



eBOOK

The SolarWinds Guide To Work From Home

For Folks (and Their IT Departments) New to Remote Work

by Leon Adato

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview



Like so many things at SolarWinds, this guide arose out of a genuine desire to help our fellow IT practitioners by sharing our experiences and offering lessons we learned along the way. In this case, our goal wasn't to help you monitor, manage, or secure your IT environment, but to simply wrap your head around the new reality in which many of us find ourselves (and our organizations) now: working remotely when it wasn't part of our work habit before, and being part of a distributed team who all (along with their spouses, adult family members, children, and even pets) are coping with the same things.

Within this guide, you'll find information running the gamut from highly technical and specific; to more organizational and broadly general.

Over the course of this eBook we'll cover the following topics:

- How to stay connected and feel like you're part of a community when social distancing and even quarantining keeps us physically distant.
- Managing the way our work and home lives blend together, so we maintain balance and boundaries.
- Tools and techniques to help stay focused, work effectively, and collaborate.
- Technical information on what kinds of hardware you might need or benefit from along with simple steps to troubleshoot common work-at-home problems.

As with everything we share at SolarWinds, you're an active participant in the conversation. Share your thoughts, additions, and even corrections with us on social media, on the THWACK® community, or wherever else you find us. That's how we all grow as IT professionals and as people who continue to strive to be our best selves and to do our best work, even in the face of adversity.

Who's this eBook for? Honestly, there's something here for everyone:

If you're new to remote work and consider yourself "non-technical," there are plenty of hints and ideas for organizing your workspace, your workflow, and just finding your groove when working with people who are not in the same building (or even the same ZIP code). There are suggestions on the kinds of things you can do with remote work software; gear to improve your experience; and habits you might not have needed in the office, but which can be game-changers now that you're remote.

If you're an IT pro who hasn't worked remote before, some of this might be old hat, but some of these tips and concepts may nevertheless be new to you. And you may find the organizational items are more immediately useful. And of course, there's no such thing as a bad time to talk about tech gear!

If you're already a seasoned telecommuter, then you will undoubtedly have been asked many of the questions we address in this eBook by friends, family, and coworkers in the last few weeks, and you should feel welcome use what you find here (with attribution, of course).

Some Initial Thoughts

While each of the chapters in this eBook zero in on a particular topic, there are a few points we'd like to make at the very beginning, which apply equally whether the specific conversation is about configuring your router, finding the best workspace in your home, or trying to walk the tightrope of a conference call in the presence of a needy toddler.

- We should approach this like every other challenge we face in tech, business, and even life: with a combination of open-mindedness to new opportunities and approaches; a commitment to keeping an eye on the data that tells us how we're doing; and the ability to "fail fast" by acknowledging when something isn't working the way we want or need it to and finding another solution.
- Remember, not everything works for everybody. Just because a WFH guide (even this one!) says you "should" do something, if it's really not working for you, then it's OK to acknowledge that and find your own way to accomplish a goal. For example:

- Many WFH guides emphasize a quiet organized space. But some people might find silence distracting. Maybe the radio or white noise helps you focus.
 - Many WFH guides suggest a dedicated workspace. But not everyone has that luxury. Making space for work can take many different forms, even if it's a seat at the kitchen table with a paper sign saying, "Mom is working right now."
 - ...and so on. The point is for you—yourself, your team, and your manager—to approach this with an open mind and a willingness to experiment when the effort you're making isn't generating the results you want.
- If you aren't 100% productive in the first day or two, remain calm. It's going to take you time to settle in and find your groove. Not only is this totally normal and OK, it would be the same if you moved office buildings, or jobs, or even to a new desk. Be gentle with yourself (managers: and your team) and allow time to adjust.
 - This is even more true when it's not just you. If there are other people in your home—whether they're other adults or children—then not only are they going through the same transition as you, but you're all also learning how to work in the same space, sometimes compete for the same resources, and find not only individual routines but collective ones as well. As with so many things, communication is the key to success!

Credit and Acknowledgements

While many of us here at SolarWinds contributed ideas, the main voices you will hear in this document belong to:

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Each of us drew on our experiences both as professionals working in IT and as remote workers—some of us very new to the experience, and some who've been doing it for years or even decades.

Chapter 2: Finding Community and Connection



The number one question people have been asking as they move to remote work is not “How do I set up my Wi-Fi?” or “How do I make my kitchen table more comfortable to sit at?”

No, the first thing people are saying is, “I feel so disconnected.” Or, “The loneliness makes me feel like I’m doing this wrong.” Or even, “I don’t like this.” Simply stated, people need to know how they are going to establish a feeling of community and connection.

First, please understand this is not a normal scenario of one (or several) members of a company beginning to work remote. People who have been working from home for years also are saying these weeks have been extremely distracting and disorienting.

It’s not the WFH change, and it’s not you. The world has been turned upside down right now. So, keep the context in mind and be kind with yourself, your coworkers, and the folks you live with.

It’s also important to remember this will not last forever. Life will return to normal. And in the meanwhile, we’re all going to get through this.

Second, there are ways for us to create and maintain real human connections even through the distance, seclusion, and quarantine. That’s what this section is about.

While many folks (especially those of us who identify more toward the introvert end of the personality spectrum) might find WFH to be a welcome change, just as many—if not more—will miss the hustle and bustle of the office, not to mention the chance to connect with a diverse group of adults with a range of personalities, interests, and stories to share each day. For some of us with busy personal lives, the office is our only chance to interact with other adults who aren't our immediate family.

So, what can you do to maintain a sense of connection (and let's be honest, sanity) during this period?

- Channels on collaboration software

Whether your company settles on Microsoft Teams or Slack or Google Hangouts or some other platform, it's a near-certainty there will be some platform you'll be using for interpersonal chat. And the platform will support more than just one-to-one conversations, it will have the ability to create separate discussion areas (or "channels") people can subscribe to. Therefore, here are some starter ideas of channels you can create to foster a sense of togetherness while you're apart:

- Water Cooler Chats—talk about the normal everyday things like what your kids are up to, what video games you're playing, shows you're watching, etc.
- Home Tips Chats—many of us don't have great skill in the kitchen or DIY skills for the home—as we learn new #LifeHacks, cooking skills, etc., we can have a place to share with each other.
- Parenting Corner—those of us stuck blessed at home with our little ones may be facing new challenges as both we and our mini-humans bump up against new schedules and new limitations. This is a space where we can discuss tips, share experiences, and vent (but only a little).
- Pets of <your company>—we KNOW our furry/feathered/whatever family members are the absolute best and cutest on earth, but that doesn't mean we don't appreciate other people's pets, too. Introduce your pet; teach the group a training tip; tell a funny joke with your pet (or about them). The added benefit of this is to help us get used to the idea of our pets making an appearance on camera during regular meetings. And that's OK. Non-pet owners can join the group to live vicariously through other people's pets.
- Virtual lunch hang-out or happy hours—why not have lunch with your favorite coworker from your desk? Call each other via your messaging platform or set up a semi-official meeting, so multiple people can join in for a relaxed chat.

