



## Working remotely: Take care to make it work

These six tips can help optimize your work-from-home experience.

By Megan Hart

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As technology has made telecommuting more accessible in professions including accounting, companies and employees alike are seeing the benefits.

Remote employees are more productive and less likely to resign than their colleagues who work in an office, according to [Stanford University research](#) published in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

“I’m not sure I could go back to a traditional office environment,” said Jamie Nau, CPA, director of accounting at Summit CPA Group.

Nau, who works from his home in Colorado Springs, Colo., has never missed one of his children’s basketball games or piano recitals, thanks to the flexibility that comes with working remotely. He’s worked from home for Summit, a virtual CFO services firm, for more than three years.

While many employees enjoy the perks of working from home, though, remote work also comes with changes.

“We can’t just take the techniques we use to work in person and translate them to working online,” said Lisette Sutherland, author of *Work Together Anywhere: A Handbook on Working Remotely — Successfully — for Individuals, Teams, and Managers*. “It’s a different way of working.”

Employees who work from home, or those thinking of making the switch, can use these strategies to stay engaged with their employers — while achieving a healthy work/life balance — from anywhere.

**Get involved in something social.** While working from home, employees can miss the organic social interactions that occur at most offices. Getting involved in a social activity can help at-home employees fill the void. Summit offers employees a flexible schedule, so they can supplement their workday with a social outlet.

“I plan my daily schedule to do something I’m passionate about,” Nau said. “I play basketball. It could be community service. Just make sure to get those day-to-day interactions.”

Nau also makes a point to speak to his co-workers about things other than work during their virtual interactions, he said. To facilitate this, Sutherland recommended arriving early to online meetings to allow for conversation.

**Say cheese.** Turning on your camera can also help build a connection between team members, Nau and Sutherland said.

“Reaching out and having a video conversation one-on-one is a great substitute,” Sutherland said. “A video call will go a long way with building relationships.”

In fact, Summit requires employees to use video while communicating, Nau said.

**Provide feedback.** In an office, feedback occurs naturally. A supervisor can often tell how an employee feels based on verbal or visual cues, Sutherland said. That’s not easy to replicate while working from home.

Taking advantage of opportunities to provide feedback is important. So is offering authentic praise, she said. Giving kudos to your colleagues can help build camaraderie on a virtual team.

**Set boundaries.** For Nau, the most challenging part of working from home has been managing his schedule. Many CPAs are used to putting in long hours at the office, he said. Calling it a day can be even more difficult while working from home.

“If you let yourself work too many hours, it’s going to happen,” he said.

Setting a schedule that you and your supervisor mutually agree on and communicating it to your colleagues is important, Nau said.

**Establish a separate space.** Creating physical boundaries is also important for employees who work from home.

“You need to be able to close the door at the end of the day,” said Carrie McKeegan, CEO of Greenback Expat Tax Services, which serves Americans living abroad. McKeegan, who lives in Costa Rica, has been working from home for more than a decade.

Establishing a dedicated workspace can enhance concentration during business hours, McKeegan said, while also making it easier to disconnect at the end of the day. Working at a spot like the kitchen counter, she added, can cause you to start associating that space with work. That can make it hard to live in the moment while eating dinner with your family.

Your friends and family should also understand that you’re essentially at the office when you’re in your home workspace, Nau said.

**Consider whether remote work is right for you.** Nau, Sutherland, and McKeegan agree: Working from home isn’t for everyone.

“I think the biggest thing is, you have to know yourself,” Nau said.

Employees who work from home should be proactive communicators who excel at time management, Sutherland said.

Fortunately, many of the qualities that make someone a good CPA also make them a good at-home employee, McKeegan said. These include the ability to concentrate, work independently, and meet deadlines.

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