

GUIDE TO REMOTE WORK *FOR EMPLOYEES*

Working environments have changed. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has shown us that work that once required our presence on campus could be done from a home office or a park bench.

While most employees will be soon returning to Rocky Top in person, some will continue working remotely at least part of the time. If you're one of them, this guide is designed to support you in creating a positive remote work experience and help ensure that you keep contributing to your team. It includes information, tips, and resources arranged under five key actions:

Practice Productivity

Stay Connected

Find Balance

Make Mental Health Matter

Implement Lifelong Learning

Practice Productivity

Especially in the past year, we've all learned a lot about successfully working from home. Here are some things you can do to help maintain productivity as a remote worker:

Dedicate—or perfect—a work space at home

You have likely already created a work space at home. It may be in a spare bedroom, on the kitchen table, or in a screened-in porch. Wherever you set up your work space, make sure it has plenty of light and incorporates best practices in ergonomics if at all possible. Visit [the Environmental Health and Safety ergonomics web page](#) for a guide to improving ergonomics in your work space along with videos and a self-assessment.

Stick to a schedule

[Research suggests](#) that employees are more productive when they focus on one task at a time or group like tasks together. Of course, many of our jobs require multitasking.

With constant distractions like email and chat notifications, messages, and other interruptions, how are we ever supposed to stay productive? A common solution is the [Pomodoro technique](#), where you work for 25 minutes and take a five-minute break. You repeat the cycle four times and then take a longer break. Another strategy is dedicating 60- to 90-minute blocks of time to work on a specific project or a combination of related projects, as described in Cal Newport's book *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*. [Here's a great summary of the book.](#)

Work on the right work

If you aren't currently meeting regularly with your supervisor, it might be a good idea to suggest. A regular check-in allows you to provide updates and ask for clarity on priorities and specific tasks.

Get a good night's sleep

Getting a good night's sleep resets your body and your brain for productive work. To learn more, see the [Sleep Well page](#) provided by Be Well, UT's employee wellness program.

Set up a routine that ends your screen time at the same time every night. Reading a book, writing in a gratitude journal, or spending some extra time with your partner, kids, or fur babies are great wind-down techniques to help you get a good night's sleep. In general, cooler temperatures (60–67 degrees) are ideal for sleep.

Spec your tech

The Office of Information Technology has a wealth of resources to help ensure that remote technology is serving you well. Visit OIT's [remote work website](#) for tips on setting up your home work space, checking your voice mail, collaboration and file sharing, connecting to VPN, and other relevant topics.

Whether you're working on campus or from home, take advantage of your access to resources like Google Drive, Google Docs, Microsoft OneDrive, and Office 365 to share documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and other files.

Improve your Zoom presence

In "[Your Zoom Presence: Putting Your Best Face Forward](#)," Tom Lemanski gives some great practical tips for virtual meetings. Here are a few highlights:

- **Nonverbal communication.** With in-person meetings, you generally don't have the opportunity to monitor the nonverbal message you're sending with your facial expressions. Zoom is like a mirror. As you glance at your face, you can see exactly what you look like to others. Make sure your facial expression is pleasant and engaging.
- **Lighting.** Situate yourself in front of a window when there's natural daylight or simply place a lamp in front of you to eliminate shadows on your face. An inexpensive light ring allows you to adjust the location, height, brightness, and hue of your lighting.
- **Audio and video quality.** Consider upgrading your microphone and web camera. A USB microphone can make a significant improvement in the quality of your voice. Similarly, many preinstalled webcams can make your look fuzzy and granular. Investing in a higher quality webcam can make a noticeable difference.
- **Camera placement.** Set up your webcam so it is level with your eyes to maintain eye contact with your Zoom team. Place your webcam to avoid the appearance that you're looking off to the side when you're looking at your screen—but do your best not to multitask. You were invited to the meeting for a reason, so be present and engaged.

Stay Connected

Staying connected with your coworkers can be challenging when you're working from home, especially if much of the group is on campus. While it's directed at supervisors of remote teams, this [FlexJobs article](#) includes some valuable ideas you can adapt for staying connected when working remotely:

Coffee chats

Just because you're not in the office doesn't mean you can't take breaks. To help stay connected, set a time for a morning and afternoon break where you can chat with coworkers.