- Celebrate successes together just as you would in the office! We can keep our spirits up by lifting each other up even from a distance.
- Send cards. You can go the ecard route or actually put a piece of paper into an envelope with an address and stamp and send it through the post office. Just like the olden days!
- Pick up the phone. Yeah, we know. You're probably on the phone (or Slack or Teams or Webex or Zoom, which is basically the same thing) all day. There's a difference between calling someone to ask where the TPS report is and calling to check in and see how they're doing. Take a moment and do the second one more than you used to.
 - Find a forum. The internet is at your fingertips. Here are a few examples:
 - THWACK: A wonderful (if geeky) place to start is SolarWinds [THWACK.com](https://www.thwack.com). Yes, there's a lot of tech talk happening there. But there's an equal amount of non-tech discussions going on if you know where to look. Ask our amazing community team about it if you need a tour around the neighborhood.
 - Reddit: there's a discussion area (officially termed a "subReddit") for just about everything, from Anthropology to ZenHabits.
 - StackExchange: While it began as a forum for programmers to ask programmer questions, it's grown into a collection of Exchanges on a variety of topics—from specific applications like Office or Magento; to games like chess or Dungeons & Dragons; to philosophy and religion; to learning a new language.
- Consider hosting open-invitation "office hours" with an open Webex or Teams meeting, so people can pop in and say hello or ask a question face-to-face.
- Sweat together. Admittedly, this requires a level of friendship we don't have with just anyone. But if you're the kind of person who likes to work out with a buddy, setting up a video chat with partner lets you cheer each other on as you squeeze out one last rep, correct each other's form, and feel like you're not alone. Even just a reminder to stand up and stretch now and then is useful.

- Missions. The SolarWinds® THWACK forum has used missions for years to build up our community, blow off steam, and have fun together-while-separate. People at your company can do the same in big and little ways. Instead of waiting for your corporate leadership to create company-wide events and goals, within your existing messaging platform channels and communities you can also create fun goals. Examples:
 - Missions to get us moving. The 30-day pushup challenge is just one example of healthy competitions we can use to get us up and moving and celebrating our successes.
 - Another is a step challenge. Whether you post your progress in a team area or use a step-tracking app allowing you to share with friends, you can set a community goal to “do your steps each day” even if each person’s target number is (and, in fact, probably should be) customized to their level.

Regardless of HOW you do it, the point is to go ahead and do something. While it may go against your nature to reach out, the reality is many of us are finding ourselves wrestling with the same emotions, the same frustration, and the same sense of inertia. If you take that first step, it’s very likely you’ll be rewarded with a grateful response.

Chapter 3: Your Work Life at Home



Now, let's take a few moments to discuss how to maintain your work life at home. Consider the many times you move around at the office: going to the break room to get a drink or snack, going down the hall to the restroom, going a few cubes down to talk to a collaborator on a project, walking to your supervisor or manager's office for a 1:1 or quick chat, etc. With those all going virtual, those sporadic times throughout the day you naturally get up and take a quick walk are now gone as you continuously sit in the same space. We have pointers for injecting a little more natural movement into your new work-from-home life.

Creating a comfortable workspace means having options. In the office we naturally get up, move around, sit at different types of chairs, and in different spaces, from our desk to conference rooms to kitchen areas to couches. Look around your home and see what options you have. Your options may be limited due to the need to share space with other adults working from home or kiddos who are distance learning, the number of available rooms and surfaces, and available technology. Chances are, though, if you get a little creative, you'll have options to break up the monotony.

- For a DIY standing option, move to an open countertop or even clear out a bookshelf and set your laptop up there for a bit.
- Another DIY standing option are any delivery boxes you might have stacking up waiting to be recycled. You can mix and match them to set your laptop at eye level for long stretches of reading, on-camera meetings, etc. Or drop it down a bit for a stand-and-type position. Or anything in-between.

- Another set of options is the devices you can use. Reading a PDF might be a strain on a laptop, but a breeze on a tablet or even a phone. And those types of switches will naturally allow you to also change position, seating, and location in the house.
- If you have a laptop or tablet to work from for a while, consider sitting outside on a balcony or porch. If not, consider opening a window for some fresh air and ambient noise.
- If ambient or white noise is helpful for your concentration, there are many free options online through music and video providers.
- Consider taking the next phone call while you take a walk. Maybe just a walk about the house to get moving—keeping your keyboard close in case you need to take a note—or if it's a meeting you can record to make note of later, consider pressing record and then taking a walk down the street (preferably not when your neighbors are doing their lawn maintenance). Keep your pace light to prevent heavy breathing.
- Lighting is another aspect of your space, but with two elements: the ambient light in the room, and the light from the device you're using.
 - For the former, make sure there's enough light (whether natural or not) to see your keyboard, the papers you're working on, etc., and you aren't fighting glare as it reflects off your screen or shines in your eyes.
 - For the latter, make sure the screen is bright enough for you to see easily and clearly, but not so bright you end up with fatigue. This is where the much-ballyhooed "dark theme" may be useful, as many folks find white-letters-on-a-dark-background naturally create an easier viewing experience.
 - We recommend at least trying out a dark theme in your browser, at a minimum, as it can reduce headaches and eye strain from prolonged exposure to those bright screens.
 - Chrome can be forced into dark mode (<chrome://flags/#enable-force-dark>); Edge can too ([#enable-force-dark](#)). Windows 10 also provides a Dark Mode option for your file explorer, menus, toolbars, etc. Additionally, there are blue light filter options in Windows 10 and on most phones to also cut down on eye strain.
- Keep safe! Your primary hazard in a home office is poor ergo practices. Evaluate your work at home layout for ergonomic best practices and make changes before you start to experience wrist or back pain. Remember: your body will tell you there's a problem only after it's a problem. If you already know you can't sit for more than two hours, don't. Once you realize you have a limit, set a timer or something to remind you to change things up before you start to ache again.

Chapter 4: Your Home Life at Work



The last chapter offered tips for Your Work Life at Home. This time around, we'd like to discuss the reverse: your home life at work, which is maybe another way of describing work/life blending. With the progression of the impact of COVID-19 across companies, communities, and schools, there's a good chance you aren't going to be home alone. Potentially, this means getting used to multiple adults working from home, kids doing distance learning, and a menagerie of pets craving attention all within a shared space. That shared space may have felt big enough for all of you previously, but with the added pressure of work and being cooped up together for prolonged periods of time, even a warehouse would start to feel cramped.

We want to offer some tips for coping with this new and completely imbalanced situation, and maybe some suggestions for balancing it back out as much as possible. As we said in the introduction, remember right now is not a normal work-from-home situation. We're all going to have to relax our boundaries just a little bit due to lack of control. This will mean you and your coworkers (your actual coworkers, not the ones you're sharing your "office space" with) need to be understanding about things like kids popping in frame, pets making their presence known, noises outside your home (and your control), and even family members shuffling past in the background.

With this idea on the table, here are some specific thoughts on how to achieve work-life nirvana (or at least equilibrium) from home:

- One strategy for starting your work day is to step out of the house, take a walk, and then come to work. When you've had a stressful day, this same strategy works well to decompress before you "come home."
- Even though some people absolutely love the idea of working in their pajamas, we'll say it here like so many other WFH guides: stick to your regular workplace routine. Get up at the same time. Get washed up. Dress in the clothes you would normally wear in the office. For many folks, this helps establish the mental boundary of "work" versus "home" life and helps keep the two from blending much.
- Create a sign or other visual indication letting other folks in the house know you're working. Set up a process where they know to text or leave you a voicemail if someone within your home needs something. It's vital to set these boundaries from the beginning.
- Explain to your spouse and children that work is being done and to respect your area and give them time frames. This helps them know you have a beginning and an end to your "work" day.
- If you have little ones who aren't really getting the "I'm in a meeting" concept, pull together a bucket of toys (some really exciting ones, preferably on the quieter side). Bring the bucket out ONLY when you're about to jump on a call. The rule is those toys only come out if the kids can be quiet, and once the call is over, they will be packed back up. Use this technique right and you may be surprised to hear your kids ask if you can "go on another meeting now," so they can play more.
- Another meeting strategy is to designate a room (one with a door) for meetings, and a different space for general work. I will admit the "room with a door" I've used in the past is the bathroom. Your mileage may vary.
- Be mindful of making healthy choices. Drink plenty of fluids, stop working to make (and eat) a proper lunch, and take short breaks to move around throughout the day. Just because you're now working from home doesn't mean you shouldn't take 10- to 15-minute breaks as you might at the office, so take the dog or just yourself for a walk to clear your mind and have a break when the opportunity arises.
- Know when to fold 'em. One of the challenges of WFH is you're always at work. Just like you should follow your normal routine for getting up and heading to the office, do the same at the end of the day. Set clear boundaries about the time you'll put your work down each day.

