

Silverstreet

Work-from-Home (WFH) Best Practices

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CONTEXT

Silverstreet may be moving to remote working in the near future for a short period of time or you may be asked to WFH to help prepare for the possibility of the team shifting to working from home.

Compared to working in the office and collaborating remotely with other offices, or even WFH for 1-2 weeks, the work-life of being a full-time remote worker has unique challenges. Working on completely distributed teams means needing different ways of informing each other, different ways of making decisions, and different ways of staying connected.

Below are some helpful tips to set-up yourself and the team for success.

A NOTE FOR MANAGERS

Your team will be looking to you to “walk-the-walk.”
If the team witnesses you follow WFH best practices,
then those guidelines will quickly become the defacto norm for the crew

1 BEST PRACTICES TIPS

1. **Set office hours and stick to them.** Our official working hours is 9:00am to 6:00pm Monday to Friday.
2. **Update your status** on Slack so colleagues know when you are online — or offline. Please be far more proactive on this than when you are in the office, managing expectations around responsiveness is very critical during WFH!
3. **Create a unique workspace in your home** — and use it specifically just *for work*.
4. **Set an agreed signal with the family** so they know when you are on the clock.
5. **For those with children**, don't expect the little ones won't impact on work time. They may even spontaneously join you in a meeting. It is all good. Your colleagues understand that while WFH, you are juggling two roles: parent + staffer. Nobody will mind if you pause to parent for a moment or two before rejoining the Zoom. They might even want to wave hello to your little one(s)!
6. **Take regular breaks** during the day and step away from the computer. A short break every 1 or 2 hours is highly recommended!
7. 🙌 **Use emojis!** It sounds silly, but your tone can be lost in chat. Be sure to be clear as things may get convoluted quickly due to how something may sound when you're writing it.
PRO TIP: On Mac, pull up the Emoji keyboard using "control + command + spacebar"
8. **Over-communicate!** Working remotely often requires you to communicate details with everyone to reduce mismatched expectations — especially if a large group of staffers starts WFH for the first time. If you ever think to yourself, "everyone knows this already" or "I probably don't need to say it," just say it rather than leave it possibly ambiguous.
9. **Embrace the upside!** Since you will be at home, cross off that personal goal that's been on the To-Do List. Anything from a food recipe that needs a close eye while in the oven, to trimming the garden plants during lunch to free up time during the weekend, or learning a new language — the time flexibility is a perk to be utilized.

2 SETTING EXPECTATIONS WHILE WFH

Here are some ideas for setting clear expectations between managers and team members, as well as for peers within a team:

1. Collaborate and agree on a “**WFH rules of engagement**” document that is tailored to your team. Pin this to your Slack.
2. **Agree on WFH office hours.** Document the default expectations in a shareable document, and be extra-disciplined about keeping Google Calendar updated. Be mindful that parents may need to shift to more flexible hours in order to accommodate their family obligations.
3. Make sure your **User Manuals** are updated with WFH specifics.
4. **Managers:** It is your responsibility to set very clear expectations with your team.

3 PRODUCTIVITY

3.1 PRODUCTIVITY : FOR MANAGERS

To set-up your team for high productivity success, follow these 3 E's of WFH:

- **Expectations:** Set'em and share'em on *everything*. From how to reach you in a crisis, to when you will respond to 1-1 Slack pings, to how you want daily status updates structured; the more clear and concise processes in place from you, the less the team will have to wonder and stress over.
- **Effort:** When one works and lives in the same space, it becomes very easy to always be on – which is a recipe for rapid burn out. Keep an eye out for WFH staffers that fall into the mind trap that time = effort. If the priority level doesn't genuinely require putting in the hours, gently encourage your report to work smarter, not longer.
- **Energy:** This is a reminder to managers (and staff) that it is especially important when WFH to be mindful of tone in written comms and body language in video calls. In the isolation of WFH life, it becomes quite easy to take responses in the most negative (and unintended) way. Combat this by going overboard to ensure the tone you want is the tone conveyed by using "Thank you", "Please" and other clear emotive indicators 🙏.

- **Overworking** when remote is a common issue.
 - Get in the habit of taking regular breaks
 - Update your status on the appropriate channels so that your team knows you are away at lunch, exercising or doing other activities – and when you will be back.
- **Take good notes at your meetings.** Folks who have to miss the meeting aren't going to catch up on context in the hallway so it's important to share the notes so they know what happened. Here are some ideas:
 - Record key decisions in a centralized **decision log**.
 - Set an agenda and assign a **dedicated note-taker** before each meeting begins.
 - Allocate some **"silent time"** during a call for everyone to write down comments and notes in a shared doc, so it's not bottlenecked by the note-taker.
- **Protect your focused work blocks.** Set specific times to check Slack and email. When an entire team is working remotely, the day can easily be spent only responding to Slacks and emails. Here are some tips and best practices:

- Set clear expectations on what **expected response times** will be for Slack and email with your manager and team (Note: Remember to factor in teams living in other time zones when setting your personal policy.) **PRO TIP:** Pin this to your team Slack channel, email signature, or user manual.
- Some teams align to check Slack and email in two blocks: first thing in the morning and at the end of the day.
- Block out focused work blocks during your day to do deeper work. Focused blocks should be at least 2 hours. If it is not pivotal for your role to be reachable at all times, turn off Slack and close your email during that time.
- Implement adding clear and concise directions to the start of communications: For example, add to the subject line of an email *exactly* what is being asked of the recipient in response: [Response Requested], [FYI - No Action Required], [Urgent: Input Required]

3.2 ZOOM TIPS

- Set your preferences to [automatically mute audio/video](#) when joining a meeting. Better to be required to manually un-mute than have a private conversation with family members broadcasted to the entire team.
- **Haven't had a chance to clean your space before a video call?** Consider setting up the [virtual background feature](#) on Zoom!
- When creating a Zoom invite ensure the link is in the Calendar notes section so the hyperlink is clickable – not simply in the location tab of the invite. For some devices, the location tab does not provide a tappable link, and many colleagues will be calling in from mobile devices while WFH. The ability to tap to join will streamline meeting start times.
- Ask the host to set up auto-record for Zoom meetings and then send out recordings to help keep others in the loop.

