

magic minutes|

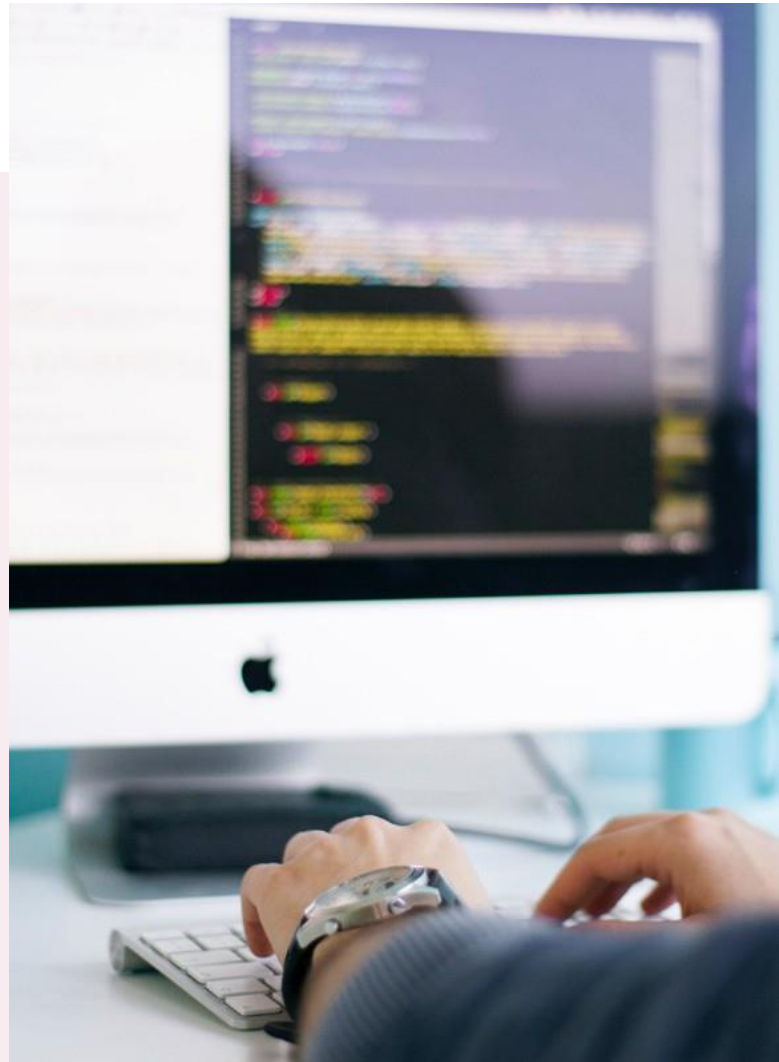


# The self-isolated worker

An e-book guide to making the most of  
home working during a pandemic

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## CHAPTER 01

# Introduction

It's work Jim, but not as we know it...



# Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic has changed the way that we live and work. The long-term impact is yet to be fully understood; however, what is certain is that in the short-term, the way we work has changed for many of us.

As I'm typing this in my makeshift home office, the issues I'm encountering are new and varied. For instance, I am constantly distracted by the pigeon scratching away and making its nest on top of my chimney. So far, the buzzard call videos from Youtube don't seem to be having any effect but I persevere.

A few weeks ago, this type of workplace scenario would have seemed absurd. Now, for many of us, there are multiple and varied distractions impacting our work.

Necessity, however, remains the mother of invention. We will continue to adapt to our new workplaces for as long as needed.

Many of us are learning new tools and techniques that will become part of our new way of working when all this is over.

At Magic Minutes, we have had to develop new ways of working. This has presented both challenges and new opportunities.

We're happy to share this resource with you and hopefully it will be of some use.

If you are reading this in a digital format, we salute your environmental credentials. For those with a printed copy, please recycle or in the instance of a continued toilet paper crisis, reuse.

Stay safe and healthy,

**Richard Buckle**  
Co-founder at Magic Minutes





## CHAPTER 02

# A new perspective

A change in circumstances requires changing the way in which we think about where and how we work.

# Where to work

Firstly, you don't need to pretend that you are in the office, but you will need a space that enables you to work effectively. Pragmatism is the key as it's not usual that homes are set up to function as an office.

If setting yourself up at a desk helps you stay focused, that's fine. For others, the kitchen table will work just as well.