- When your work day is over, try to separate yourself from it as best you can. This is easier for some folks than others; and easier at some points in a workflow than others. But if you set a routine and deviate only when absolutely necessary, you can save yourself from some added stress.
- And when your actual day is over, make sure you're letting your body wind down. Working from home means your screen time is only going to increase, and at this point there's a large body of evidence showing the negative effect blue-light (the kind coming from your tablet, phone, and laptop) has on sleep patterns and overall health. A couple of hours before you want to get to sleep, close up the laptop, put down the phone and tablet, and give your body a break from the screens.

Chapter 5: Stay On-Task and On Time



In this section, we want to discuss your options for staying on-task and on time. There are a lot of distractions at home, and your mind won't be in the same headspace as it was when you were in the office. At least not right away—this takes a (usually small) adjustment period. Here are some tips and tricks from a few WFH veterans on maintaining focus, taking breaks, and managing tasks among other things.

- While you'll see a lot of jokes about how people who work remote spend their whole day in pajamas, most WFH veterans will tell you keeping the same go-to-work routine you had when you were in the office is a far better way to keep you focused.
- That said, if you find you get a real productivity boost from working in more comfortable, less "traditional" work clothes (presuming they're appropriate for video meetings with coworkers, of course) then have at it!
- Get up and moving from time to time. Office layouts naturally get us moving, at least a little bit. House and apartment layouts? Not so much. Every hour or so, make sure you walk away from the keyboard for a minute. Do some stretches or take a walk around outside. Just because you shouldn't be in social settings doesn't mean you can't step outside for some fresh air.
- Staying on task and focusing can be difficult when in a WFH situation. The main thing to remember is distractions are always there—the ones at home are just different than the ones at work. Try different methods of organizing until you find one (or a combination) that works.

- Set an outline or schedule for yourself of things you need or want to accomplish for the week (and prioritize it).
 - If you are truly struggling, set one thing (yes, just one) that you want to get done. Build up from there. But don't confuse "being overwhelmed" with slacking off or being lazy.
 - Work with music on. If you find lyrics are distracting, try just instrumental options or ambient noise.
 - Wear noise-cancelling headphones to help keep in-home distractions down.
 - If the unmade bed or sink of dishes is grating at your nerves, it's totally OK to go deal with it. Once it's out of the way, you can get back to the task at hand.
 - Engage in "productive procrastination": putting off one task by doing another equally important one. If you can't face the monthly budget report, go make a sales call. Can't deal with talking to another person? Write another section of the employee handbook. Do you hate writing? Go back to the budget report. And so on.
- Limit your media intake—from radio to TV news to social media scrolling. Even ignoring the issue of the misinformation floating around, consuming a constant feed of news can make this challenging situation feel overwhelming. In addition, the situation we find ourselves in today has such a high rate of change, the crisis at 9 a.m. is no longer even relevant by the time the 5:00 news rolls around.
 - Twitter provides filters to block stressful subjects, so you can use it without being inundated. Other social media platforms have similar tools. For example, try using a combination of the following filters in a Twitter search and making THAT the page you go to instead of just twitter.com:
 - filter:follows
 - tweets only from accounts you follow
 - filter:news
 - tweets containing news
 - filter:links
 - tweets containing links
 - filter:images



- tweets containing images
- filter:videos
- tweets containing videos
- filter:periscope
- tweets containing Periscope videos
- filter:retweets
- classic RT retweets or quote tweets
- filter:nativeretweets
- retweets via the retweet button
- filter:safe
- tweets excluding adult content
- filter:verified
- tweets from verified accounts
- Remember that these filters allow you to filter things IN or OUT.
- “filter: <something>” will include that something,
- while “-filter:<something>” will exclude it.
- Example: filter:follows -filter:replies
- Additionally, browser plugins such as StayFocused limit the amount of time spent on specific websites. These can be used to minimize social media intake or just as a reminder to move on to a different task.

Try out different things to see what works for you. As you can tell from our suggestions above, there are many options and if you get distracted by one thing, try another, or even something completely different than those we’ve listed here. Don’t be afraid to test something out or get creative.

Chapter 6: How Work Actually Gets Done



This may seem like one of the nitty-gritty questions for new remote workers, but it's actually very simple: for the most part, you'll get work done at home the same way you did in the office.

Sure, you might have a few more emails or company group chats than you did before, but otherwise, things are the same. You're probably using a company system—or at the very least the company software through a browser. You probably have access to all the same folders and document shares, so you don't have to resort to emailing copies of files around over and over again. Emailing documents around should be your last choice when collaborating. You probably have “that one application” where most of your work happens.

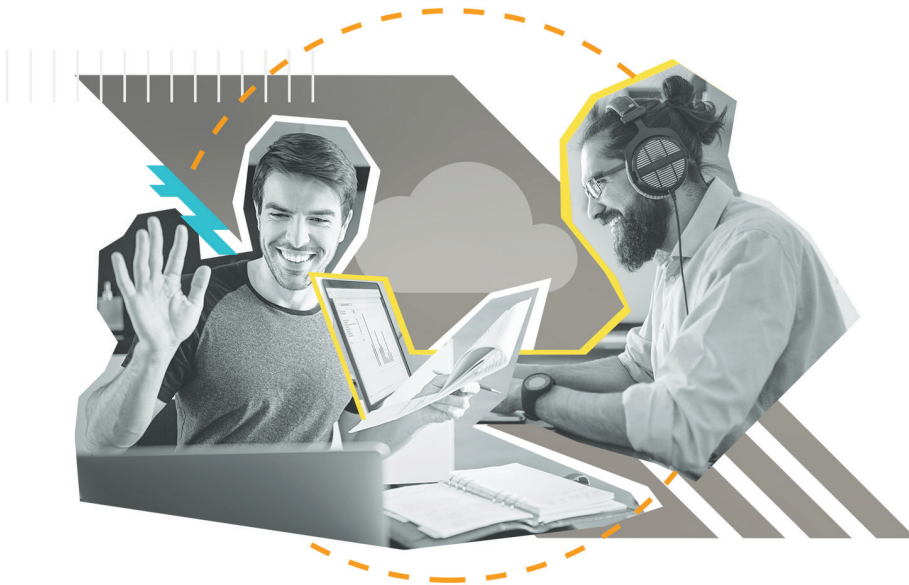
And maybe there were options in some of those tools you simply didn't need, or even know existed, but will love once you find out about them. So here goes:

- If you're using Office 365, your account provides you with:
 - Outlook, Teams, Word, Excel, PowerPoint—of course. But you already knew that and are probably familiar with what they are and how they work.
 - OneDrive—an area on your computer that automatically synchronizes to “the cloud” and therefore is available to any device you own. So instead of “uploading” something to a SharePoint page, you can simply save it on your OneDrive and it gets synced automatically.

