

TOUCHPOINTE

Top 10 Business Solutions

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Have you noticed how many people are working from their home these days?

With gas prices continuing to climb and technology creating new and innovative ways to stay connected, working from home is becoming more and more the norm.

TouchPointe has been working a virtual model for almost three years now and loving it.

We have found that productivity continues to climb when everyone is

working with clear goals and objectives regardless of whether they are in a corporate office environment.

TouchPointe covers 10 key ways its employees make working a virtual model successful:

1. You must set boundaries! Just because you work at home doesn't mean you can drop what you're doing and head off to lunch with a neighbor.

In fact, those last minute calls will be very tempting when you're hitting a wall

trying to build a book of business.

Use the opportunity to run off and play as a reward for completing your to do list for the week.

2. What time does your day start and end?

As we all know, the day can escape us quickly, especially if we don't add structure. We can also spend all of our time working especially since work is 30 seconds away.

Create routines and rituals that you follow every day.

My business partner, Pete Schouweiler will start his day with a cup of coffee and the paper without fail. Once he completes that part of the day, which typically starts at 5:00 am, he is ready to tackle the day.

Some suggest getting in your work clothes, as if you are going to work so it forces you into the "work mode."

We all remember Mr. Rodgers who would have a change of clothes for everything – his special sneakers for play time and of course that awful sweater.

Personally, I love my sweats and save the mon-key suit for client visits. Once home from a client visit I am back in my comfy clothes ready to tackle the rest of my day.

3. Define your work-day. Have a plan of attack for the day and stick to it. Put everything in your calendar including vacation days, start times, family dinners, etc.

The old saying "You don't plan to fail, you fail to plan," is so critical to someone working from home.

Although I might work late some nights in my office, my office shuts down from the hours of 6:00 to 9:00 pm so that I can have dinner and snuggle time with my family.

The days I have failed at this miserably is when I am attached to my blackberry during these precious hours that will never return.

4. Set up your home base office in advance.

Create a floor plan for your desk, computer, and printer creating the ideal layout. You want to be comfortable in your new "home away from home."

A big advantage is it is your home and you can paint it the color you want along with accessorizing it however you like. I love the sound of my water fountain that runs right outside of my office!

5. Prevent Interruptions. Separate your work area if possible from the rest of the house. The best way to do this is to have a door on your office, preferably a sound proof door with a reinforced lock (not always an option). When the door is shut you are at work – if open, interruptions are welcome.

Creating a separation is

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key, especially if you are on the phone a great deal and don't live by yourself. This is an area that initially was a disaster until everyone in the house knew "Mom was at work so it is not ok to run through her office screaming she hit me."

6. Employ Joint calls with your co-workers and clear objectives. Technology has allowed us to have live conversations with video. Gone are the days when it seemed you were watching a foreign film – you could hear the words but the mouth was a few sentences behind.

Have you tried Skype or www.gotomeeting.com? These and many more tools are available at a reasonable cost so, before you jump in your car, jump on your computer.

Clear objectives with your manager is critical to your success – are you both in agreement of what the results should be?

If you are the owner, are you in alignment with your business plan and do you review it on a regular basis?

7. Staying connected. Several articles have been written about the importance of keeping connected even when you work remotely. There is a certain aspect of social interaction and teamwork that develops when you are tied into the bigger picture of a company.

Planned gatherings are critical for creating team work amongst your co-workers. At TouchPointe we pull all of our clients and consultants together for what we have coined our

"In Touch Third Thursday," which happens the third Thursday of every month. We hold it at Champps at the Irvine Spectrum at 6:00 pm – same time, same place every month! We also have regular trainings every Monday and monthly events where we pull the team together. Creating community in a virtual model has been key to our success.

8. Marketing Clients. Walter Serrano from One on One Fitness works on Bannister Street in Ladera Ranch. He and his family live upstairs while he trains his clients in his store front gym downstairs.

When I asked him what the key was to working at home he shared it's all about having an existing client base. "I have no foot traffic, so it is imperative I have a tight marketing plan that can bring in clientele."

Of course there is no substitution for word of mouth and referrals – Walter has helped me loose over 20 pounds!

9. Separate phone line. This of course would have been a great task to complete before my nine-year-old decided to play operator and not give me the return phone call from an important lead.

There are many services available that will answer your incoming calls not to mention you can have all your calls automatically forwarded to your mobile phone. The outgoing message is important and should say your company name and a brief message.

Many phones offer a key

to press to skip past your message. Regular callers love this especially if your message is long. It says, "To bypass this message, please hit . . ."

10. Create your fortress. This advice was given to me by a book I read years ago called the "Power of Focus" by Cranfield. Find a good attorney (Dan Doyle from Law Offices of Dan Doyle), tax preparer, accountant, a printer (Paul Guidotti, Mouse Graphics) and so on.

Who are your key advisors, your go to people to get the advice you need for running not only your business but your household? How tight are these relationships? How dependable is the service?

List out your fortress and find out where there are missing players – the next step is to fill those critical positions. Your fortress may take several months, maybe an entire year to complete, especially if you are seeking out referrals which I highly recommend.

(Michelle Patterson is founder and managing partner of TouchPointe, headquarter in Ladera Ranch. TouchPointe is a senior level consulting and recruiting firm, specializing in the placement of finance, accounting, IT, and human resources in both interim and permanent positions. Contact TouchPointe at 949-218-0866 or at www.touchpointe.com.)

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