

WORKFORCE STRATEGY (/KEYWORDS/WORKFORCE-STRATEGY)

Worried About WFH Disruptions? Don't Be!

These eight strategies will help workers, managers, and organizations at large not only adjust to but optimize working from home.



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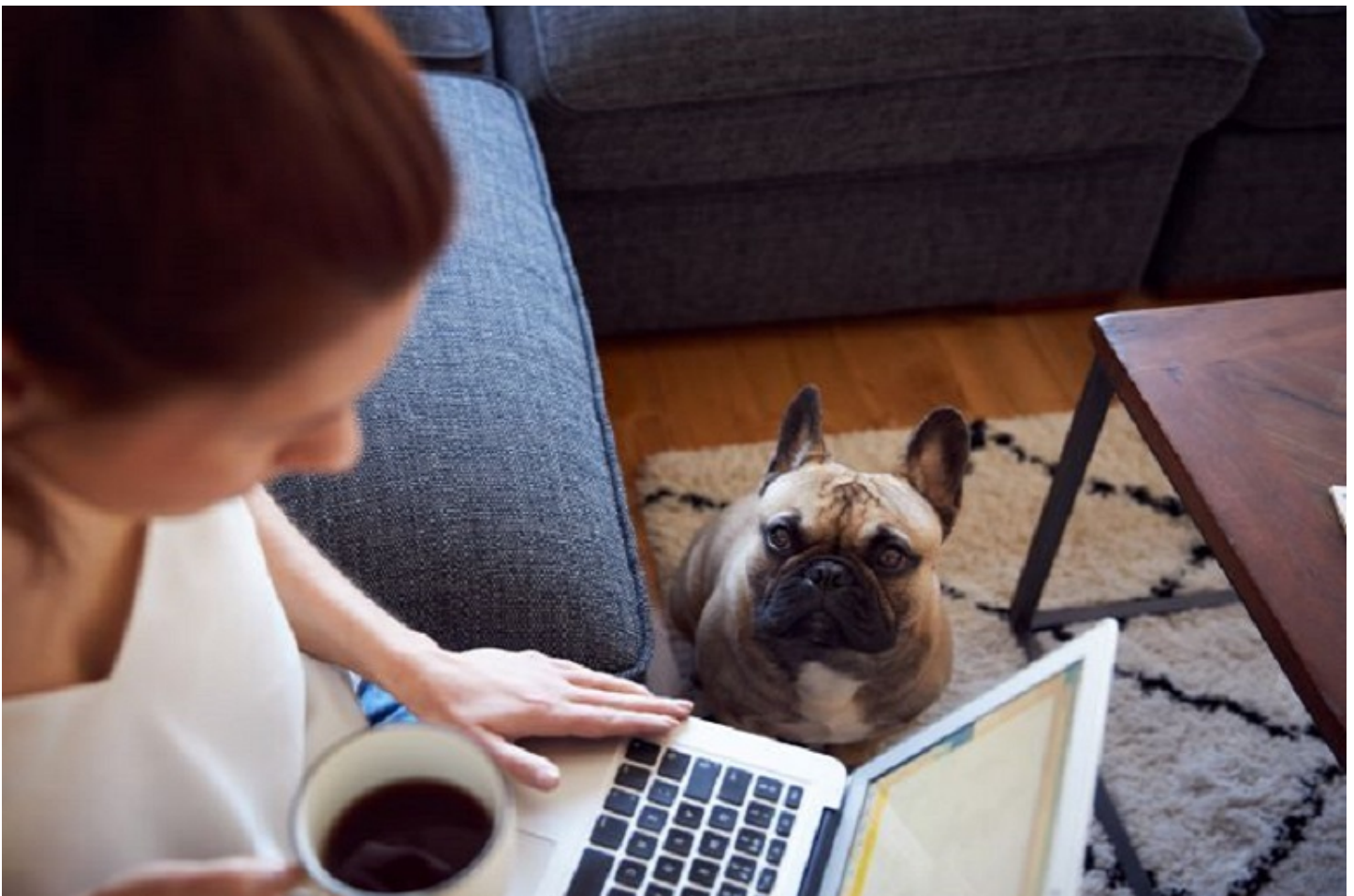


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As a self-employed consultant, I've worked from home for a large part of my career. This has been an easy way to keep overhead low and productivity high — I don't have a commute or pay rent for a physical office outside the home. Plus, working from home meant I could always be there when my kids were young. Throughout the years, I was also forced to work out ways to deal with disruptions that come with being at home. How do you not attend to things staring you in the face: chores around the house, active children, or a couch calling you to a nap?