- OneNote—create free-form, unstructured “notes,” which can include drawings, notes, web links, screen clips, and even audio. You can create them yourself or collaborate with other folks.
- On most collaboration platforms (Teams, Slack, etc.) sharing a file with a group will also allow you to edit the file as a group. So, if you haven’t done so until now, get those important group files into your collaboration channel, and then open/edit it from there when you must make updates and additions.
- Likewise, on most collaboration platforms, if you upload and share a file once, you don’t have to upload it again. There’s a place to re-share files from your repository, so sharing becomes cumulative.
- If you’re not already using one, look into a workflow tool (example: Trello or Asana). The idea is to group and list tasks into categories like “to do,” “doing,” and “done” (or various shades of those three). Then everyone on the team can pick tasks from the pile when they’ve finished the previous job. The status of any specific task or set of actions within a project can then be viewed at a glance.
 - Another trick if you’re on video chats a lot and the objects in your rearview mirror may be messier than you wish they appeared: check the tool you’re using for meetings and see if it supports a blurred (or even replacement) backgrounds. This sometimes relieves anxiety for you to allow video. It also blocks/blurs the people you live with, who did NOT plan or agree to star in your team meeting.
 - We’re all used to scheduling meetings in one-hour or half-hour blocks of time. Consider emulating short, focused “hallway” conversations in your shared workspace instead. Try using very short check-ins with your peers as you work through your tasks rather than long drawn out “standing” meeting formats.
 - In addition, before starting a conversation (chat, call, or video), consider these tips:
 - Compose your thoughts. Working remotely, you really need to think about how to most productively interrupt your peers. What decision or action are you working towards?
 - Ping your colleague on chat, and confirm they are interruptible—that they have a moment for a voice conversation, or to handle a quick query by text.
 - Set an expectation about how much time you need and try to stick to that.

- Be aware when you switch from daily in-office to WFH, you (and your coworkers) will be more task driven. This means you may complete tasks quicker.
- You might also develop a sense of “anxiety” over missing something. This is like a WFH version of FOMO. We’re here to tell you that this is completely normal! A good first step to combat this is to develop the habit of checking in (with your boss, the requestor, the team). See what tasks are available, make sure everyone knows the tasks you’ve checked off the list, and keep moving forward.

Chapter 7: Collaboration at a Distance



A lot of these tips are predicated on the idea that the work we do is largely individual contributions. But at SolarWinds (and probably where you work, too), the truth is we do a lot of brainstorming, whiteboarding, and even four-hands-one-keyboard-ing. How can we continue to work together when we're not actually together?

For any communications with internal individuals, your collaboration platform—whether it's Microsoft Teams or Slack or something else—should be your first choice. There are many reasons for this, but the short list is:

- The ability to conference other people into a team discussion surpasses anything you can do on a cell phone or softphone system by an order of magnitude in terms of ease of use.
- The audio and video quality are “good enough” (depending on your internet connection of course).
- Many of these tools allow you to “blur” the background of your video calls (hiding your cluttered office, your “half eaten lunch in the kitchen, your spouse who’s working at the desk behind you, etc.).
- Screen sharing is simple and intuitive.
- You and your callers can easily work on documents simultaneously.
- File sharing is stored within the collaboration platform.

Consider using a “true” meeting tool (such as Zoom or Webex) only when you’re meeting with external parties.

Use the status features in your company’s chat app to signal your availability. When you come into the office, set your status and your status message to indicate you’re available. When you go to lunch, set the “be right back” status, and log out using “away” at the end of the day. Many chat apps have the option to set a custom status, so use it at your discretion to indicate a status the out-of-the-box indicators don’t cover. Your team will learn to rely on checking your status for availability if you use this consistently.

Also, be aware certain events or actions will change your status in Teams. Starting a call with someone will automatically change your status to “in a meeting.” Starting a screen sharing session will automatically put in you “Do Not Disturb” mode until you stop sharing. Generally, these are good things, but you should nevertheless be aware of them. Otherwise you may find yourself coming out of a friendly conversation sharing your screen and showing off pictures of your cat only to find three people have been clamoring for your attention but—because you were in “do not disturb mode”—you didn’t see it. See your company’s application guidelines for automatic status changes you may be subjected to.

Regardless of your collaboration software choice, you should (almost) always use a camera for video sharing. Attendees are more responsive when they see a face.

- Webcams: You want to “maintain eye contact” as much as possible when working remotely. This is easily done with a laptop because the webcam is attached at the top. If you connect to an external monitor, it’s best to have the other person’s video near the same place as your camera. This allows for natural eye contact instead of you looking at other screens. Also, raise your laptop (re-use a shipping box you haven’t recycled or use a stack of books) to put yourself at or just above eye level. Nothing’s more distracting than looking up someone’s nose during a call.
- When you’re speaking, look directly into the camera. Pay attention to your lighting, so your face isn’t constantly in shadow. (See “lighting” in the “Your Work Life at Home” chapter.)
- Screen sharing: The power of sharing what you have on your screen cannot be overstated. Even if you aren’t collaboratively editing a document at the same time, just being able to say “Wait, go back to the bit at the top” and talking through things is incredibly helpful.

- Whiteboarding, old school: Some people think best when they can sketch things out freehand, scribble down notes, and draw (literal) connections from one idea to another. If you have a whiteboard handy, training your webcam on it and going to town is just about the same whether you and the team are in the same room or miles apart.
- Whiteboarding, new style: Technology allows us to take the simple whiteboarding experience and kick it up a notch. Within Teams, you can invite everyone to a meeting and then do a whiteboarding session where everyone can sketch, type, connect, and revise until an idea begins to form. Other whiteboarding apps, such as Freehand by InVision, can integrate with chat apps like Teams.
- Co-working on a document: One of the nice parts about sharing a document (either in Teams or in SharePoint) is multiple people can simultaneously open the document and add new information, make changes and edits, etc. If you really need “all hands on deck,” there’s no better way to get everyone involved and crank out a deliverable in record time. And it beats the heck over the “email a copy around to each person one at a time” method we used to do.
- Other apps in Teams—there are dozens of other apps you can use for workflow (Asana, Trello, Divvy), brainstorming (Evernote, Freehand, OneNote), and more. Your company may use a different chat app, like Slack, and there are often options you can explore for integration there as well.

Collaboration is key to your work experience both in the office, and now in the new work from home lifestyle. Hopefully, our tips help your team be efficient while you are in disparate locations. And when the dust all settles, and we go back to “normal” life, you’ll know how these tips can be used both in the office and when coworkers are remote. Close the gap between team members and even different teams and collaborate more! Your energy and ideas may be what gets a project moving again, or someone from a different team or department might do the same for your project.

Chapter 8: Clear Communication



Our last chapter covered the importance of and practical tips for collaboration. Here, we want to address communication. While everyone is geographically dispersed, it's imperative to maintain the communication channels which occur naturally in an office setting. It's deceptively easy to lose important details (not to mention the sense of connection and being in sync) if you no longer have your daily chat with Steve down the hall, your walking chats on the way to meetings, your weekly sit-down with your manager, etc.

It's true that some folks are natural communicators who seem like they'd be able to stay fully connected and "present" whether they're working via email, Word docs in a shared folder, Teams chats, or even semaphore!

However, most of us—especially those who are new to remote work—might need time to find their communication groove. As you settle in, recognize the things which haven't changed, which are still happening the same as they ever did—even when everyone was in the office. A lot of communication happened (and will continue to happen) over email. Team meetings where half the group is attending remotely from their desk are still going to happen—and be better as a result because nobody will be fighting to be heard over temperamental meeting room microphones. Even those moments when we start up a Teams chat with the person three cubes over (or even right next to us) aren't going to change much.