Some people will prefer to work in a more relaxed setting. In essence, do what works best for your personal circumstances and yet strive to maintain the level of professionalism that would be expected in your office environment.

This also provides a great opportunity to get to know your colleagues a bit better as you'll get a glimpse into home lives. This needs to be treated with respect as many people prefer to separate work and home.

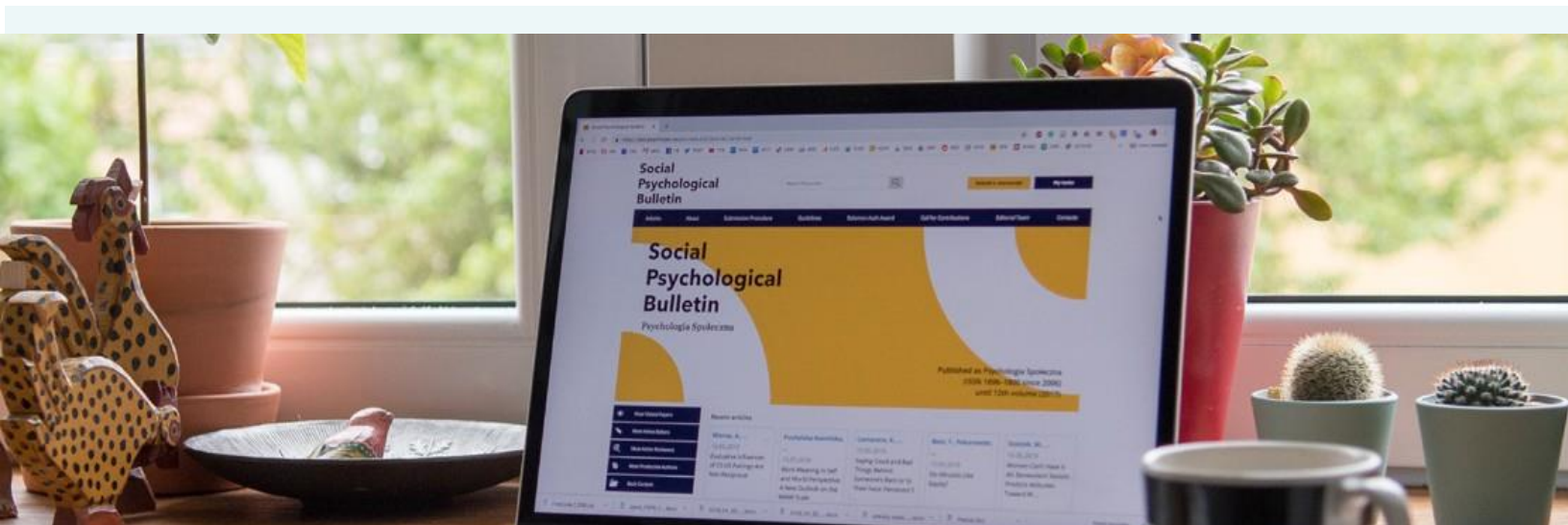
Also bear in mind that your meetings may now take place in kitchens and living rooms and may involve the next

generation of workers. Many people with children are having to juggle looking after the kids as well as staying on top of work. (**Top tip** - if you have kids in the room and you're on a Zoom call, mute your audio and then press space bar to speak!).

It may be useful to conduct your own basic DSE assessment using the following link:  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf>

To stay comfortable and reduce the risks of display screen work, we recommend that you:

- break up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least 5 minutes every hour) or changes in activity
- avoid awkward, static postures by regularly changing position
- get up, move about or do some stretching exercises
- avoid eye fatigue by changing focus (e.g. stare out the window and see what the neighbours are up to!)





# How to work

## Your daily routine

Many work routines are derived from our company culture. How we start our work day, make a drink, go for lunch, and leave the office are often related to specific work place behaviours. At home, you may need to be mindful of setting a structure that creates a rhythm of work and reminds you to take breaks.

- Create a morning routine that puts you in a mind-set to start work
- Set timers for breaks, not just for lunch but to remind you to get up and away from your screen regularly
- Be prepared for distractions that may not exist in the office and build time for them into your routine

Depending on the nature of your work, you may have a conversation with your line-manager about varying the hours that you work in the day. For example, as some people find themselves more productive in the evening, you may wish to start your day later than usual, have a break for a couple of hours, and work again in the evening.

