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Working from home amid Covid-19 outbreak: How to avoid distractions, putting in longer hours than usual

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Fernando Hernandez/Unsplash

Employees should establish a familiar routine at home similar to the one at work to stay focused, a professional working at a human resources training company said.

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SINGAPORE — Employees working from home need to stay connected, avoid distractions and maintain a routine, experts told TODAY on Wednesday (Feb

After the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (Dorscon) alert for Covid-19 was raised to Orange on Feb 7, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) advised employers to have temperature checks, split staff members into different teams



to work from home.

Others such as United Overseas Bank and mining corporation Rio Tinto Group have also begun making arrangements to allow employees to do likewise.

On Wednesday, DBS asked **300 employees** from the 43rd floor of Tower 3 of Marina Bay Financial Centre to work from home after a staff member from that same floor was confirmed to be carrying the new coronavirus.

Employees and their families now find themselves having to adjust to a new routine.

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MAKING HOMES CONDUCTIVE

Some adjustments have to be made, and this includes helping young children get used to seeing their parents work from home.

Mr Wan Junyan, 44, executive director of the Singapore Mediation Centre, told TODAY that he used to work from home as a writer and had to tell his children who were then nine years old to look for him only when necessary.

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“Apart from that, I make the effort to carve out time with them,” he said.

Madam Aisyah Mohd Nooh, 33, a television producer who recently started to work from home, said that she chose to involve her two-year-old child during work calls so that he does not distract her.

“Whenever I have to get on a phone discussion, I will put the earpiece on and have my son listen in as well. He finds it amusing and will keep still,” the mother-of-two said.



Mr Adrian Tan, 40, a researcher for human resources technology at PeopleStrong, which develops digital tools, said: “Spending less time on work due to household errands does not necessarily mean that your work will suffer. Even in the office, people might spend their time shopping online rather than working, so the distractions and time lost (at home or work) are just about the same.”

He added that the output produced should be the more important consideration rather than the hours spent.

He himself regularly works from home, and he said that the time saved from commuting helps him to achieve more in the morning when he is most productive.

STAYING CONNECTED

Mr Tan, a father-of-four, adopted a morning regime where he would go for a run along Pasir Ris beach after taking his children to school — to ensure that he stays fit even while working from home.

To help him juggle the demands of work and home, he uses a variety of online tools.

For instance, he uses an automated transcription application called Otter AI to take minutes during meetings and the web application Calendly to schedule meetings with work associates.

“Rather than wasting time on coordinating a suitable date and time to meet, I send my calendar to my colleagues so that they can see my schedule and fix an available time slot to meet me,” he said.

“You would be surprised to know how much time these online tools can save us. It matters to work productivity as well, since creative work is the one that requires the most time and energy, and cannot be automated,” Mr Tan added.

For Ms Yvonne Li, 36, director of Tate Anzur, Google’s suite of applications such as Google Hangouts and Google Drive have made her agency’s work-from-home transition a seamless one.



working from home and is easily reachable for discussion online, we were able to establish concrete plans with our clients quickly,” she said.

Mr Mark Cosgrove, 50, who runs his own human resources training company, said that employees should regularly check in with their colleagues and bosses.

“This helps to build connections among employees and prevents people from feeling lonely and disconnected.”

Bosses can also arrange for a quick 15-minute conference call with team members at the end of the day so that everyone is on the same page, he added.

ADJUSTING TO THE ROUTINE

Mr Cosgrove said that employees should establish a familiar routine at home similar to the one at work to stay focused.

“Having the same rhythm and routine at home is critical,” he said. “This helps (employees) deliver the same value on time.”

He added that working the same office hours would also help employees to separate their work and home.

“While working from home, you might work 11 hours instead of the usual eight to nine hours,” he said. “So when you get up in the morning, you should start at your normal time such as 9am and knock off at 6pm or whatever your usual time is.”

Another way of keeping to the same routine is by taking the same lunch or coffee breaks and avoiding activities one would not normally do at the office such as watching television, he said.

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