

On April 3rd Dr Stef Burns joined the WIMWA mentoring cohort for a zoom conference and she has kindly shared her notes to help the WA mining and resources community adjust to these uneasy times. WIMWA would like to thank Dr Burns for her ongoing support and kindness and her generosity in sharing her wisdom.

A general set of thoughts

In our typical work lives, our **effectiveness, is highly linked to our interactions via the work place.** The direction, guidance, tasking and learning comes from interacting with other people. There is continuous feedback from bosses, peers and customers. We are often quite unaware of these effects, as they are pervasive and embedded over many years.

The **environment itself has a direct effect on our state of mind,** and on from that it causes continuous, high-quality action on the job.

While it is a simple matter to say, 'Work from home', it is a very different matter for humans to adapt to that new environment. This is a wholly new state of work culture and change rarely comes easy to humans.

Now you are required, **absent of external tensions,** to generate your own motivation to take actions at the same level as if you were in the office.

This is where the work we did on procrastination and persistence at the 2018 WIMWA Summit comes into play. The whole of

your work day allows you to come to observe your internal processes that cause you to take actions or avoid them. Your new work life is your playground for learning.

For many of you, this will require that you learn how to communicate with your teams via technology. Some of you will learn to become 'digital leaders'. The quality and effectiveness of your communication will require a whole new level of skill. All of the previous human factors have to be replicated in a digital form. This will be challenging.

You can expect that initially, there will be a **loss of effectiveness and productivity.** A time when you are not get anything done nearly as well as you did when you were going into the office. So, what are we going to do?

Given this **initial period will be disorienting,** as it is not something you have likely ever confronted, and given you can expect some loss of effectiveness early on, the **single best use of your time right now is to prepare.** This means planning and organising your new work environment and getting ready to work in a new way. Spending time over this initial period taking some useful steps, is a way of getting back to full work capacity much sooner than later.

Following you will find **7 activities.** Have a read through them all to see what might resonate as important for you. Each of you will likely apply them differently given your different home environments and even your own nature. So, nothing here is cast in stone. Use this as a guide.

In one way or another, I will see you all again soon. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you need any help navigating this time.

Most sincerely,
Stef

Some helpful tips for getting effective working from home

I have been working from home for most of my career. I've learned a lot about what helped, and what didn't help, keep me productive in that unique work environment. I've also been called on to help others when they have made the transition from work to home. Here's a few things I've learned along the way.

However, (big caveat), your life is infinitely nuanced in ways I cannot even imagine. Take all this for what is useful, and chuck out what isn't. A chance to reset your ideas on what it means to 'work'

This is a once in a life time opportunity for you to learn a lot of new things about this idea of 'effectiveness'. 'Going to work' can be a mindless activity: how we get there, what we do when we get there, following blindly the rituals and rhythms we habituated from years of repetition. Of course, these all make us effective or we wouldn't have the job, but there is an opportunity now to really assess what productive and effective means. Free from those embedded work distractions, you can think more clearly.

In 1665, Isaac Newton had to work from home when the University of Cambridge temporarily closed due to the Bubonic plague. It was the most productive period of his life, and he used that time to develop his theories on calculus, optics and gravity.

Think big!

Look around, what's the best spot at home for work

One advantage we have when we go to the office, is that the environment itself triggers our state of mind. We go into 'work' mode. Unless you've been taking work home for a while, and effective when doing so, you will need to take some action to create this effect in a new environment. It won't happen automatically. Have a good look around at home and see if you can find a spot that you don't use for any other 'home' activities. Even if you need to set up a folding card table in a corner facing the wall or looking out over the yard. **It should be a place where when you go, your brain knows 'this is where my human works'.** I'd suggest you especially avoid the kitchen table or the lounge.

Think of the kinds of work activities you will be doing and set up this space to accommodate that work. What technology will you need? Do you need to charge devices, what paperwork? You want to avoid getting up and down to get things. Every time you do that you will find it might take a mighty effort to get seated and focused again!