Many people will miss the opportunity that their daily commute provided to provide a buffer between work and their home life. If this is you, think about finding a way to put some time between finishing work and having to engage in domestic duties. Lock yourself in the bathroom, sit in the car for 10 minutes with the radio on (you could drive it to the shops but only if essential!), stare out of the window; you get the idea.

## Coping with distractions

You may well find that there are fewer distractions at home, sometimes more, often they are just different (e.g. nesting pigeons). Be aware of what the distractions are over the first few days and work out how to minimise them. It can be helpful to set boundaries with people around you.

Also be aware of the way that you may distract yourself and consider how you can minimise those distractions such as removing social media notifications from your phone and scheduling a time to get an update on the news.

## Managing output

From speaking to several people over the past few days, many of them are finding that they are being more productive working from home. One of the most important conversations that you will have within your business is around deliverables and outputs.

When staff are home-working, outputs are often easier to measure than hours.

Be clear with everyone in your team about who is doing what and when.

Using a meeting app like Magic Minutes can help to keep track of what everyone agrees to do. Used in conjunction with Zoom or Microsoft Teams, this can provide a great way to keep the team connected and focused.



## CHAPTER 03

# Utilising Technology

Whilst we wait for AI to finish building Skynet, here's a look at some of the technology we can use to help us work from home.

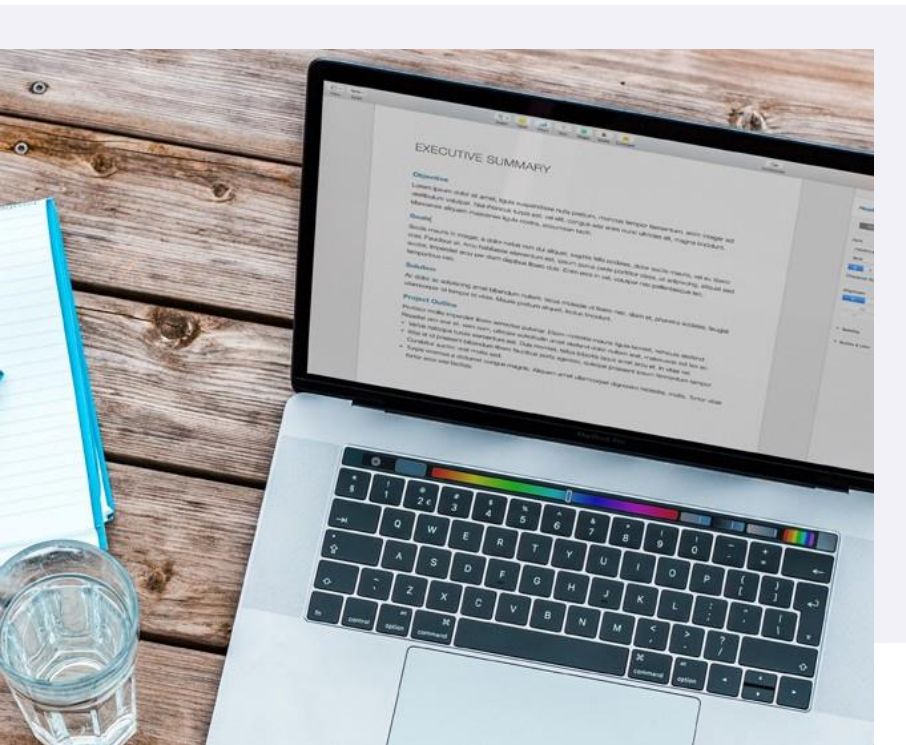


# Getting the timing right

One consequence of remote working is that it isn't as obvious as to when your colleagues are available to chat. Back in the day, BT had the strapline of "It's good to talk", which is still as true today as it was then. Arguably we don't do enough of it. However, it's much easier to cause interruptions to your colleagues' flow when you can't see that they don't want to be distracted (I've had 4 slack messages, 2 phone calls and a Teams meeting whilst trying to write this paragraph!). Ad hoc phone/video calls are necessary, but it might be worth considering the following to help minimise disruption:

- Share your daily schedule with your team so that they know the best times to engage with you

- Using an app such as Doodle to schedule team time
- Schedule a regular time for catching up. At Magic Minutes, we have found that this has worked best to schedule specific time for work-related catch ups via Teams and have a separate time slot to have more "water cooler chats" using Zoom.
- Block out time in your diary on a "Do not disturb" basis.
- "Dead time" such as car journeys has disappeared which can mean it's easier to interrupt other people's work.
- After a full day of video calls, it can be favourable to just have a phone call to allow your eyes to focus on something more than two feet away!



