

Working from home

By Kate Sykes, founder of www.careermums.com.au

Working from home is something most of us would love to do. Being able to work part time and structure work around your family is so appealing.

Current skills shortages combined with globalisation and technological advances are changing the mindsets of organisations about working flexibly. Flexible work options such as part time work, job sharing, flexi-hours, telecommuting and working from home are becoming more prevalent in organisations.

If you are currently on maternity leave, you have a better chance of being able to work from home for part of your working week. Why? Because your manager knows you and understands the type of worker you are. Many organisations have not worked out how to measure people's performance outside of the office walls so trust and familiarity play a significant role.

If you are not currently employed, you need to be creative in your approach. Consider securing a part time role and demonstrate your abilities before requesting the opportunity to work from home. Or you could identify your key skills and market yourself as a consultant with a home office. Often, the best leads for employment come from close to you so communicate your intentions to your friends, family, work colleagues, and local businesses. Design a flyer and hand it out.

The Solution to Work-Life Balance?

For many people, working from home is the solution to the work-life balance conundrum. The autonomy and comfort of working from home instead of the mundane commute to and from work, early mornings and office politics make working from home sound very appealing.

Yet personality is a key factor and working from home does not suit everyone. If you are the kind of person who loves the everyday social contact with peers or enjoys working in a close-knit team, then working from home is probably not for you.

Working from home requires a level of self-discipline, motivation and organisation that not everyone possesses. And if you think working from home is a solution to the issue of childcare, think again. If you are expected to be on call during the day, you will require childcare.

If you want to explore self employment opportunities, do your research first and be wary of fraudulent websites that advertise work from home opportunities. Always read the fine print and check whether the organisation is legitimate before signing up.

Work from home advantages

- Independence and control in your work day with the ability to structure work hours around your own schedule and your family commitments.
- Chance to enjoy more family and personal time.
- Save time and money on transport costs.
- No office politics and distractions.
- Greater flexibility in your working hours.
- Tax advantages – you may be able to claim on utility costs and office equipment.

Work from home disadvantages

- Interruptions from family and general household distractions.
- Working from home is not the answer to the childcare dilemma. You will still require a carer for your child.
- Can be isolating and lonely as there is limited social interaction with colleagues or anyone to bounce your ideas off.
- Lack of technical support and equipment including login issues and slower download.
- Lack of work structure – you may find it difficult to separate work from home life.
- You have to be self motivated and organised.
- You may experience negative reactions from co-workers and clients. If this happens, you need to talk to your manager.

What you will need to work from home

- A computer
- A dedicated phone line
- An answering machine
- A pager
- A mobile phone
- Fax facilities
- Email access
- An ergonomic chair and desk

Tips for Success

- Notify your regular clients that you will be working from home for part of the week.
- Be organized as it will improve your productivity.
- Structure your work day and keep distractions at bay. Conversely, don't be in work mode all the time i.e. don't just check your email when you're off duty.
- Obtain good resources – a reliable (portable) computer, high-speed internet access and a mobile phone will help your productivity.
- Network – speaking to people in your field (networking) will help you remain focused and motivated.
- Keep up with personal and professional contacts by emailing them regularly and calling occasionally.
- Stick to a schedule. Treat your days like a "regular" work day. Many people have found that a 9-5 or 10-6 schedule really helps keep them on track and productive.

- Separate your “work” area from your “living” area. This includes your phone and computer.
- Get dressed every day. Don’t wear pyjamas all day. It will make you *feel* less work-like.
- Take breaks. Get away from the computer and don’t work through lunch.
- Keep your weekends. Working from home shouldn’t change your work/life balance.
- Keep your work area clear of personal paperwork and other projects that may distract you.
- Have goals for what you want to accomplish each week.
- Request feedback from clients and other people you work with on a regular basis. This can help you identify shortcomings and keep you motivated to keep improving your skills.

Jobs suitable for working from home

These jobs include:

- Work that can be performed without reliance on office based systems and procedures;
- Project orientated roles;
- Work that has a long lead time;
- Writing and report based jobs;
- Work without a high degree of supervision or monitoring required;
- Work that does not require a lot face-to-face client or customer contact at the workplace.

It is fair to say that some aspects of most office based jobs can be performed at home because of the heavy reliance on computers and email. Build a business case and negotiate with your manager or prospective employer.