

Yes, we are WORKING from home

By Gaynor Paynter

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One of the challenges work at home moms come up against on quite a frequent basis is that when we say we are working from HOME, we do not get taken seriously. There is a common misconception in both the corporate world and the offspring of the work at home mom that work at home moms are actually not working but playing. Now this may be true of some work at home mothers but not, and I stress, not if they are serious about making their business work. Serious work at home moms put every ounce of extra energy they may have into making their businesses work.

While changing misconceptions in the corporate world is an ongoing challenge I urge all work at homers to undertake to do their part in, there are certain things that can be done to convince our families that we are actually working. These measures may seem tedious to begin with but can become sanity savers in the end.

1. Your office space, whether this be a corner of a bedroom, or a whole room, needs to be clearly designated as work space – do not permit this area to become a playground. It's an office, an area of work and children must be disciplined to realise this. Corners of bedrooms can be cordoned off. Set rewards for this rule being adhered to, maybe a packet of sweets at the end of the week for not treating mommy's desk like the local jungle gym, and suitable punishments too for when this rule is broken – less computer time, less TV time, etc.
2. Rules need to be established and be punishable offences if broken – when Mommy's door is closed, or when she has her headphones on, she is working and should only be disturbed in emergencies. Shutting the door is an effective way of creating a boundary between work and leisure. Of course, you can't shut out a young child who may be a danger to him or herself, unless you have suitable supervision for them.
3. Try to establish working hours, and try to stick to these (this is often easier said than done in a work at home situation, but if it's adhered to generally, children will become accustomed to when Mommy is working and when she isn't). If you can afford it, hire assistance or enlist the help of grandparents to supervise and stimulate your children, or try to work only when they are at school and then again when they go to sleep at night.
4. Set goals for yourself every day and inform your family that this is what you are trying to achieve, and if they allow you to achieve it there will be time to spend with them afterwards. I have a whiteboard in my office,

which I divide up into days and then into blocks of hours, in which I list my priorities for the day, and the time which I expect myself to achieve these targets in. Failing this time management, you may find yourself working 18 hour days, which is okay for a time, but soon leads to burn out. The theory behind this is simple. A school day is divided into blocks of time. In this manner, an entire curriculum is achieved in a year. If a school can push a curriculum with a timetable, I can meet my clients' requirements in this way too. Of course, there are times when I don't meet my targets. So I run half an hour over target, instead of working until midnight.

5. Behave as you would if you were in an office working to set office hours. This requires severe self discipline. Try to minimise distractions and interruptions during your working hours – ask people to call in the afternoon if you plan only to work in the morning, arrange outings and visits for times when you are not working. A good rule of thumb is every time you think of doing something, remember that you are your own boss, and ask yourself if a boss in an office would allow you to do what you want to do. Would your boss mind you breaking right now to watch “Days of Our Lives?”, etc.
6. Talk to people. Although I list this sixth and last, I believe this is one of the most important rules of making your work from home situation work. Talk to your children about what you are doing. Talk to others who are doing the same thing as you. My colleague Alison Fourie (www.amftyping.co.za) and I last year hit upon the idea of trying to gather together all the work from homers in related industries into one group. Transcriptionists and Virtual Assistants of South Africa (TAVASA) was born and here we get companionship, a work force, advice from other moms – loneliness and frustration gone, we have answers and solace at the tip of our fingers. Sign up here. <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/tavasa/>

Perhaps the most important thing of all is to remember that you are a professional – act professionally and you will be treated as such.

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