Choosing a spot for work may be a critical factor in your effectiveness. Create a space that feels good to be in, and stay in for blocks of time. Make it a place you are drawn to, think about aesthetics, think about minimising distractions.

If you just don't have a home environment that can accommodate this, perhaps look further afield. A spot in the garage, or in the back garden. If worse comes to worse, tape a 'Do not disturb' sign on the back of your chair when you are working. Get creative and find a unique place to set up, or a unique way to signal this is work time.

Set A Time Frame

You never really need to think about 'how long am I going to work' when you GO to work. You go to work for a time. When you are there you work. Then you leave. But at home this will change. Now, you do not have the act of 'going to work' and 'being at work' to demarcate time.

Now at home, set the time you will 'go to work' each day. It should be the same time every day, be consistent. Also set the times when you are to take a break, eat lunch and stop for the day.

Committing to a stop time is very important!!

Just working until you are fatigued kills anticipation and motivation for tomorrow. Don't let yourself get trapped in 'do I feel like working today'. The answer will quickly be 'no'.

At home it is easy to miss some of the rituals that prepare you for work. If you shower before work, then keep doing that. If you dress for work, keep doing that. If you shave before work, or put on your makeup, keep doing that! If you eat breakfast before work, for sure keep doing that!

Keep other routines in place

All your other routines surrounding your work day should stay intact as best you can. For instance, if you typically make the kids' lunch the night before so you can leave for work on time, then continue to make their lunches the night before. If you iron your clothes on Sunday so they are ready for the week, keep doing that. Changing small things, thinking, 'I can do that in the morning' or 'I don't need to do that anymore' will not help you!!

Remember, at work, you do more than work.

Don't cut yourself off from others. At work, you interact with others casually on breaks, or when you have a question, or when you are seeking feedback. At home it is easy to eliminate these features of life at work. Find ways to keep them going. Schedule a lunch time call with a colleague. Shoot off a text to check in with team mates on breaks. Keep your connections going. Everyone benefits.

Have a list of things you want to accomplish each day.

Lists are great, but not if they are long and you never ever get to the end of them. Be specific about the 3, and no more than 4, tasks you want to complete that day. You'll start on these in the morning, and tick them off as you go. When they are done, you'll feel quite a hit of relief. You can also do more after that but those added tasks will be done with a sense of freedom.

The best time to make a list for the next day, is at the end of your work day. Brains like being primed. If you think through what you want to accomplish tomorrow, it'll be working on that outside of your awareness through the evening. When you wake in the morning, you'll know what you have ahead of you, and in that can be positive anticipation which relates to motivation.

Prepare Yourself For Discomfort

It might never come, but if it does you want to be prepared for a bit of frustration, irritability and discomfort. This will be a new experience. Time will move more slowly, there will be different kinds of distractions you normally don't deal with when you 'go to work'. You may get to the end of a day and realise you got nothing done. If you are prepared for these

effects, and this occurs, you'll better respond to it. And, you will make the right attribution for the problem ... you are not bad or lazy, it's just a new environment you need to adjust to.

If you get chronically stuck in inefficiencies during this time, please reach out for help sooner than later. Help-seeking behaviour is a highly valued skill.

Working, parenting and teaching from home

Let's not kid ourselves, what is causing this transition is unique. It is NOT just about you working from home! For some of you, this will be a total disruption. You can chuck out all my advice above if the truth is your life is turned upside-down. Do the best you can. You will feel rewarded by every effort you make to be effective in keeping your work going at this trying time. Pat yourself on the back at least once a day.

In closing

This will be a time of great opportunity to learn about yourself, and practice applying what you learned from all the events you've attended, and all you've read, over the years. You will likely never again have an opportunity to grow such as this. Don't squander it, take it in your teeth and run. What allows leaders to do so well when leading others, is what they do leading themselves in their efforts to learn, solve problems, make decisions, prepare and reflect. It's called self-leadership and what you learn there will greatly help when leading others.

Stay safe,

Stef

