



Seven ways for lawyers to look after wellbeing while working remotely

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Many of you will currently be working remotely as our organisations bring into place 'social distancing' measures. While these measures are essential for public health, the World Health Organisation has acknowledged they can impact the wellbeing of those who are in these situations. I have worked on my own for several years now and understand intimately the impact it can have. The first couple of days are fun because they are different, but then it starts to become more difficult.

Here are seven ways you can maintain your wellbeing while the social distancing rules apply and you are working remotely:

Watch your kitchen habits

When you work in an office, you tend to pack your lunch in the morning and keep your snacking to a minimum during the day. The physical environment helps with this if you want a snack, you often have to leave your place of

work and walk to a café. When you work from home, the same physical barriers don't exist, so you have to be careful not to turn the fridge into an easy distraction device each time you encounter procrastination or need a break. Keep healthy food a priority and put in place some personal guidelines for eating while you are working remotely.

Keep a routine

Some of us experience anxiety when our routine changes or our day is uncertain. To keep this to a minimum, keep yourself in the routine you have established for work. Keep setting your alarm and getting up at the same time, keep getting dressed for work and keep sticking to your regular working hours. This will help with feeling you have purpose and direction even though your physical environment may have changed. Everything you can do to reduce anxiety at this time is helpful.

Get outside

Within the limits of the health guidelines and the building you are in, it is helpful for your wellbeing to connect with nature. If you can go for a walk and combine exercise with nature as part of your routine that is wonderful. Spend time on your balcony or open the window and let in some fresh air. The whole world does not revolve around your laptop. Take the time to focus on the other things that are going on around you and it will help you keep your perspective.

Build 'micro-lifts' into your day

Without your conscious awareness, you normally have 'micro-lifts' peppered throughout your day. These are the little moments where you treat yourself to a coffee from your favourite coffee shop, you smile at someone in the street, you have a chat with a colleague or any of the other small things that give you a little boost or micro-lift without you even realising. When you work from home, these things don't tend to happen naturally, the impact begins to accumulate and normally hits at around the two-week mark according to Dr Lucy Atcheson, a counselling psychologist. You can create these micro-lifts for yourself by doing something that generates a sense of achievement such as learn a few words in another language, join an online group, try a new form of exercise or talk to a family member, colleague or friend on the phone. Staying connected with

others is a great way to give yourself a 'micro-lift', especially if you can find something humorous to share in your day.

Exercise

Exercise is beneficial for your wellbeing in so many ways including both physical and mental. If you are not able to do your preferred exercise regime (for example the gym, swim or sport), look for ways you can replace it within the health guidelines or within your own home. Can you, for example, set up a circuit on your deck or in your loungeroom using equipment you have at home? Can you safely go for a walk once a day and still keep your social distance? Exercise is necessary to break up the amount of time you might otherwise spend in front of a screen while working remotely. You need to replace the movement that you had getting to and from work and walking around an office, going to meetings etc.

Don't get sucked into the negative thinking spiral

A danger of working remotely is that you have a lot of time on your own that you wouldn't normally have. One of the unhelpful things humans do when they have time on their own is self-reflect and not in a positive way. You spend the time passing judgment on yourself and thinking about all the things that are wrong in your life. If left unchecked, this negative spiral can turn into massive life dissatisfaction. It can help if, instead of seeing this as a

negative period in your life, you see it as simply a different period. One that has a different rhythm from what you have experienced before. You can head off the negative spiral by finding things to be grateful for. The negative thinking spiral will not be helped if you are getting a steady diet of doom and gloom from news websites or social media. If you can feel your anxiety levels rising, watch your media habits and choose healthier ones. Check the news once a day, instead of every time you need a mental refresher while working.

Do things you enjoy

No one can thrive on a steady diet of isolation and bad news. While you are working remotely, find the time also to do some things you enjoy. Is it time to try a new craft, pick up that musical instrument you have sitting in the corner, try cooking new dishes, reading a book, gardening or do it yourself projects around your home? Ensure you make space during the day to keep enjoying life, the work you do and the colleagues you work with. ■

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