

How to (really) work from home

The coronavirus pandemic has drastically changed so much about our home and work lives. Because of the need for social distancing, many more people are working at home, some for the first time.



Angie Hyche

While some excel in adapting to this new setting, others struggle to remain productive. My husband, Eric, began working

remotely in 1998, well before it was so commonplace. Over 20 years of experience with remote work has given him valuable insights that can help those who are still settling into this new normal. For this article, I asked Eric some questions about how to work effectively from home.

You started working from home before it was widely utilized. How and why did your remote work begin?

While we were living in Atlanta in 1998, Seattle-based RealNetworks offered me a job, but I didn't want to live on the West Coast because of family ties in Kingsport. After telling them I wanted to work for them but didn't want to live any further from Kingsport, they offered to let me work remotely, and I have been working remotely ever since then. I worked for RealNetworks from 1998 to 2013 and have worked for Groupon since 2013.

What are your top strategies for productively working at home?

The most important one in 22 years of remote work is to have a regular start time and end time every day.

I've always insisted on a dedicated space for work. When our daughters were young, I worked in an office built into a detached garage. Being in a completely separate space was very helpful. Even now in a small loft apartment, I don't just work from the kitchen table. I have a desk that's specifically for work.

I always dress for work. Working at a tech company is fairly casual, so I don't have to dress up. But I still dress as if I were going into the office.



PHOTO BY ANGIE HYCHE

Have a dedicated space for work, advises Eric Hyche, who has been working remotely since 1998.

I over-communicate to my employer. For example, I have a worklog in a Google doc that I share with my manager. At any time, he can see what I've been working on every day.

How has the practice of working remotely changed over the years?

The biggest change has been technology. I have so many more tools to stay in touch with my colleagues than when I started.

When I first started, I decided to be very rigid with my schedule. I worked 8 to 5 and didn't do anything else during those hours. Later I relaxed a little bit and would occasionally

trade a few minutes of running an errand for a few minutes of extra work at the end of the day.

What are your biggest distractions?

It's easy to start reading the news and suddenly find that an hour has gone by, so I try not to open any news while I'm working. Of course social media like Facebook and Twitter are "weapons of mass distraction," so I almost never open those while working. But really just the normal activities around the house are the biggest distraction — packages being delivered, laundry needing to get done, contractors dropping in for home repairs, travel planning, online shopping, etc. Really, my

personal to-do list is my biggest distraction.

What do you see as the biggest advantages and disadvantages of working from home?

Advantages: When you work in an office setting, there's always a social expectation that if someone drops by, you'll stop to talk. This is built-in wasted time. You get that time back when working from home. Another advantage is that there is no wasted time commuting.

Disadvantages: It's hard to remain socially connected to co-workers. You really have to work at it. You don't know any of the scuttlebutt or water cooler talk around an office. That

talking time isn't all bad. Sometimes that kind of talk can lead to useful technical discussions. You have to plan those kinds of conversations when you work remotely.

Another disadvantage is that work-life balance is much harder. You're tempted to work all the time.

Do you find that you are more productive or less productive when you travel to the Groupon offices as compared to working at home?

I am much more productive at home, mainly because at the office, I feel the need to have scheduled time with many different people plus some general social time.

Do you find that people are respectful of your time, or do you often have requests to do non-work-related tasks during work time? How do you handle these requests?

Early on, I started applying what I called the "Eastman Rule" not only to myself but to others. When I was deciding whether or not to do a household job/task/errand in the middle of the work day, I would first ask myself: "If I was working from an office at Eastman, would I do this now?" If my answer was no, I wouldn't do it. I applied the same rule to family and friends. When I got requests, I would say, "If I were working at Eastman right now, would you ask me to do this? If not, I'm not going to do it."

What advice would you give to people just beginning to work from home?

Be as rigid as you possibly can with your schedule at the beginning. You can always ease up later.

If possible, have a dedicated room for work. If that's not possible, have a dedicated desk or space that you only use for work.

If there are young children at home, you need clear signals for when you're working and when you're not, and you need to communicate clear expectations for your family and friends.

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SCOTT JACOBS/EDMUNDS VIA AP

Apply disinfectant using wipes or spray disinfectant onto a soft cloth, and use disposable gloves to protect your hands.

