

Critical Skills Needed To Work-From-Home Success

1. Communication

Self-Check: Can you accurately and succinctly convey and interpret thoughts and ideas through digital messages?

In remote work, you'll learn that over-communication is just communication. Virtual workers don't have drop-bys, hallway meetings, and handshakes to stay connected and visible. Additionally, nonverbal communication is extremely limited, which can inhibit effective communication. Therefore, we are what we share. Go above and beyond in communicating what you're doing, by writing comprehensive but succinct messages, promptly responding to others, speaking transparently about needs and feelings, and proactively asking questions.

2. Self-Motivation

Self-Check: Can you take initiative without being prompted or rewarded?

Because remote work can't be physically supervised, productivity is measured by results. So, if you're extrinsically motivated, the feedback and praise that you're wanting isn't going to happen until after your project is over. A teleworker must be able to start and pace appropriately on their own, then identify more work to be done after that project is complete. In other words, you can't wait around for your boss to drop by with a new assignment. It's your job to stay busy during work hours, and sometimes that even means ambitiously making new work for yourself.

3. Trustworthiness

Self-Check: Are you going to fulfill expectations without supervision?

When you can't see or talk with your team at any given time, you have to believe they are working just as hard as you are to meet your goals, and vice versa. Doubt, worry, and micromanagement will only divide your team and slow output. You can build trust within your team by celebrating progress together, creating a safe space for failure and questions, evenly distributing workloads, and, most importantly, being trustworthy yourself.

4. Discipline

Self-Check: Are you in control of your own time, tasks, and energy?

If you've been depending on your boss walking by to snap you out of a YouTube rabbit hole, or seeing your office mate walk to the conference room to keep you on schedule, you're going to be in a world of hurt when working remotely. "Freedom" from the office comes with the caveat that you're now independently responsible for your own self-management and staying on task throughout the day. This can take some time to learn and master, but starting with a time-blocked schedule and prioritized to do list can help.

5. Curiosity & Critical Thinking

Self-Check: Can you independently analyze, evaluate, and strategize an issue?

Working independently requires being independent. The people on your team are no longer within arm's reach for support and assistance. So, be resourceful and creative as you solve the problem alone. Think through questions like: What is the problem? Where is it coming from? Is there anyone that can help me overcome my barrier? Are there any resources that I currently have that could help me solve the issue? Do as much as you can alone, but also remember that many problems require collaboration to solve, but when working from home no one is going to notice you looking stressed and come over to offer assistance. So, if you need help, exercise skills #1 and #2 and proactively ask for it.

6. Adaptability

Self-Check: Can you adapt to and accurately prioritize the impact of changes?

As the world is now poignantly aware, decisions about and within remote work can be made extraordinarily quickly. Well, get used to it. If a brick-and-mortar office is symbolic of permanency and stability, then it's understandable that a virtual workspace is complementary to that with agile workflows and quick communication. The pace of the virtual business world is notoriously fast. Tools, deadlines, and developments are no longer arduously discussed and contemplated in meetings before implementation, a quick call or notification can mean a full pivot in direction, and workers need to be able to "go with the flow without compromising the integrity of the assignment."

7. Accountability

Self-Check: How do you and your team know that you've been productive throughout the work day?

The number one concern of managers that are new to remote work is whether or not their team members are staying productive. Based on the other critical skills of self-motivation, trustworthiness, and communication, it can be deduced that it's the worker's responsibility to not only be productive, but prove that they were, and to confidently claim ownership for their work by meeting deadlines, fulfilling commitments, and accepting consequences. Prove that you're engaged in your work regardless of location by demonstrating a new kind of "presence" — instead of physically arriving at the office, "show up" to work with full attention and accountability. Your coworkers won't be able to see you at your desk, but they'll certainly be able to see your commitment to your work.

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