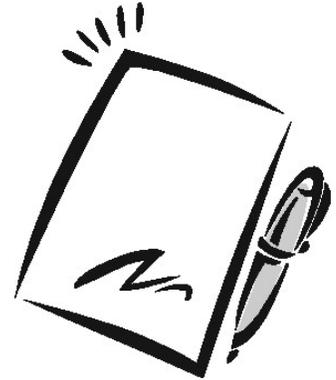# Tips for Successful Remote Work

**Step 1**: Assess the Job Requirements and Yourself

**Step 2**: Ready Your Remote Work Site

*Choose the Right Location*

*Plan for the Unexpected*

**Step 3**: Sustaining a Successful Remote Work Arrangement

*Communicate, Communicate, Communicate*

*Be Flexible – Remember that Flexibility is a Two-Way Street*

*Periodically Re-Evaluate Your Remote Work Arrangement*

*Remote Work Evaluation Survey*

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# *Tips for Successful Remote Work*

OK, so we are all scrambling in reaction to the Covid-19 crisis, and you've been asked to work remotely. Now what do you do?

For many, remote work provides numerous opportunities to improve how they get their work done. However, things may be a little different today.

If you are one of the many people struggling to learn how to work remotely while also caring for children who are no longer in daycare or school, our Thursdays with ThirdPath webinars have many tips to help you manage these turbulent times.

Find the recordings at: www.thirdpath.org/thursdays-with-thirdpath/

In the meantime, we hope these remote work tips help you take a few steps to make the most of your current remote work situation, and maybe even make it an option you can continue for the long run.

## **Step 1:** Assess the Job Requirements and Yourself

The more specific you are about what your job entails and how you plan to get it done, the more you will be able to provide your manager with on-going updates of how you are carrying out your assignments effectively.

Some of your success at working remotely will be connected to the specific job you do. Some is more connected to you and the workspace you have created at home.

### *Do a Quick Assessment*

**Section 1 – Job Specific Issues**

__ I perform many tasks that can be completed effectively outside of the main office
__ I can change face-to-face meetings to virtual meetings
__ I can use different technologies to schedule impromptu discussions
__ I am able to keep sensitive information confidential and secure at my remote work office
__ I can track my progress and report back to management regardless of where I work
__ I can be evaluated on performance based on quality and timeliness of assignments, quantity of work completed or a combination of these factors
__ I have access to the equipment, supplies, and technology needed to perform my work offsite
__ I can obtain the reference documents I need through electronic transfer or some other means
__ I perform work that requires concentration and benefits from being completed in a quiet environment.

**Section 2 - Personality, Social and Family Issues**

__ I am comfortable with virtual communication (email, cell phone, web conferencing, etc.)
__ I am self-disciplined
__ I am well organized

\* See opening paragraphs. As we manage this turbulent time, we will all find these skills more challenging.

## Step 2: Ready Your Remote Work Site

### *As you get started*

Work closely with management, Human Resources and IT to ensure that you have the proper documents, equipment, supplies, and systems access in order to effectively and securely get the job done.  Were you give a laptop computer programmed with all the word processing and remote access software you need?  Furniture need not be more than a desk, chair, and small file cabinet or bookcase.  Make sure you also have the Help Desk contact number handy, and know what kind of information they will need in order to provide assistance.

### *Choose the Right Location*

**Do:** Locate your workstation in a segregated place within your home. You don't need to have a separate room however you can set up a distinct place within a room.  Good examples include: a well-lit corner of the recreation room or guest bedroom.  The goal is to find a location that provides good lighting, airflow, and quiet while you work.

**Don't:**  Set up your home office in a heavily trafficked, noisy spot.  If you simply don't have a place within your home conducive to working, consider using a local remote work center.

**Why:** One of the most valuable benefits of remote work lies in your ability to work in a quiet environment without the typical interruptions of the primary workplace.  This is one of the reasons why productivity tends to increase when employees remote work.  In addition, if you have a quiet, segregated area for working, it reinforces the message to family and friends that you are AT WORK when remote working.  This is an important aspect of the transition to remote work that tends to be overlooked: it isn't just a change for you, your supervisor, and your co-workers, it is also a change for your family or others you live with.