That said, there are some major and minor differences to keep in mind, and we have some advice for handling those. Two important general points to start off with:

First, recognize there are folks we used to see and work with face-to-face every day. In this new situation we're all in, you'll have to get the same types of work done, but without the face-to-face part. Now—before it turns into a problem—reach out to those folks and come up with a plan for communication. Together, look at all the options you have available and brainstorm which ones seem like they'll be the best option going forward. You'll have to work together to overcome obstacles and find the right mix of technology and process to re-create the successes you had when you were able to work in-person. You might get it right on the first try, and you might not. The point is not to give up, and not to say “Well, I won't be able to get this project done until we're back in the office.”

Second, to all managers reading this: providing direction is good. Micromanaging is not. If you're tempted to set up more meetings for 1:1s, first ask yourself what problem you want to solve. If you're worried tasks won't get done, acknowledge that pulling staff away from their workflow to jump on a status call is the exact opposite of fixing the issue. Instead, put some structure around workflow—how tasks are assigned, how staff can quickly and conveniently communicate progress and status in a way you can stay informed but doesn't interrupt them, etc. Extra meetings “just because” makes everyone uncomfortable and cuts into your regular work. If, on the other hand, the challenge is maintaining a sense of team and forward motion; and your team is expressing a desire for more direction from you, then by all means you can move to a “management by calling around” model.

- Just as we know a lot of meetings can be emails, a lot of face-to-face interactions could be a shared spreadsheet, a channel or group chat, or even a quick daily email with a standard format.
- For most folks, “text before call” is the appropriate practice. Structure your communications in smaller blocks; text or chat message your colleagues and ask them if it's a good time for a voice call. Let them know how much time you expect you'll need for the topic. Anything approaching 30 minutes should be a meeting invite on their calendar.
- We need to be mindful of some basic meeting etiquette. When you're attending a large voice/video conference, mute your mic when you're not speaking. No matter how quiet your home office is, there's always distracting background noise. Don't be the person who must be muted by the meeting organizer.
- At the same time, we're all in the same boat right now when it comes to social distancing. We all know that, like us, your kids, your spouse, and your pets are all there. Don't be overly embarrassed or make a big deal if one of them starts to bark while you're talking.

- Know you can record your meetings or even your individual calls in most meeting/collaboration platforms. So, if you're in a groove while having a chat with a coworker and are worried you'll forget something, record it. Just be aware most platforms will notify the participants recording is taking place, so be prepared for any questions asking "Why?"
- Another helpful option many meeting and collaboration platforms have is automated closed captioning. 55 million people in the world have some form of hearing loss. Add to that your team members who aren't native speakers of the language the meeting is being run in. Finally, consider the folks who may be in a situation where hearing the meeting is simply impossible (like those barking spouses and kids), and you have a compelling case for turning this option on.
- Just as you can call someone inside an individual chat in many collaboration tools, you can call from group chats. Remember, it will call EVERY person involved in the chat, so you may be interrupting many people at their work. These can also be recorded. If more than two or three people will be involved, consider a meeting.
- Mixed format team meetings are challenging. When you have several people on-site and several off-site, running a meeting in a meeting room will inherently cripple your communication. Remote folks will never have the audio experience of being in the room, and folks who are present will be drawn to pay more attention to others in the room. Consider scheduling the entire meeting online and put everyone on a level playing field with video and good headsets. It feels a little strange at first to participate in an online meeting with other people in your immediate area, but the overall quality of communication improves immensely, and everyone is heard.

All-in-all we all agree communication is key and maintaining the social connection to coworkers is important to collaboration and your day-to-day productivity. Those hallway chats, 1:1s, regular team or department meetings, work lunches, etc. are a core piece of many employees' days and workflows even if you haven't yet realized it.

Chapter 9: Being Heard When You're Not in the Room



Shouting “Can you hear me now?” at the start of a meeting is funny, until you’re in an important meeting and they really can’t hear you. Then the feeling is more of all-out panic and frustration.

What IT practitioners know is that a lot of problems with remote work—from meeting participation to accessing resources to “this is so darn slow”—can be overcome with just a little bit of testing and a few simple fixes. Here are our tips and advice for dealing with signal issues and (minor) outages.

- For this document’s purposes, the term “Wi-Fi” refers to the internet connection in your house or apartment, and “cellular” means the connection (voice or internet) from your cell phone provider. BOTH will let you access the internet and even company resources like document shares, collaboration tools, and email. But there are significant differences in speed, quality, and cost. For some folks living in areas with poor internet service, cellular service will be stronger and faster. For those living in areas where internet service is robust, however, it’s going to be the opposite case.
- If you’re doing work on your cell phone (or tablet with a cellular data plan), make sure you know which you’re on before you run down your data plan (or run up your bill).
- Try “dowsing” for signal strength—both Wi-Fi and cellular signal will vary in strength around your living space. The room with the best Wi-Fi may have the worst cell signal, or vice-versa. The easiest and cheapest way to check this out

is to walk around each room with your devices (typically your laptop and cell phone). Stop in each place where you might want to work and sit for about 10 seconds. Then check the signal strength bars on your devices.

- Wi-Fi calling—If you happen to live in a place where Wi-Fi is strong, but cell signal is weak, you can turn your phone’s “Wi-Fi calling” feature on. Then your cell calls will come over the internet and will have the same great signal strength your laptop has.
- Repeaters and amplifiers—for both Wi-Fi and cell phone, another option is to purchase a device to boost the signal where you are. There are two basic options:
 - An amplifier (as the name implies) will take an existing signal and make it “louder” (i.e., stronger). Typically, you’d use this for your cell phone. An antenna goes outside where the cell signal is best, and a wire carries it to a box inside which rebroadcasts the cell signal inside the house for better reception.
 - A repeater is more commonly used for Wi-Fi. You place it (roughly) halfway between the Wi-Fi router and where you want to sit. It creates a much stronger, secondary Wi-Fi network for you to connect to.
- It’s also important for you to understand how your corporate VPN works: if you’re not on your corporate VPN, then you’re not protected by your company’s firewall rules and malware blocks. That’s OK in the sense that you haven’t violated any rules. But it means you need to be self-aware of your browsing and which (potentially unsafe) websites you might be hitting. Healthy paranoia goes a long way. Do not forward content that seems “shady” to your IT staff or others, even to ask, “does this look OK?” It’s better to take a screenshot and forcibly stop your browser task. Then you can send the screenshot to your IT staff to have them evaluate the situation.

DIY Home Internet Repair

“Screws fall out all the time, the world is an imperfect place.”

-John Bender, The Breakfast Club

Work from home and inevitably you’ll have a moment where things stop working as expected. Often, that moment comes approximately 15 – 30 minutes into your first day, right before your first meeting. In those moments (and all the other ones which will undoubtedly come after) there’s always your help desk. Don’t ever forget they’re there to do their job and help you out of a tight spot.

BUT... many of us—even those of us who wouldn’t consider ourselves particularly

technical—would love to know if there were any actions we could take first, which might just clear up the problem and allow us to get on with our lives (and our work). What follows is just such a list.

Just to level set: at no time will the instructions tell you to “open up the command line and type ‘ping 127.0.0.01’ to see if your loopback adapter is working.”

These are some initial steps any regular mortal can do.

1. Try it from another device.

If you’re having trouble getting to a website or service, try it from a secondary device (a tablet, another computer, etc.). This won’t fix the problem (although if it works, you have a solid “plan B” in case you can’t get the actual problem solved), but it will tell you whether the problem is limited to one device or not.

