

How to make working from home easier in these Covid-19 times

By [Lynn Madeley](#), issued by [Havas Johannesburg](#)

23 Mar 2020

Like many other companies across the globe, last week we took the decision to close our office. Within 24 hours probably 75% of our staff were working from home and within five days we had reached 100%.



If you had told me that we were going to do that within five days, five days ago I would have told you it was impossible. What this coronavirus reminds you, is that if there is one clear common goal, together, we will achieve it.

However, this is not about 'how to close your office'. These are my observations about working from home in these very strange times. It's hints and tips if you like; a little *listatorial* (listicle + tutorial).

So here goes:

1. A video call is worth about 1,000 emails and 100 WhatsApps

A video call is significantly more effective than an email, a WhatsApp or a phone call. The reason is that via video we read body language, so it is much easier for people to click in emotionally to what someone is saying. And let's face it humans are social animals, which is why this is so hard. It's actually a good idea to videocall friends as well as at the moment – it does its part to counter the loneliness that comes with the social distancing we all need to abide by.

2. We need to check in with people on a regular basis

Checking in with people is really important and this is not about making sure they are doing their job. We need human contact and even if that is from your colleague, right now, that is okay. Ask people how *they* are, not how work is. And if you are used to a check in with people, then at the moment you need to increase the frequency but decrease the duration of those interactions.

3. We need to make sure that we help people remain accountable

Rather than telling people to be accountable, we need to help them be accountable. Be clear with the deliverables that

are required and make everything smart (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timeous). Oh, and by the way, hold yourself accountable too.

4. We need to understand people's individual circumstances and challenges in this work from home world

Working from home for me is easy. A decent workspace, good Wi-Fi, lots of data if the power goes down, no kids running around demanding attention, but for other people, it isn't so easy. It is particularly difficult if you have children who are now at home for an extended period. Maybe it's a case of popping them to bed half an hour earlier so that you can work when it's quiet later in the evening. The job we have to do probably takes between six to 10 hours of our day, but we have 24 hours in a day. Perhaps take the afternoon to be with them and then work into the evening? Or you could have firmer rules, like, leave mom or dad alone between 10am – 12pm, and between 2pm – 4pm. This might be a good compromise.

5. A little patience goes a long way

Does everyone know how to use the tech? Understand that for some people they have never had to interact with video conferencing, other walking into the meeting room on time. Now they have to click links, know where the mute buttons are, understand how to share screens, etc. In the beginning, we will all need to exercise a little patience and teach people rather than rolling our eyes at their incompetence.

6. Establish the rules of engagement

Regardless of whether you are working from home or in an office environment, we all need rules of engagement. Will it email which are followed up with a WhatsApp if it is really urgent? Are you going to keep normal office hours or can you extend the time that is acceptable to communicate for a further hour? You need to reach an understanding with your team.

7. People must have access to information to do their job. If there was ever a time that IT needed to be your friend, it's now

The first person I called on Sunday night after the president's address was Batman (well not really Batman but near as). 'Batman' is the head of IT. The discussion was simple: We need to give people data and we need to get them access to the servers, and if we break a few rules along the way, that's just fine. Batman and Batman's friends, namely Robin and Cat Woman came to the party. Honestly, it was the Holy Trinity of IT and office management who made it all happen.

8. How do we mitigate loneliness for our people?

Those video check-ins are vital and part of them should just be a chat. Asking people how they are, and then letting them tell you, is so important for that. On Friday last week, we tried Virtual Friday Drinks via Zoom. It was awkward and funny, but I think it worked. Virtual coffees in smaller groups are also happening. And you know what, a simple call or message that says, 'How are you doing?' means so much, particularly if it comes from your boss.

9. Keep your routines as best you can

We like routines, they give us great comfort. They make things feel normal. So, try and begin work at the same time. Don't suddenly change the way you work. One of my habits is to eat the same lunch every day, and I am carrying on with that from home. It gives me an order. Really think about keeping as much the same as you can, it will help you find a rhythm.

10. Create work-home boundaries

Probably the most difficult for me this week has been switching off. My chosen workstation is in the kitchen. The problem with that is I don't stop working all day because everything I need to work is within reach. My solution is to actively close my laptop when I believe I should 'go home'. This week, I will try and mark the end of the day by walking out of the kitchen for a few minutes just to help create a physical switch between work and home. We need to encourage the people that work for us to do the same.

11. How to stay focused

When I work from home, I hyper focus, which is great, but you can't keep it up day in day out. Do the hard work at the time of day that works best for you, when you are at your sharpest. Split your day up into bite-size chunks, and that is not morning and afternoon, but rather in 30 minutes chunks with five to 10-minute breaks. During your break, do nothing but stand in the sun about five times a day to recharge. But whatever you do, don't just sit in one place all day and suddenly realise at 5pm you haven't even had a bathroom break.

And that's about it. Find a rhythm that works for you. If you manage people try and help them do the same. If you have a boss and they are not giving you the support that you feel you need, ask them to help you. After all, right now we need to help each other.

Good luck and stay isolated.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynn Madeley is the CEO of Havas Southern Africa.

- " **LG's 2024 soundbars deliver complete at-home entertainment with rich audio** 15 Jan 2024
- " **Havas Red expands to South Africa adding PR, social and content capability to the region** 11 Sep 2023
- " **Havas Media ranks 5th as media agency in South Africa, Recma First Edition 2023 results show** 9 May 2023
- " **Havas prosumer studies reveal interesting facts on lesser explored topics** 12 Jan 2023
- " **Pernod Ricard appoints Havas Media SA as its media agency of record** 22 Dec 2022

[Havas Johannesburg](#)

HAVAS To be the world's best company at creating meaningful connections between people and brands using creativity, media and innovation.

[Profile](#) | [News](#) | [Contact](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [RSS Feed](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>