Participate in office discussions

If your office has a chat board with general discussion topics, stay active by responding to questions and discussions.

Use group chats

Use group chats for quick questions, collaboration around projects, and brainstorming.

Take virtual lunch breaks

Joining with colleagues for a virtual lunch break is a great way to break away from work. Make it fun by featuring different cuisines.

Join colleagues for virtual workouts

Virtual workouts are a fun way to stay active and work out alongside other members of your team. [Check Be Well's schedule of virtual workout classes.](#)

Find Balance

As the lines between home and work blur, it's even more important to strive for balance. One way to accomplish this is setting boundaries and being intentional about balancing work with other elements of your life.

Participate in the Work–Life Sounding Board

Sounding boards are employee-led interest groups, with meeting times and activities determined by participants. The Work–Life Sounding Board, as its name implies, deals with the balance between life and work. Listen to the group's [podcast](#) discussing work–life issues and search the university's [events calendar](#) for upcoming meetings.

Plan your time after work

To help with the blurred lines when working from home, set boundaries by taking specific actions after you log out for the day. Perhaps taking a walk will help you unwind. If you can't get out, do a short set of exercises or stretches. Another idea is to designate a set time to eat dinner if you don't already have one.

Make Mental Health Matter

If you are a benefits-eligible employee, you and your immediate family have access to the university's [Employee Assistance Program](#). Most employees associate the EAP with mental health assistance, and it is a great resource for mental health. But it also offers resources for things like managing stress, improving relationships at home and at work, addressing legal and financial concerns, getting the most out of your career, and finding resources for child or elder care.

Another valuable resource is the [Sanvello](#) app, which offers clinical techniques to help dial down symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression anytime you experience them.

Connect with powerful tools that are there for you right as your symptoms arise. UT Knoxville employees get the premium version at no charge with the company code Here4TN.

Take advantage of Be Well's programs

[Be Well](#) offers a wide range of programs and resources for creating healthy habits, including healthy lifestyle programs, healthy cooking classes, community gardens, employee fitness and wellness challenges, campus walking paths, community races, and events.

Implement Lifelong Learning

Whatever field you're working in, lifelong learning is important for expanding your knowledge and keeping your professional skill set up to date. UT offers numerous learning resources—many of them accessible to remote workers.

Learning & Organizational Development

[Learning and Organizational Development](#), or LOD, focuses on leadership development and coaching. LOD serves the Knoxville area campus community, conducting workshops both virtually and in person. The team facilitates two leadership development programs—the [Inclusive Leadership Academy](#) for exempt faculty and staff and [UConnect](#) for nonexempt staff—as well as strengths-based leadership sessions for departments.

LinkedIn Learning & K@TE

UT employees have access to thousands of training titles offered through LinkedIn Learning and the university's [Knowledge and Training Excellence \(K@TE\)](#) system.

To get started with LinkedIn Learning, visit the [OIT knowledge base page](#) for the site. You can choose from a wide variety of courses, and completed courses are added to your training transcript. For classes that specifically pertain to working from home, search for “remote work.”

LinkedIn Learning offerings are also available through K@TE.

Other learning options

The [Educational Assistance benefit](#) assists regular employees (that is, those who are not in temporary or student positions) with payment of undergraduate- or graduate-level tuition. [Policy HR0330](#) provides details for any employee interested in this option.

If you are looking to take an online class, sites like [EdX](#), [Coursera](#), [Kahn Academy](#), and [Udemy](#) are great options. Some courses are free, while others have a charge. Be sure to carefully check the details before signing up a course.

Many professional organizations offer virtual and in-person conferences, events, webinars, and other learning resources. If you are unsure if there is a professional organization for your field, ask your supervisor.

We're Here to Support You

Here is a quick list of helpful campus resources that may be helpful as you're working remotely:

[Be Well](#)

[Department of Environmental Health and Safety](#)

[Division of Diversity and Engagement](#)

[Employee and Organizational Development](#)

[Employee Assistance Program](#)

[Events Calendar](#)

[Human Resources](#)

[Knowledge and Training Excellence \(K@TE\)](#)

Can't find what you're looking for? Contact the Human Resources Employee Relations team:

Email: hr@utk.edu

Phone: 865-974-6642

Website: hr.utk.edu