



A survival guide to working from home in times of pandemic

These days Gard employees are working remotely across our offices around the globe. Sandra Guiguet in our Hong Kong office shared her thoughts with Gard colleagues that may apply equally to our Members and clients as they too find themselves working remotely. We are pleased to share her advice.

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These are unprecedented times even for those of us in Asia who experienced the SARS epidemic in 2003. Here are some reflections and suggestions for Gard colleagues and friends across the globe, based on our few weeks of home office experience in Hong Kong.

Adapting to change

For most of us, working from home, a hotel room, a train, or a plane is familiar. After all, we do most of our business using a PC and a mobile phone. We do it often and for short periods of time. However, working from home for several weeks in a row, without knowing how long this will last and with for some of us amidst a noisy tribe sharing the living space, this is a new and abnormal situation. Add on top of this a hint of fear of being sick or seeing your relatives affected by a virus that still has not revealed all its darkest secrets and you get a recipe, if not for disaster, at least for a potentially bumpy ride.

Working from home may appear at first as a welcome break from having to go to the office every day. Once the novelty of being allowed to stay home wears off, you could experience less exciting phases ranging from boredom to loneliness, frustration, lack of engagement, lack of energy, mild or more severe anxiety and negative thought patterns. This is all quite normal so the best is to know about it before it happens so you can anticipate and do something about it.

Hong Kong office experience

Among the most challenging features of remote working, there is of course technical issues if you don't have a big monitor or find slower connectivity at home, not to mention disturbance from roommates or family members. Scientists say it takes on average 25 minutes to return to the original task after an interruption so you may really want to find a way to isolate yourself or establish clear boundaries with your family members. If you don't have a home office set up, you will need to find the best place in the house or apartment to avoid disruption. Sitting at the kitchen table may not be such a good idea!

Lack of easy connection with co-workers has also been reported as detrimental. Less easy interaction and face-to-face meetings can hinder the natural flow of exchanges. Whether it comes from the uninterrupted train of thoughts or the daunting proximity of the junk food drawer, distraction can strike at any anytime whether you live with a family, a pet or alone.

Is there a silver lining?

While most of our staff have reported experiencing the same efficiency as when working in the office and sometimes a slightly reduced efficiency, it also appears that there has been a clear gain in efficiency for some of us due to more flexible time management. Either way the work gets done and the new set up develops a greater sense of trust which was already an important feature of our Gard culture. There are many other positives and here are just a few.

- No commute saves time and money and reduces the carbon footprint.
- Shorter morning preparation time, unless you insist on wearing a suit at home.
- More time to take care of your family.
- Better work/life balance.
- Healthier diet and improvement of cooking skills.
- Realisation that many routine meetings can often be solved more efficiently via e-mail and chat conversations.
- Reduced risk of catching the virus and in turn reduced level of worry.

Some useful tips

No one solution fits all. Each staff member has managed to make it work when adapting to individual circumstances. While maintaining the exact same routine as in the office may not be possible, establishing a good new routine during those times will be essential. The following tips may help.

- Set a “Work from Home” schedule and stick to it. Change it if does not work and try a new routine.
- Include some breaks during your working day.
- If possible, create a home work station that mirrors the one in your office.
- Lower the threshold for picking up your phone and contacting your colleagues or external business partners who are facing the same situation as you.
- Lower the threshold to ask for help as well as sending a smile to your colleagues.
- Make use of all available communication tools.
- Exercise. Whether you stretch 5 minutes several times a day or go for a jog, the most important goal is to integrate some form of motion into your day.
- Breathe. Ideally outdoors to get fresh air and if possible, sun exposition (your immune system needs Vitamin D) and if not, a few minutes at your window will do. Air your apartment and especially the room where you are working. Of course follow local guidelines for social distancing when outside of your home.
- Find a relaxing activity which qualifies as a good break from work and from family. (Checking social media and distressing news of the world does not count and only achieves the opposite.)
- Stay patient and positive and resist the temptation to check the news all the time.

Finally, just remember that Isaac Newton and Shakespeare had some of the most productive times of their lives and some major breakthroughs while working from home during plagues episodes.

This is a unique opportunity in your life to spend time with your family and while supporting uninterrupted Gard quality services, to show strength, resilience, solidarity and apply our Gard core values.

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