## *Plan for the Unexpected*

**Do:** Have a back-up plan for those times in which "Murphy's Law" is in play. Your remote system fails, your computer crashes, the assignment you planned to complete by the end of the day is taking longer than anticipated. What can you do? Discuss your back up plan with your supervisor so you are both on the same page.

**Don't:** Think that a problem is unlikely to occur, that's why organizations have IT departments.

**Why:** Something will inevitably go wrong – often when you least expect it and it is most disruptive. With a back-up plan you increase your options, for example, by creating different tasks to complete, or taking a personal day and getting back to work after the problem is resolved.

## Step 3: Sustaining a Successful Remote Work Arrangement

### *Communicate, Communicate, Communicate*

**Do:** Keep your manager and co-workers informed about your work. This could include, on a daily basis phone calls and emails, as well as a weekly or bi-weekly written progress report.

**Don't:** Assume that everyone knows what you are up to and believes that you are busy getting the job done.



**Why:** If your supervisor doesn't hear from you, he/she may be concerned about what you are doing. One of the greatest obstacles to overcome in a remote work environment is that sense of connectedness with others. The more frequently you reach out, the more people understand you are "at work" even if you are not physically nearby. In addition, if you encourage colleagues to contact you when you are remote working you establish a better flow of communication.

### *Be Flexible – Remember that Flexibility is a Two-Way Street*

**Do:** Adopt a positive, problem-solving attitude when you are asked to adjust your remote work arrangement. Look for ways to be flexible and accommodate the needs of your supervisor, co-workers, and clients.

**Don't:** Act defensively or "put out" by a request to make an adjustment.

**Why:** Being inflexible will build resentment and hostility with your supervisor and colleagues. Your ability to approach flex as a two-way street not only increase your chances of success with this arrangement, it gives you and others more opportunities to try out, or continue, such arrangements. Your current remote work arrangement could be an opportunity the whole organization gains from.

## *Periodically Re-Evaluate Your Remote Work Arrangement*

**Do:**  Meet with your supervisor to explore how your remote work arrangement is impacting your work and the work of the office.  ***For an excellent tool to help you with this process, see the Remote Work Evaluation Survey at the end of this document.***

**Don't:**  Put it into "cruise control" and just assume that, since you haven't heard any complaints lately, everything is just fine.

**Why:**  You don't want to wait until there is a problem to fix it.  You are much better anticipating possible problems and avoiding them.  Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to give someone bad news or talk about something that is uncomfortable?  So, don't wait for your supervisor or co-workers to come to you. Instead, take the initiative to meet with them, and ask how your remote work schedule is working out *for them*.  Solicit feedback on the quality and timeliness of your work assignments, and offer to make adjustments.

## *About this Resource:*

This resource is an abbreviated version of a guide created by Kathy Kadilak. Kathy managed the U.S. Department of Justice's Worklife Program from 1995 until her retirement from federal service in March 2007. As the Department Worklife Program Manager, she was responsible for initiatives affecting over 120,000 employees nationwide. Kathy successfully expanded the availability and use of work-life programs, with a particular emphasis on remote work.

**Kathy served on the board of ThirdPath Institute for eight years, the majority of those years as board co-chair.** She has always been actively involved in her community and growing family, in part because of her success as a remote-worker.

## *About ThirdPath Institute*

ThirdPath Institute assists individuals, families and organizations in redesigning work to create more time for family, community and other life priorities. We provide a road map for individuals and organizations to design integrated solutions so we can all succeed at work while caring well for our loved ones and communities. Through this work, and in collaboration with others, we encourage more progressive conversations at home, support more flexible workplaces and push for improved public policy.

ThirdPath Institute is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, that relies on the support of individuals in order to keep cost of services low, quality of programs high and the breadth of our reach expanding. Please consider a donation!

