How To Work Remotely
A guide to let you make the most out of remote work - and your free time

Respect boundaries, especially your own!

Remote Work is what you make of it – and if you don't set boundaries, it's going to be hell. Make clear when you are working and when you are not working – for yourself and your colleagues. And make sure that you respect their boundaries as well as your own. That means not to answer messages or calls that reach you outside of your communicated working hours – if you have a work phone, why not put it into flight mode or disable push notifications?

But it also means communicating your preferences to your colleagues: Let them know what hours you plan to work, maybe give a certain time where taking calls would suit you best and state what medium you prefer for communication. By not constantly making yourself available you might think that you could miss something important. But instead, think what you could miss if you don't do it: peace of mind in your free time.

Initially, you might feel discomfort and guilt for setting these boundaries, saying no and refusing to deal with work in your free time. When this happens, remember: These feelings are exactly why we need to have boundaries, they're the sting of overwork being pulled out of your leisure, and this process takes time and it won't always be easy. But it will be worth it.

Normalize asynchronous communication!

The mobile phone revolutionized communication by enabling immediate conversations with almost anyone in the world at any given time. In a work context this means that your boss and co-workers are able to force you into work mode whenever they feel the urge to speak to you. Since remote work encourages flexible schedules and self-organized work, these calls might reach you outside your personal business hours and abduct you back into work mode during designated free time. This agressive form of communication can be avoided by limiting unannounced calls to emegencies. Asynchronous communication through media like mail or tools like Miro gives your colleagues the opportunity to reflect on your message and answer whenever it suits them best.

Develop routines...

While self-organization is undoubtedly one of the possible perks of remote work, that does not mean that it's impossible to have certain routines: Setting specific times to answer mail, have lunch or stop working helps to set up boundaries between different aspects of work-life and leisure. You can even synchronize these routines with the rest of your household: Finishing at the same time as your partner, when the children get back from school or when your dog needs its afternoon walk can work as a reminder to switch from work to leisure domains.

... and rituals!

Constantly switching between work and non-work domains can make remote work stressful. The practice of commuting to work traditionally presented us with time time to transition from one role to another – often without us having realize this. However, such low-context rituals can be transferred to the realm of remote work: It can be a walk with the dog to start the work day, a quick work out, a cigarette on the balcony... Even if you unknowingly already have a ritual, it can help to mentally establish it as the bridge between work and leisure.

Create physical barriers between work and non-work domains

Many remote workers don't have the luck to have an office at home. Still, with the help of some tricks a physical seperation from work still is possible: Naturally, some remote workers have the option of working in a café or a co-working space, to recreate the physical separation between work and free time.

But there are also little tricks that you can use when working from home. Wearing a specific pair of 'work-sweatpants' or setting up a folding screen will manifest themselves as signals of the work domain in our subconsciousness. Consequently, their absence implies leisure. Conveying such physical and visual signals can help us differentiate between work and non-work domains. Furthermore, the process of setting or dressing up can be included into the the aforementioned practice of establishing rituals to start and end the work day.

Reflect on your leisure activities!

Are you angry if you haven't reached your performance objectives at the gym? Do you throw tantrums when you lose in an online-game? Do you plan to monetize the pictures that you love to paint? The constant need for self-improvement and optimization can colonize our hobbies, turning them from pleasure into work-like domains. So instead of giving us shelter from the mechanisms of paid labour and profitability, they can also be corrupted by application of the omni-present dogma of productivity and capitalization. Reflect where you can see this happen in your leisure activities and remember that you do these things because they bring you joy and there is no need to quantify them in order to justify this.

Organize yourself!

While individual techniques are helpful to cope with the challenges of remote work, collective action must follow. The more fragmented a workforce is, the more resources are necessary to represent it. Therefore, remote work constitutes a challenge for many unions.

Even if you're not organized, unions have always fought for your rights as a worker and are responsible for many of the benefits we experience in our jobs. Now with the great change event of remote work at the door, solidarity between workers and collective bargaining power will be more important than ever. Get involved and help your union to represent you and others – for a more just culture of work. Unsure where to look? unionize.co.uk helps you find the union that represents you best.