4 COMMUNICATION

- 🙌 **Use emojis!** It sounds silly, but your tone can be lost in chat. Be sure to be clear as things may get convoluted quickly due to how something may sound when you're writing it.
PRO TIP: On Mac, pull up the Emoji keyboard using "control + command + spacebar"
- **Err on over-communicating.** Working remotely often requires you to communicate details with everyone to reduce mismatched expectations – especially if a large group of staffers starts WFH for the first time.
- **If you are providing a status update:** Plan to give frequent updates on the status of projects which will help everyone stay connected and on track. Accept that you may need to provide the information multiple times as updates can often get missed in a crowded Slack channel or full inbox.
- **If you are receiving a status update:** Knowing what is going on isn't enough – do let the person know you received an update so they aren't left hanging. In Slack, a simple "thumbs-up" on the comment will do; on email a short reply of "Got it!" will put your colleague at ease knowing their message was seen.
- **If you have had more than 5-6 back-and-forth exchanges on Slack or email** attempting to clarify something with a colleague – it is likely time to jump on the phone quickly to hash it out.

5 WELLNESS

- **Set sustainable office hours and stick to them.** Google Calendar is your friend. If needed, schedule morning routines and wind down routines into your calendar.
- You'll be getting less movement than normal. Create routines for moving regularly.
 - Try starting your day with a walk or other stretching exercise, something to get your body moving.
 - Set a timer for every two hours to stand up and walk away for at least ten minutes.
 - If you have a meeting that doesn't *require* being on video or at the computer, take it from your phone – and then walk around the house or outside (if that is an option) to stretch your legs.
- **Prepare for the day as you would if actually going into the office.** This helps delineate “work time” from “personal time”, even if everything is happening at home. Get dressed, shower and then use your “commute time” for non-work activity. Some suggestions:
 - Virtual watercooler talk in your team Slack
 - Spend time with family
 - Have a cup of tea alone
 - Read a book as you might normally do while in transit on a train or bus into the office
- **For those with children,** don't expect the little ones won't impact on work time. They may even spontaneously join you in a meeting. It is all good. Your colleagues understand that while WFH, you are juggling two roles: parent + staffer. Nobody will mind if you pause to parent for a moment or two before rejoining the Zoom. They might even want to wave hello to your little one(s)!
- **If you have a partner who is also WFH,** agree on a schedule that will allow you both to have time to focus on work. Create a schedule for critical meetings that must be taken undisturbed, so you don't disturb each other, or can cover for each other with parental duties.
- **Getting a quick meal or a snack** and going back to your desk to work is often standard when at the office, but while working from home that behavior results in a full-day of screentime without pause. That's bad! Step away from the laptop for snack time and lunch.
- **At the end of the workday,** budget a block of time on your calendar for unwinding from work instead of diving directly into home life – you typically have a commute to transition from your “work mindset” to “home mindset”.

6 COMMUNITY

- **Create virtual watercooler spaces!** Like Slack channels or Zoom rooms with your immediate team or close work colleagues. **NOTE:** This space is *separate* from work projects. Consider sharing the following:
 - Morning Coffee Chat standup aka what's new in life
 - 'Remote Pizza Friday': gather around and chat for 30 minutes while having lunch

You can also join existing Slack community groups like **#gocatsftw #musicdiscovery** where you can share your workspace setup, favorites music, or pet pictures

- **Add a photo of yourself** to all of your work accounts (Google, Slack, Zoom) so that team members can always "see" the person that is speaking.
- Please comment with your other ideas here 😊

7 WORKSPACE

- **WFBed?** As convenient or cozy as it may be to work from your bed, do not do it. Save that as a sacred space for resting.
- **Create a unique “workspace” in your home** – and use it specifically *for* work. It can be the kitchen table or an entire home office, but that space is dedicated to your office hours – when it is after hours, move locations for any personal projects on the computer.
- **Set up your new “desk”** so that you can work comfortably and won’t develop [repetitive strain injuries](#). Working on your couch or in positions that are not [ergonomic](#) can cause long-term injuries.
- **Get a good seat.** This is now your “office” and as you will be working there daily, don’t deny yourself a seat that is comfortable. Don’t want to splurge on an expensive chair? Try an ergonomic seat pad, a lumbar pillow, or a footrest to help support good posture.
- A major challenge for working from home is sharing the space with family members. **An agreed-upon signal** will visually inform family members that you are “on-the-clock” and not to be disturbed. This can be a closed door, headphones, a handwritten “At Work” sign, or even a stuffed toy on the desk.
- **Let there be light!** Don’t neglect to properly illuminate your workspace to help avoid eye fatigue.
- **Haven’t had a chance to clean your space before a video call?** Consider setting up the [virtual background feature](#) on Zoom!