

THE WORKING FROM HOME SERIES



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Three Tips for Staying Motivated

So suddenly the Coronavirus has you working from home. You've got your laptop, a big wad of papers and a cup of coffee—this should be easy, right?

It's actually a lot harder than it looks. After 15 years in an office and the 20 more of working at home, I can tell you that the biggest challenge you'll face in the transition is **MOTIVATION**. If you're used to going to the workplace every morning, what gets you there is *external motivation*. You have to drag yourself out of bed and stay there til 5:00, or there will be consequences.

But all those structures that kept you focused disappear when you set up shop at home. The refrigerator is calling your name, the TV is playing in the next room, there are a million distractions a click away on the Internet, and you can blow two hours playing solitaire and no one will know. The only thing you have to keep your butt in the chair is internal motivation.

After working from home for 20 years, I've discovered some simple tips for staying productive. In this first post of a series, I'll show you some ways to do it.

- 1. Energy Management.** You'll need to spend extra energy motivating yourself—energy that you didn't expend at the office. So plan for that.
Action Step: Take one minute right now and map out your natural energy levels during the day and week. (For instance, my highest energy is mornings, and lowest is mid-afternoon.) Then plan to do the stuff that you least enjoy or that takes the most effort when your energy is *high*, and do the fun stuff when energy is *low*. If you leave the stuff you avoid until Friday afternoon, it will almost certainly still be on your to do list next Monday.
- 2. Take Real Breaks.** Want to feel unmotivated? Work too long without a break!
Action Step: Set a recurring break timer on your phone. You can try 15 minute breaks in the morning and afternoon, short 25-minute bursts with 5 minute breaks in between, or 90 sprints with 10 minute breaks. Then get up and move. To avoid getting sucked into your *other* to-do list (stuff around the house), take a walk down the street, retreat to your bedroom or play with the kids.
- 3. Don't Set Goals You Can't Meet.** When you are trying to stay motivated, discouragement is the enemy. You want to finish each day feeling like you've won—that you got done what you set out to do. So set a goal for each day that is doable in a day—including time for distractions, new tasks, e-mail, and so forth.
Action Step: Keep track of the amount of *friction* in your day: how much time do you spend doing things that *aren't* on your task list? You can't create a realistic to-do list until you know how much time you have in a day to work on it!