

# Since 2008 I've Worked From Home. Here Are 5 Helpful Tips.

*By Dan Pontefract*

I spent ten years at TELUS as a team member, leader and executive. I was a mobile worker the entire time. I worked from the road, a TELUS office, hotels, the odd coffee shop ... and yes, I worked about 50 percent of the time from the comforts of my home.

I never had an office in any TELUS building. I didn't have a permanent desk. There was no coffee mug that said "Dan is the World's Baldest Man," waiting to be filled every morning. I performed my duties wherever the wind took me and that included my home.

Harris / Decima conducted a [survey](#) entitled "Evaluating Attitudes about Flexible Work," and there were some statistics that resonated with me as a mobile worker. For example:

- 81 percent of respondents agreed that an organization offering a flexible work program positively differentiates one company from another.
- 67 percent of those surveyed noted they would be more loyal to companies that provided them with the option of flexible work.
- 87 percent of employees who have ever worked remotely responded that they are just as productive, if not more when working out of the office.
- 56 percent said that having a flexible work option would motivate them to work harder.

In Ireland, consulting firm Regus polled executives and leaders [finding](#) "nearly three quarters believe flexible working improves staff retention and seven in ten consider flexibility a key measure in attracting new talent." Regus also discovered that 74 percent of respondents believe flexible work styles makes employees more loyal and that 55 percent think workers wouldn't accept a position if the flexibility weren't offered.

I now have 12 years of experience as a mobile worker, including working from home. I believe society is only at the beginning of such a workplace evolution, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need for employees to think about how they will handle such a shift.

I have five helpful tips for you to be as effective as possible when working from home.

- Establish Personal Norms
- Be Present with your Presence
- Wear Shoes
- Walk Around
- Spaced Out

## Establish Personal Norms

When will you work? What time of the day will you start and stop working? Do you have some days where you might work a few hours at night, and others where you might watch your daughter's school play? These – and a hundred other questions – are the types of questions you should be asking yourself as you define and establish personal norms when you work from home. For example, I make my meetings 45 minutes in length (not 60) so I have 15 minutes to answer emails, phone calls or participate in social spaces. I block off 30 minutes before I take my first meeting of the day and 30 minutes after my last to plan, prepare, catch up, etc. Whatever your norms are, it's best to align them to a time management plan of some sort and stick to it. Oh, and DO NOT multitask on conference calls. You will get caught. (And there is no such thing as multitasking.)

## Be Present with your Presence

Ideally, your organization has some form of instant messaging and/or collaboration technology. In the case of IM, turn it on! You'll be alone 99 percent of the time when working from home devoid of face-to-face colleagues. Thus, by ensuring your IM tool is on (and your status is aligned to your calendar) others will know if you're busy, free, in a meeting, delivering a presentation or itching to chat. If your organization possesses collaboration technologies, either block out time to participate in company chatter or manufacture ways to continue being present with your presence. Send a Kudo, comment on a blog, answer a question in a micro-blog or post a video or photo. The water cooler has turned virtual and your job is to remain "present with your presence" despite there being no physical water cooler chatting taking place.

## Wear Shoes

It may seem silly, but I wear shoes every day when working from home. Most days I wear comfortable dress shoes from Fluevog. Now, I'm not so dogged that I'll wear dress clothes – like a suit – when working from home, but I advocate wearing shoes. There are a couple of reasons. First of all, when you don't wear shoes (and are barefoot, in socks or wearing slippers), I believe you slip into a relaxed mindset. Think of working from home like working from the office. Are you barefoot there? Second, when you put on shoes, you're going to work. When you put on slippers, you aren't at work. You're at home. If you wear shoes, you should mentally associate yourself with being at work, even if you are working from home. If you have an "*I don't wear shoes in the house policy*," buy a pair of indoor-only shoes that you put on when you are working from home. Developing an *at home* working mindset is vital, and as strange as it sounds, wearing shoes will help.

## Walk Around

Business innovator Nilofer Merchant nailed it with her [TED Talk](#), *Got a Meeting? Take a Walk*. When working from home, I suggest you employ the same tactic only slightly modified. You will likely be on a conference call at some point when working from home. If you're like me, you're on multiple conference calls almost the entire day. Whether you have a landline or a mobile phone at home, get yourself a headset or earbuds with a microphone. If you're on a conference call, try to walk around your home once in a while with the headset. It could be indoors or, if you have a front yard or backyard (or a quiet street), think about going outside. Maybe you have a balcony. The fresh air will do you some good. (Learn how to use your mute button effectively too.) When you take a break – and you should schedule in multiple breaks to your day – think about walking around again, or exercising at the gym, go for a run, bike ride, or do yoga. Whilst technically not 'walking around,' the point is to be active and not be sedentary.

## Spaced Out

To properly 'space out' is to ensure you set yourself up for success in the physical spaces where you will actually work from home. I highly suggest you forego placing a desk in your bedroom. If at all possible, avoid this scenario. You will feel as though work is unending. Who wants to wake up in the same place where work is being done? Find somewhere else, anywhere else. I have a dedicated office, but I will also work from other areas on occasion, like the dining room table. In this case, being 'spaced out' means you have to instill a personal discipline to separate work from your home life. Whether you're single, in a relationship or a marriage with children, you need to prevent yourself from a 24x7 work mentality when working from home. Guard your white space. Protect your free time. Don't let work be your only priority. I am a proponent of life-work balance, not work-life balance because I believe life always comes first.

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He is the best-selling author of three books: *OPEN TO THINK*, *THE PURPOSE EFFECT* and *FLAT ARMY*. A renowned speaker, Dan has presented at four different TED events and also writes for *Forbes* and *Harvard Business Review*. Dan is an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria, Gustavson School of Business and has garnered more than 20 industry awards over his career.



His third book, *OPEN TO THINK* won the 2019 getAbstract International Book of the Year winner and the 2019 Axiom Business Book Award in the Leadership category. He is set to release his 4<sup>th</sup> book on September 29 titled, *LEAD. CARE. WIN. How to Become a Leader Who Matters*.

Previously as Chief Envisioner and Chief Learning Officer at TELUS—a Canadian telecommunications company with revenues of over \$14 billion and 50,000 global employees—he launched the Transformation Office, the TELUS MBA, and the TELUS Leadership Philosophy, all award winning initiatives that dramatically helped to increase the company’s employee engagement to record levels of nearly 90%. Throughout his tenure he was a mobile worker and helped the organization rollout its award-winning Flexible Work Styles model. Prior to TELUS he held senior roles at SAP, Business Objects and BCIT.

Dan and his wife, Denise, have three children (aka goats) and live in Victoria, Canada. Reach him at [www.pontefractgroup.com](http://www.pontefractgroup.com)