Now that many employees have been thrown into the work-from-home (WFH) world, they're asked to do more without the support and structure of the past. Schools and daycares are closed, grandparents are isolated so they don't get sick, and there are no playdates or summer camps. How do people make sure that their job gets done while toddlers are interrupting telephone calls, dogs are barking at the FedEx guy, and laundry is piling up? This can be a real challenge. I recently heard about **the case** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/us/drisana-rios-lawsuit-hub-international.html>) of a woman who was fired from her job because her boss didn't like the noise her children were making during client calls. She is suing for gender discrimination and wrongful termination.

When my kids were younger, I worked during naptime, after they went to bed, and often as they played at my feet. I learned how to be productive and make the most of my time in these situations. HR and other workforce strategists will need to give WFH employees time to explore what works best for them and continue to evolve best practices guidance based on their experiences. Success will take collaboration between employees and employers.

Here are eight strategies that will help employees, managers, and companies as a whole deal with WFH disruptions:

1. Set a new schedule and revise expectations. Managers should consider their goals and each employee's circumstances. Discuss barriers to, and the support needed for, success during this time. Identify potential disruptions and come up with ways to address them.
2. Be realistic about what employees can accomplish. Does the employee have adequate childcare? Are they supervising homeschool with children? Do they need upgraded

technology, equipment, or Internet service? Look at ways to support the employee in fulfilling their work tasks.

3. Be flexible. Studies have shown that employees often work longer hours when at home than in the office. Is it possible to be more flexible with an employee schedule to allow time to attend to matters at home?
4. Coordinate with a partner, spouse, family member or trusted friend. If work demands require your time and disruptions are occurring, work out a schedule with those in your support system to ease the stress.
5. Use the mute button liberally! If your barking dog is making it difficult to participate in a call, hit the mute button. Turn off your video and put up a profile picture instead so others don't see your kids running behind you.
6. Cut everyone some slack. Have patience as most of us have been thrust into the WFH situation without advance planning. With all the daily activities disrupted, be patient when a child is crying in the background or a dog is barking on a conference call.
7. Have a sense of humor. I refer to my dog as my "office manager" – alerting me to deliveries, when the lawn care arrives, and when other "office managers" are walking down the street. My kids are my "coworkers," sometimes my "grumpy coworkers." If we add some humor, it can relieve some tense situations.
8. Take some time off. Despite a heavy focus on WFH productivity, we all still need to take a break. Working from home doesn't mean you should always be expected to be "ON." Change the scenery by sitting in the backyard, get another cup of coffee, or do a quick meditation. If you need a vacation, take the time and shut off your job.

If an employee's WFH circumstances just cannot be resolved, perhaps a leave of absence is in order. The **Families First Coronavirus Response Act** (https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic/ffcra-employer-paid-leave#_ftn1) requires certain employers to provide their employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. The Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division administers and enforces the new law's paid leave requirements. These provisions will apply from the Act's effective date of April 1 through year's end.

We're all working under unusual circumstances. By communicating and collaborating, employers and employees can meet the demands and challenges of the WFH environment.

Denise is writing on behalf of the Society of Communications Technology Consultants, an international organization of independent information and communications technology professionals serving clients in all business sectors and government worldwide.



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[_mc=wscpost](https://schedule.enterpriseconnect.com/session/fireside-chat-balancing-distributed-office-work/875711?_mc=wscpost)) with Melissa Marsh, founder and executive director of PLASTARC, a social research, workplace innovation, and real estate strategy firm. **Register today** (https://enterpriseconnect.informatech.com/augustvirtual/2020/registrations/Attendee?_mc=wscpost)!

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