# Staying connected

Good communication is a critical component of any healthy organisation. Trying to maintain this throughout a period of remote working can be a challenge. If you already have good relationships with your team then this will be a considerable advantage at a time like this.

For leaders, it's vital to communicate regularly with the team to keep everyone engaged. It's worth remembering that everyone has different preferences when it comes to communication styles. Introvert vs. Extrovert, Millennials vs. Boomers, to name but two areas where communication preferences may differ. There is no harm in asking people what their preferred communication method is, especially when we are all looking into each others' homes. We can be thankful that given the technology at our disposal we have numerous options available to help connect everyone on the team.

Decide with both individuals and as a team how and when you will communicate. Diarise the time so that it becomes a regular fixture in everyone's schedule.

Ensure that any meetings have a purpose and an agenda. Where appropriate, take detailed minutes and assign actions to increase accountability and visibility across the team.

We tend to stay connected with different people in different ways and with varied channels.

With clients we are tending to use email and online meetings. Zoom tends to work best as it handles the visibility of more attendees. Several larger organisations we work with are using text messages to broadcast updates to staff who may not have access to a work email account.

Internally, we are using Slack for internal comms, MS Teams for the daily catch up, MS Teams/Facetime for individual catch ups. There has been some trial and error in working out which application works best for a given situation.

Additionally, we have found a lot of value in having a regular catch up via Zoom with several other businesses we know. This is giving us all a chance to connect and catch up on what's going on in different sectors.





# Managing video calls

A common observation we are coming across is that people are finding that the number of video calls they are on has increased dramatically. Back-to-back video calls all day can be mentally exhausting. Sharing a screen to discuss a document and having someone take minutes is a good way to ensure that time is well spent.

Video call dress code has been a topic of discussion. Suit and tie, business casual, t-shirt or PJs? Common sense and context will dictate what is appropriate.

On a video call you're giving people a glimpse into your home. Think about what is going to be in view of the camera. Nobody wants to

see your laundry (hopefully) or a pile of dirty dishes. Consider using a custom background image or alternatively it can be often be blurred. This can be especially useful if you are having to work in a shared space and other members of the household are moving about in the background.

Call quality can be compromised by others in the house hogging bandwidth. Get the kids off Netflix if you're on an important call and you're experiencing quality issues.

Speaking of kids, many parents have found their little cherubs wanting to get in on the video call. This can be a bit stressful for all concerned but muting your microphone can make it a bit easier.



Photo by NeONBRAND on Unsplash





## CHAPTER 03

# Managing your mental health

The world as we know it may be coming to an end, but  
there's no need to panic (well, not just yet...)

# Keep calm...

## Your daily routine

It is important to pay as much attention to your mental health as your physical health, particularly during a time of isolation and social distancing.

Key protective factors for good mental health can include:

- **Regularly engage in meaningful activities.** If you have been placed on furlough leave, find non-work-related activities such as house-hold projects, gardening, writing to friends and family, learning a new skill on-line;
- **Take good care of yourself.** It's important to maintain your regular routine of washing and dressing in the morning. Eat a good breakfast and get to your workspace at your normal time;
- **Get some fresh air and exercise.** Exercise is proven to release chemicals that improve emotional wellbeing. Take advantage of going outside while permitted, look for online classes and resources;
- **Understand what causes you to stress:** Be aware of what you enjoy and what causes you stress or anxiety. Remember that you can't control everything!

## What can you do to help yourself?

With so much uncertainty within all areas of life it is understandable that people are expressing feelings of anxiety and stress.

There are a number of things you can do to help yourself manage your stress levels.

As the saying goes, a problem shared is a problem halved. Stay in contact with friends old and new. It's a great opportunity to have a virtual trip to the pub and have a drink with friends who live far away. Connect in groups, with apps such as Facetime, Whatsapp or HouseParty and try things like an online pub quiz.