## *A Few of Our Resources*

**OMG! Overwhelm Mitigation Groups**
A 12-call series with professionals from all different points in the career life cycle. The group meets once a month for an hour as they learn key work-life integration skills. Topics include: Creating routine quiet time; Planning for the seasonality of your work; Turing off work while on vacation; Effective delegation; Moms, dads and work-family balance.

**Whole Life Leader Groups**
Already committed to an integrated approach to work and family? Join one of our groups of male and female managers working together to address their short and long-term work and family goals.

**Learn More: www.ThirdPath.org**

# Remote Work Evaluation Survey

Periodically it is important to assess the impact of your remote work arrangement and make adjustments that will improve your communication with your supervisor, co-workers, and clients and enhance your job performance. To gain a more accurate perception of your remote work arrangement, enlist the support of your supervisor and colleagues in responding to the questions listed below.

**Section I:  Current Remote Work Schedule**

○      Number of Remote Work Days (or Hours) Per Week:

○      Remote Work Location:

**Section II:  Job Performance and Work Environment**

*Rate your job performance and productivity as a result of remote work*

| Criteria | Increased Substantially | Increased | No Change | Decreased | Decreased Substantially |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Productivity (quantity) | | | | | |
| Work quality | | | | | |
| Communication with supervisor | | | | | |
| Communication with co-workers | | | | | |
| Communication with clients | | | | | |
| Timeliness of work | | | | | |
| Teamwork (ability to work effectively and cooperatively with others) | | | | | |
| Organizational skills (ability to plan and carry out assignments) | | | | | |
| Overall performance | | | | | |
| Other (specify here) | | | | | |

- In what ways has remote work improved your job?

- What adjustments could be made to your schedule to further improve your job performance?

- What changes have you made in the way that you plan your work?

- How has remote work affected your access to the resources needed to complete your work?  (E.g., computer, software, copier machines, printer, office files, supplies)

- Have you experienced remote access or communications problems while remote working?

- What equipment or supplies would enhance your performance while remote working?

- How timely and useful is the Help Desk assistance you've received?

*Rate your ability to communicate in the following areas*

| Criteria | Excellent | Very Good | Good | Satisfactory | Needs to improve | Not applicable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reach manager when necessary | | | | | | |
| Coordinate with co-workers | | | | | | |
| Initiate new tasks | | | | | | |
| Follow-through on projects | | | | | | |
| Access support staff | | | | | | |
| Access Help Desk staff | | | | | | |

- Rate your remote work as compared to working in the primary office.  Check all that apply.
  [ ]  Less Stressful
  [ ]  More stressful
  [ ]  Able to concentrate better
  [ ]  Not able to concentrate as well
  [ ]  Fewer interruptions
  [ ]  More interruptions
  [ ]  More able to stick to my agreed upon schedule
  [ ]  Less able to stick to my agreed upon schedule

- Do you feel more or less connected to the following people or activities:
  Manager . . . . . . . .      [ ] more    [ ] same    [ ] less
  Co-workers . . . . . .      [ ] more    [ ] same    [ ] less
  Support staff . . . . .      [ ] more    [ ] same    [ ] less
  Clients . . . . . . . . . .      [ ] more    [ ] same    [ ] less
  Special work events      [ ] more    [ ] same    [ ] less


- How can you improve your level of interaction with in-office staff and participation in special work events?

- Have you incurred additional expenses due to remote work?

- What are the recurring costs?

- Are there any costs that your organization might fund?

**Section III:  Impact on Personal Life**

- How has remote work impacted you and your family? Check all that apply.

  [ ] More able to manage family responsibilities

  [ ] Less able to manage family responsibilities

  [ ] More family interruptions during the day

  [ ] Fewer family interruptions during the day

  [ ] More support from family for work arrangement

  [ ] Less support from family for work arrangements

  [ ] No significant impact on family

- Overall, how has the quality of your life changed since you began remote working?

- What is the greatest disadvantage of remote work to you and your loved ones?

- What is the greatest advantage of remote work for you and your loved ones?

**Section IV:  General**

- What changes would make your remote work schedule more effective for you?

- What changes would make your remote work schedule more effective for your family?

- What changes would make remote work more effective for your organization?