2. Turn off the VPN and try again.

Sometimes the VPN can block things it shouldn’t. Turn it off and try again. If it works, you know.

3. Conversely if the VPN is off, turn it on and try again.

This is especially true for systems and services “inside” the company firewall.

4. IsItDownRightNow.com

If it’s an external site, you can test it using an online “is it down” tester. And yes, IsItDownRightNow.com is a real website.

5. Go to a website you haven’t visited in a while, like AOL.com.*

This might sound weird, but sometimes a specific site gets “stuck” in your browser because of a thing called the cache. Going to a different site proves you can go SOMEWHERE. From there you still need to figure out what’s wrong with the site you needed.

6. Turn it off and on again.

We know, WE KNOW. *“Everyone always says that.”* You know why? Because it works so darn often. Make sure you turn off both your Wi-Fi router and the box from your ISP (if you have two separate devices). Also make sure you wait a full 30 seconds. A lot of devices keep a short charge to protect against quick brownouts, so you need the device to be down for a bit longer than a quick on-off.



7. Have a plan B (device, location, process, etc.).

If all else fails and your home network is down hard, you should have a plan in place for what you're going to do. Do you have a secondary location you can move to? (Hint: a coffee shop is a bad idea even when we're not dealing with a pandemic.) If nothing else, maybe keep local copies of the documents you work with the most, so you can keep typing.

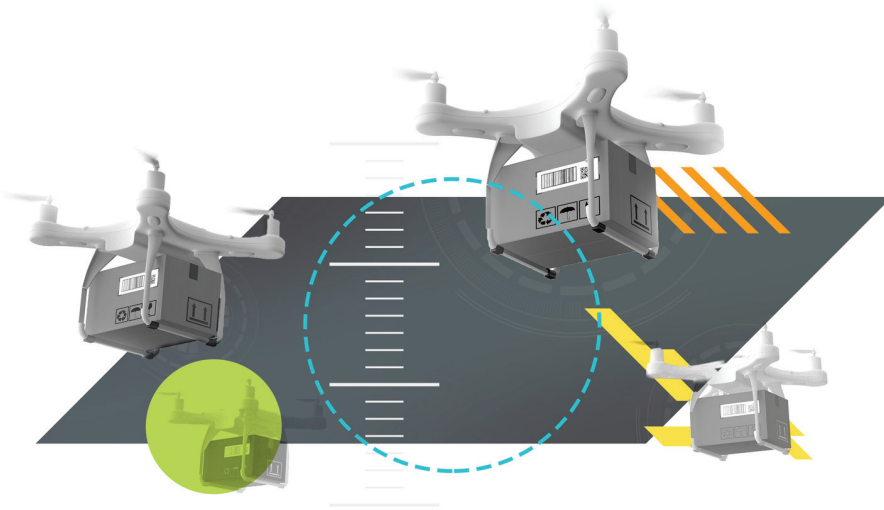
- This is where using a cloud storage service like OneDrive or Dropbox is worth it. Because ALL your shared documents can be stored locally, and when you reconnect, they'll all synchronize back up to the cloud for you.

With the great influx of remote infrastructure now needing support by your IT help desk, try to remember the issue may be on your side and go through some troubleshooting before contacting them about signal and connectivity issues. A few simple steps for you could resolve your issue without waiting on the help desk to have the cycles to work with you.

Also remember you can use the "other type of signal" (cellular vs Wi-Fi) to get online, connect with support, and have them do some troubleshooting steps as well.

* If it HASN'T been a long time since you visited AOL.com, you have a problem and should seek help immediately. Yes, we just went there to make a joke.

Chapter 10: Sometimes It IS About the Tech



We've spent a lot of the previous chapters providing tips and tricks for the social, communication, and work/life blending aspects of having (and being) a largely work from home workforce. Now, we want to address actual pieces of tech to improve your remote working experience. After all, we—the authors of this eBook—DO work at SolarWinds: a tech company selling specialized software to a highly technical set of customers. It was inevitable before we finished this series, we'd dig into the bits and bytes; the wires and gear; and the programs and protocols of all this.

Disclaimer: None of the below items are paid advertisements from or endorsements for any of these companies or products. They're either specific callouts for the things we use day-to-day or general examples of the kind of product we're talking about. There are many options out there, and we wanted to ensure you can get both the idea of what we're describing and have the specific models in case you were having trouble deciding.

This list of devices was created with an eye toward how they can help enhance your WFH experience.

- How did we come by this gear? Several of us are nighttime and weekend gamers and repurposed gear from those home setups; and some of us just collect tech for our home computers for home labs, or for instilling an appreciation for tech in our kids; or because we're fickle and have to own the latest and greatest doodad and everything else goes into our personal tech graveyard, whether that's a box or closet or corner of the attic.

- Meanwhile, some of these items were obtained specifically because we're frequent (if not full-time) remote workers—some of us have been telecommuting for years. And so, we invested in tools the way a professional carpenter or plumber might: researching and trying out solutions not based on brand or price or even what other people had, but on what worked for us and fit our personality and style. It's similar (in a way) to how you might buy things (or bring them from home) to decorate your cube at work just because you like it better than what your company provides.

Toys for Techies

- Ear Gear—Cordless headsets offer several advantages—you can get up and stretch or walk around during a call. They also offer an opportunity to step away from distractions (email, messages, your pile of overdue work) when you really need to have a focused conversation. Some variations:
 - Noise-cancelling headphones: There are several creative ways to ensure you have a quiet space to work: duct-taping the mouths of all the other people in your home; encouraging very long daytime naps; installing a "Get Smart"-style "cone of silence," etc. But possibly one of the more convenient options is to put on a set of noise cancelling headphones. You get the quiet you need, and your housemates avoid the discomfort of ripping off the duct tape after every meeting. Some options our staff have recommended include:
 - [Bose QuietComfort 35](#)
(Bluetooth wireless and/or wired, no mic)
 - [Jabra Evolve 65](#)
 - [HyperX Cloud](#)
 - [Sony WH-100XM3](#)
- Wireless earbuds
 - Apple AirPods—the earbuds you love from the brand you trust.
 - Other on- and off-brand models. Some have noise-cancelling features, some even support microphones.
- Multi-device Bluetooth—the advantage here is one device can connect to multiple sources. So, you can be listening to music streaming from your tablet, then take a call on your phone, and then switch to a Teams meeting coming from your laptop.
 - [Plantronics Voyager Legend](#)
 - [Jabra Pro Series](#)

- USB hub: You'd be amazed at how many things compete with the one or two ports on your laptop—keyboard, mouse, external webcam, speakers, and more all want a piece of the USB action. Having a USB hub turns one port into four, seven, or even 12.
 - [Anker](#)
- A cheap keyboard and mouse: Your laptop keyboard and mouse may be fine for trips to another office or a flight, but day after day it becomes difficult and even an actual physical strain to use. An external keyboard and mouse don't have to be expensive and allow you a full range of motion.
- An ergonomic keyboard and mouse. While we did say a "cheap" keyboard and mouse helps, there are ergonomic options which offer even more relief when you might be coping with less-than-ideal conditions like using your kitchen table as a workspace.
 - [Anker ergonomic mouse](#)
 - [Microsoft ergonomic keyboard Surface edition](#)
 - [Kinesis Ergo Keyboard](#)
- Wireless Device Chargers—being able to keep your devices going all day while also being versatile enough to pick up easily when you move from room to room or out to the yard helps take the worry away about missed calls or drained battery.
 - [Samsung Wireless Charging Pad](#)
 - [Portable solar-powered charger](#)
- Routers (external from the one from your ISP)—this is the beating heart of your home internet, so why did we leave it for last, and why do we have so few examples? Because there's such a wide range of models (even from a single vendor) and features, it was hard to offer specifics without the list growing to over a dozen. So instead, we're going to give overall guidelines:
 - Regular basic Wi-Fi router—this all-in-one box takes the internet in from your ISP and puts out a wireless signal. No fuss, no muss.
 - Mesh network system—the key to these kinds of systems is you can add on to extend the signal around your house. If you have a dead spot, you can add another box halfway between your first router and the dead zone, and it will act like a repeater. The more of them you have, the stronger your signal is all over the house. These work seamlessly around your house, but they can be on the pricier side and you can't mix-and-match. If you go with Google Mesh, you can't add a Linksys mesh device.



