about working from home, and it may squash your hopes of lounging around in your pajamas all day: “Working in sweats or PJs may be a great reason to desire to work from home, but if you get up and actually get ready for your day as you would if you were going into an office, you will feel a lot better and will most likely be a lot more productive. Plus, with today’s advances in technology, you never know when someone may want to do a video chat. It is always a good idea to be client presentable ready whenever you are working from home.”

When you are making the decision to move from your corporate office building to an at-home office, make sure to have a realistic view of what you can expect from a work-at-home environment. The potential freedom can be great but, unless you have superb balancing skills, you may find you are actually working more than you were before. **HL**

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