Keep your car clean to reduce the risk from coronavirus

By RYAN ZUMMALLEN EDMUNDS

The spread of the novel coronavirus, and its associated COVID-19 disease, is made worse because it is highly contagious. Since vehicle interiors, are essentially small contained spaces, it is important to take steps to reduce the risk of contracting the virus while driving or riding inside.

When it comes to vehicles, washing your hands thoroughly is one of the most effective ways to prevent transmission of the virus. But proper cleaning and disinfecting are also advised. That's because the virus can exist on a variety of surfaces, sometimes even days after contagious droplets were planted there.

BE PREPARED

While it's important that the inside of your vehicle is clean, it's just as important that your hands are free of germs too. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends washing your hands for at least 20 seconds before or after eating, using

the restroom, coughing or sneezing, caring for others, and leaving your house.

Cleaning your vehicle should also be on the list. It may also be a good idea to use disposable or designated gloves while cleaning to prevent the spread of the coronavirus inside.

USE THE RIGHT TOOLS

The right disinfectants can kill the coronavirus so that it doesn't live on surfaces such as rubber, plastic, aluminum and leather. Most common household cleaners will work. The American Chemistry Council has a helpful list of specific EPA-approved products for use against the coronavirus. We recommend keeping a tube of disinfectant wipes in your vehicle for regular use.

Check to ensure that the cleaners you're using are safe for the surfaces in your car. Some disinfectants can dry out leather. A safer option would be to use a mild soap and water, then apply a leather conditioner to protect those surfaces. This option will not kill germs as well as harsher disin-

fectants, but it will greatly reduce them and help prevent spread.

FOCUS ON TOUCHPOINTS

The main areas that need to be cleaned are obvious. Anything inside the car that your fingers touch should be cleaned: the steering wheel, gear shifter, lane change and windshield wiper stalks, door handles, radio knobs, infotainment controllers, storage bins and seat belts. The CDC recommends cleaning touched surfaces daily.

One other area might not be so immediately evident: The top of the dashboard is a prime spot for harboring such microorganisms, according to Charles P. Gerba, a professor of microbiology and public health at the University of Arizona. Recirculating air swirls up against the windshield and sticks to the dash, Gerba said. Cleaning that spot reduces risk.

This story was provided to The Associated Press by the automotive website Edmunds.

Q&A: COVID-19 expert explains how the virus makes people sick

MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

Experts continue to learn more about SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and how it behaves. Dr. Gregory Poland, an infectious diseases expert and director of Mayo Clinic's Vaccine Research Group, is answering questions about how the virus makes people sick, how it compares to influenza, and how the COVID-19 pandemic response is affecting the flu season.

Q. How does the virus that causes COVID-19 make people sick?

A. A simple way to think about this is like a lock and key. The virus has projections off of it, like a key, which look for human cells in the body that have receptors, which act like a lock. That key enters the lock — turns it if you will. The virus enters into our own cells, and then it takes over our own cellular machinery and starts using it to produce copies of the virus. And when you get enough copies of that virus in a cell, it bursts it open and then travels to the next cell, and the next cell. You're talking about billions, maybe even trillions, of numbers of these viruses, so you begin to understand how it starts affecting blood vessels, the heart, the lungs, the GI (gastrointestinal) tract and can cause people to become very ill and occasionally die.

Q. What makes COVID-19 more dangerous than influenza?

A. The case fatality rate is probably about 10 times higher than influenza. This particular virus is very efficiently adapted to find those receptors, bind tightly to those receptors and then, as I say, take over the cells. So it's a matter of how efficiently it does that.

Q. Is the flu season over?

A. If you look in most places in the U.S., flu activity is still high. We keep talking about bending or flattening that curve for COVID-19. We're trying to do the same thing for influenza. Social distancing has started to bend the curve for flu, so we've already started to see a decrease in that. That doesn't mean that it's over yet, but I think it's had its peak and will be disappearing.

Q. Is it too late to get a flu shot?

A. It's never too late. We give those flu shots all the way into April and May, particularly if someone is traveling to the Southern Hemisphere, which they probably are not given the circumstances. But, yes, I'd give it as long as I have the vaccine and if they are not immunized.

Check the CDC website for additional updates on COVID-19. For more information, go to the Mayo Clinic News Network and mayoclinic.org.