- Wi-Fi Extenders—not quite a mesh system, but also not quite as expensive. These are single boxes designed to pick up an existing Wi-Fi network and extend it by creating its own Wi-Fi network and passing the data along. Thus, if you have a Wi-Fi network called “SolarWindsRocks,” when you set up an Extender it would create “SolarWindsRocks_Ext.” You could choose to connect to either network depending on where in your home you were. On the plus side, these are cheaper, and they aren’t brand-specific. On the downside, every extender diminishes the signal by about 50% and you get further from the main router.

(For the) Office Space

- Exercise ball: These are great additions to your standard desk chair and give you one more option for changing your sitting position.
- A good desk chair: Speaking of desk chairs, the \$30 Office Warehouse special was probably fine when you planned to sit in it for 15 minutes while you pay bills online, but now that it (and your butt) are being pressed into service for 8 solid hours a day, you may need something a bit more robust. We’re not saying you need to drop a half-g on a Herman Miller Aeron chair, but something with multiple adjustments, lower back support, and breathability (because nobody wants a sweaty backside. Nobody.) will make the difference between the ability to sit and focus for hours a day and crawling into bed each night feeling like your body is about to fall apart like the car at the end of The Blues Brothers.
- Whiteboard: As mentioned elsewhere, having a real, actual whiteboard to scribble down thoughts, brainstorm, or just doodle can be another way to kick your creativity and problem-solving into gear.
- Wrist rest: Along with a good keyboard and mouse, a resting pad ensures your arm and hands are in optimal positions to avoid short-term fatigue and long-term strain.
 - [Allsop Ergonomic Wrist Rest](#) (Mouse)
 - [Razer Ergonomic Wrist Rest](#) (Keyboard)
- Anti-fatigue mat: These are the kind you might buy for your kitchen. If you’ve set up a standing desk option (whether you’re using a counter, bookshelf, cardboard boxes, or an actual standing desk) having a mat will help you avoid sore feet and allow you to stay standing longer.
 - [AmazonBasics](#)

- Desk lamp: We've talked about lighting before. If your best work space has horrible lights, turn them off and just set up a nice soft-light desk lamp. Your eyes (and your coworkers looking at you on camera) will thank you.

Staying Fit and On Task

- Treadmill desktop, Cycle desktop, or a standing desk are great ways to keep you going strong mentally and physically. (REMINDER: these can be big-ticket items. Before you drop serious cash, use some of those Amazon boxes you have lying around and stack them up to the right height. Try it out for a few days to make sure working while standing is right for you.)
 - Standing desk converter kit—[example](#)
 - Motorized standing desk—[example](#)
 - Desk treadmill—[example](#)
 - Desk cycle—[example](#)
- Helpful Timekeepers—time-tracking systems with a physical element—a cube or device with a way to manually indicate a change of what you're working on and will give you visual and audio feedback when you need to stop, get up, etc. Two examples are:
 - [ThermoWorks TimeStick](#)
 - [Timular](#)

Safe and Secure

Keeping your home network safe is something you probably didn't give too much thought about until now. And why would you? You only need to put locks on doors when something inside is worth taking, and until now, you probably had very little tech requiring hardcore cybersecurity. The problem is this: the most valuable thing in your house are the people in it. And now they—along with all their tech—are home 100% of the time, and hackers know it. YOU are valuable because of what you know (passwords, account IDs, etc.); what you access (important files and servers); and even what you are (biometric scans).

And therefore, even if internet security wasn't a priority before, now it needs to be. The good news is you don't have to do much to make yourself significantly more protected. Here are some specific actions you can take:

Your Wi-Fi Router

The first stop is the router, the device providing the internet to your humble abode.

1. Look at your Wi-Fi router and make sure you can log in to it
You've never logged in to it? We're not surprised. Most people don't. But this is a new world we're living in, and it calls for new habits.
 - Change the admin password ...and the admin username.

Let's be clear: If you do nothing else, you will have made your home internet infinitely more secure than it was a moment before. But please don't let this be the only thing you do. While you're logged in...

2. See what security options you can turn on. Many models even have a wizard to help you configure this.
 - You can block services you know you aren't using—things like gaming or filesharing.
 - You can set up alerts, so you're notified in case something goes wrong, like someone trying to log in with the wrong password.
3. Make sure the Wi-Fi security is set to WPA2-PSK (TKIP/AES) or, if that's not available (and upgrading to a newer router isn't possible right now), WPA2-PSK (AES).
 - Then set (or change) the Wi-Fi password.
You already have a good password? Change it anyway.
Yes, we're totally serious.
4. Turn off "remote configuration."
 - No, you don't need it.
 - We swear to God—if you're reading this guide, you really, REALLY don't need it.

If you **do** change anything, document it by writing down the old value or taking a screenshot. You never know what you might need to revert later. Take it from us—after years of doing network engineering, anything can come back to bite you.

In the same vein, change one thing at a time and then test, Test, TEST! Make sure everything (still) works. Then you can change another item.

Your Internet Provider

In a similar vein, log in to the account you (probably) got from your internet service provider (ISP). Once again, change your password. Then see what options are there. Some providers give you a surprising degree of granularity for firewalls, attacks, etc. Anything you can do to make your environment more secure overall is worth it at this time.

Your Software

Once you've protected everything you can at the edge (i.e., where the internet comes into the house) your next stop is to update everything the internet touches. Everything from the old desktop computer to the newest smartphone or tablet. That means updating the operating system AND all the apps, which are usually two separate steps. Keeping all your software on the latest version will help ensure they're protected against the latest threats.

This is doubly true for your antivirus software. What? You don't have any? Go get some. Yes, right now. We'll wait here until you do that.

Tools That Help You Help Others

Many of you reading this are probably working in IT. If not, you're likely one of the more technical folks in your circle of family and friends. If this is the case, having tools to help you solve those problems remotely will keep everyone safer. It also means you can respond to issues faster, which will make everyone happy.

First, check out the troubleshooting steps we included in the last chapter. Those are great steps to walk someone else through.

Second, remotely accessing other people's stuff—especially home-based stuff—can be a little tricky. Work networks and devices are built for this sort of thing. Home networks? Not so much.

The trick is a two-parter. You need a software solution which is both easy for you (the ersatz support tech) to use, but also easy for the person at the other end of the phone. Here are a few tools we've used in the past. Your mileage may vary, of course. All are in the no-cost/low-cost category because we know cash is the last thing you have extra of right now.

1. **Dameware® Remote Everywhere**—yes, yes, we know we said this series would avoid making a direct pitch. Consider this our one mulligan. On the other hand, right now it's free to use for 90 days and runs on a wide range of platforms.
2. **TeamViewer**—beloved and venerable, this software is geared to let you view and even control a remote device. But the add-on TeamViewer Pilot can also use augmented reality (AR) to let you guide the remote user through tasks like changing a lightbulb, etc.
3. **OpenDNS**—while this usually goes under the section on securing your network, we were concerned it might be too much for some home users. But hey, you're their support staff, so we had to tell you about this somewhere in this guide. OpenDNS requires a small configuration on the home router, but once you have it in place, it helps protect the entire network from both threats and from "objectionable" content (however you define it).

We aren't saying these are the best options out there. We made our decisions based on multiple factors at time of purchase and encourage you to explore your options and find what works best for you and your fellow social-distancing-mates at home.

Chapter 11: Additional (External) Resources

In this chapter we've pooled together external resources from the WFH community, our teacher and school administrator friends, and other friends who help them (and us). These range from other WFH guides to online learning resources (free) for your kiddos.

As you might imagine, there are a lot of resources popping up as other companies and individuals come up to speed on the WFH process. A few that caught our eye include:

- Work From Home Guides, Essays, and Perspectives
 - *"Adjusting to the Virtual Office Life"*
 - *"Five Tips on Working from Home from a 20-Year Working from Home Veteran"*
 - *"Work in the Time of Corona"* by Alice Goldfuss
 - *A Student's Guide to Working From Home*
 - *Survive and thrive with your young children (Ages 4–10) at home*
 - *The family lockdown guide: how to emotionally prepare for coronavirus quarantine*
- Technical Resources
 - *"Tips for Effective Remote Work"* using Microsoft Teams
 - Pluralsight's catalogue of training is free for (at least) the month of April 2020)
- General Sanity-Helpers
 - (Free) *Ambient noise to make you not feel alone* (coffee shop, office, etc.)
- Free eBooks
 - *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal*
 - The Internet Archive's collection of 20 million free eBooks and texts

With all the inspirational stories we've seen and heard regarding the immense work our schools are doing and have done to put something together for the kids to maintain distance learning at this time, we know you likely have already gotten things from your kids' schools that may include assignments, suggestions, and

online library info. These are merely options to augment what you may have already received. Some of them involve learning through games, so are quite engaging for the kids, and some are virtual field trips you can explore together.

- Free learning resources for keeping your kids' minds engaged:
 - [Prodigy](#) (Math)
 - [Khan Academy](#) (Many subjects for kids and adults)
 - [Squiggle Park](#) (Reading)
 - [Storyline Online](#) (Reading)
 - [Mystery Doug](#) (Science)
 - [Kids National Geographic](#)
 - [Typing Club](#)
 - [History for Kids](#)
 - [Scholastic](#)
 - [ABC Mouse](#)
 - Reach out to your teacher friends and kid's teachers to get access to these [Educational Resources](#). School access is required
 - Discord has also opened their Go Live participation to 50 people to support virtual classes
 - Virtual Field Trips
 - [San Diego Zoo](#)
 - [Yellowstone National Park](#)
 - [Mars](#)
 - [Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)
 - [Georgia Aquarium](#)
 - [Virtual Farm Tour](#)
 - [US Space and Rocket Museum](#)
 - [Discovery Education Virtual Field Trips](#)
 - [The Louvre](#)
 - [The Great Wall of China](#)
 - [Boston Children's Museum](#)

Several chapters in this eBook have mentioned the importance of getting up, moving around, changing position, and more. Here are some links to health sites that offer more specifics:

- Ergonomic Self-Assessment Resources
 - National Institute of Health's "[*Computer Workstation Ergonomics: Self-Assessment Checklist*](#)"
 - The University of Texas at Austin's "[*Ergonomics Self-Evaluation: Computer Workstation*](#)"

This is by no means an exhaustive list. We hope these provided some guidance or assistance, as needed. Feel free to share with family, friends, colleagues, and your communities. We are all in this together!

Chapter 12: The Mostly Un-Necessary Summary



We're calling this the "mostly un-necessary summary" because, if the previous 11 chapters haven't given you the information you needed, odds are you won't find it here. Because this isn't going to be about information, but instead about encouragement.

As we said at the start of this eBook, at the best and most normal of times working remote feels different than the way in-office work does. Not only different, but in some ways harder. But not all of this can be laid at the feet of telework itself.

Some of what you are undoubtedly experiencing isn't because WFH is hard, but because our specific situation here in 2020 is hard. It's a challenge irrespective of our individual deadlines and deliverables. It's a hurdle no matter the organizational size or the interdepartmental politics involved. It is, to use one of the most commonly used descriptions of the day, unprecedented.

Many of us are trying to juggle work and life and family all in the same space. We're trying to ignore the distractions and at the same time not be a distraction to the folks around us. We look for ways to resolve our frustration and ease our anxiety while at the same time not give our loved ones a reason to feel those same emotions.

Nothing in the previous 11 chapters talked about this in any great detail. It's the one piece which is deeply personal—as unique and specific as each of us who is sorting it out right now. And while we can't offer the level of specificity on this challenge as we have in everything until now, we can offer you some general thoughts.

First, be kind with yourself, with those you live with, and in all your

interactions. We're all coming to this moment from different backgrounds and histories. We all have different pressures, and we all have different methods of coping. Remember to breathe. Remember to think before speaking or acting (and especially before hitting "send" on an email). If nothing else, see if what you intend to say passes the rule of three: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary to say?

Second, be prepared to grow and change. Not only are we each approaching this differently, but our strategies may change from week to week or even day to day. As we learn more about how to "work together while we're apart," we may find techniques and strategies we felt were essential even a week ago are no longer helpful or needed. This is time where we will undoubtedly be called upon to adopt new strategies and then set them aside just as quickly—sometimes hourly—as the facts on the ground for our particular business respond to the fluid situation in the world.

Third, take time to listen. Some of us will find ourselves in close quarters with the same people day after day; while others will find ourselves with little direct human contact. And all the while the people we talked to every day over a cube wall or across the lunch table are now on the other end of a screen or telephone. Now, more than ever, it's important to recognize the power of listening. Of being genuinely present and open to another person. It doesn't mean we have to solve their problems. When we listen, we share the burden, so its weight can be borne; or we share a joy, so its intensity is magnified. There are times when friendship calls simply for a human presence, a listening ear and an understanding heart, irrespective of the distance between them.

And finally, look to the future. In the face of calamity, we may feel that we—individually or collectively—are losing hold of everything we once had or knew. Those who lived in generations before us discovered something many of us never learned: we cannot always change the circumstances in which we find ourselves, but we can change the way we see them, and this itself changes the way we feel. We can't control what happens, but we never lose the freedom to choose how we wish to respond.

In practical terms, this means we can use this time which is filled with so much change and turn it to something positive.

If the WFH life never grows on us, at the very least we can use these experiences to inform our understanding of ourselves. We'll know telecommuting is not the way we work best, and that—in a future which is not far off—we'll be back in an office and unplagued by doubts about whether the grass might be greener on the other side of the VPN. At the same time, we'll understand the challenges our colleagues who are distant—whether in a satellite office or homebound location—are dealing with and adjust our behaviors to make their experiences less difficult.

On the other hand, if we're thriving in the environment, we have the opportunity right now to be leaders and helpers to our coworkers. To share techniques to build success, to create solutions and work-arounds where there are pitfalls, and to help keep the business moving forward.

Thank you for taking time out of your day to read this, and share it, and even to contribute your thoughts—whether on social media, our **THWACK** community, or elsewhere.

Yours remotely,

Alli, Chrystal, Destiny, Joe, Kevin, and Leon

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