Other things to think about are:

- Eat and maintain a healthy diet and don't let working at home encourage unhealthy dietary habits.
- Get enough sleep - 7-9 hours is recommended ([www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org))
- Catch up on reading or listen to audiobooks
- Listen to your favourite music
- Learn a new skill (finally master the Rubik's cube!)
- Start gardening
- Take up a hobby or join a club
- Volunteer for the NHS or a Food Bank, offer help to the vulnerable
- Mediation, mindfulness techniques, CBT. There are lots of free resources online and Youtube is a great place to start.

# Stay Positive

## Pressure vs Stress

Pressure or positive stress (known as eustress) can have a beneficial impact on your mental health by:

- Increasing productivity
- Encouraging team camaraderie
- Providing a sense of achievement over task completion

Stress, on the other hand, usually impacts negatively on mental health and can cause issues such as anxiety and depression.

Learn to look out for the signs of stress (in yourself and others. Consider what activities you can do as a team to support each other remotely with regard to managing stress. Many people try to hide the signs of stress and this can be much easier to do when everyone is working from home. At this challenging time, be kind to each other in both word and deeds. Understand that everyone has different pressures and challenges that you might not be aware of.

## Build a Positive Mental Health Culture

Educate yourself on mental health and wellbeing (there are some useful links on the resources page) and encourage your

colleagues to do the same. Make an effort to talk to your colleagues about non-work issues and ask them how they are feeling. Ask how you can help them with tasks if possible.

Don't be afraid to talk to someone about your own thoughts and feelings. A lot of people are in the same boat. It's also a good time to show an interest in your colleagues' opinions, cultures, and beliefs and perhaps get a different perspective on current events.

## Using your breaks for good mental health

Taking breaks from your screen is so important. Set a timer or use the end of a playlist/album to prompt a break. Here are a few suggestions to encourage your good mental health:

- Dance at your desk to your favourite music to energise and inspire you.
- Have a healthy snack to boost your energy and mood.
- Water a plant - growing plants is said to lift spirits and soothe the mind.
- Create a board of gratitude (could be as simple as a piece of paper) where you can write things for which you are grateful.
- Post a positive message in one of your communication channels, to make others feel appreciated; it will also make you feel good







## CHAPTER 03

# Making the most of your time

Whether you're on furlough or working from home, we've all got a bit more time on our hands. We've put together a list of resources to help you make the most of self-isolation.

# Useful links

## How to Stay Informed

Top websites to keep you informed include:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/>

## Ideas to Help Use Your Time Wisely

Some of the best online resources to help you engage in personal development:

[www.futurelearn.com](http://www.futurelearn.com) (includes many free courses)

*Join millions of people learning on FutureLearn. Find online courses and degrees from leading universities or organisations and start learning online today.*

[www.mooc.org](http://www.mooc.org)

*Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are free online courses available for anyone to enroll. MOOCs provide an affordable and flexible way to learn new skills, advance your career and deliver quality educational experiences at scale.*

<https://uk.babbel.com/>

*Babbel - language learning online. Easy. Fast. Fun. Try now for free! Interactive Lessons. More than 14 Languages.*

## For Healthy Minds and Relationships

Apps to maintain a healthy mind

- Calm
- Headspace
- Aura
- Stop, Breathe, Think
- Insight Timer

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>

<https://www.workplacestrategiesformen talhealth.com/>

<https://www.loveisrespect.org/healthy-relationships/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/coronavirus-what-it-means-for-you/>

<https://111.nhs.uk/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/self-care-for-anxiety/>

# Great Tools for Remote Working

## **Magic Minutes -**

[www.magicminutes.co.uk](http://www.magicminutes.co.uk)

Helping organisations change the culture of their meetings by bringing greater focus, accountability, and collaboration.

## **Zoom Meetings -** [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)

The original software-based conference room solution used around the world in board, conference, huddle, and training rooms.

## **Microsoft Teams -**

[www.teams.microsoft.com](http://www.teams.microsoft.com)

A teamwork hub and Office 365 team app that fuses group chat software with collaboration tools. (Has replaced Skype for Business)

## **Slack -** [www.slack.com](http://www.slack.com)

Organise conversations, share files, and get answers faster. Keep your whole team in the loop by messaging in open spaces called channels.

## **Trello-** [www.trello.com](http://www.trello.com)

Covering everything from to-do lists to project management.

## **Clockify -** <https://clockify.me/>

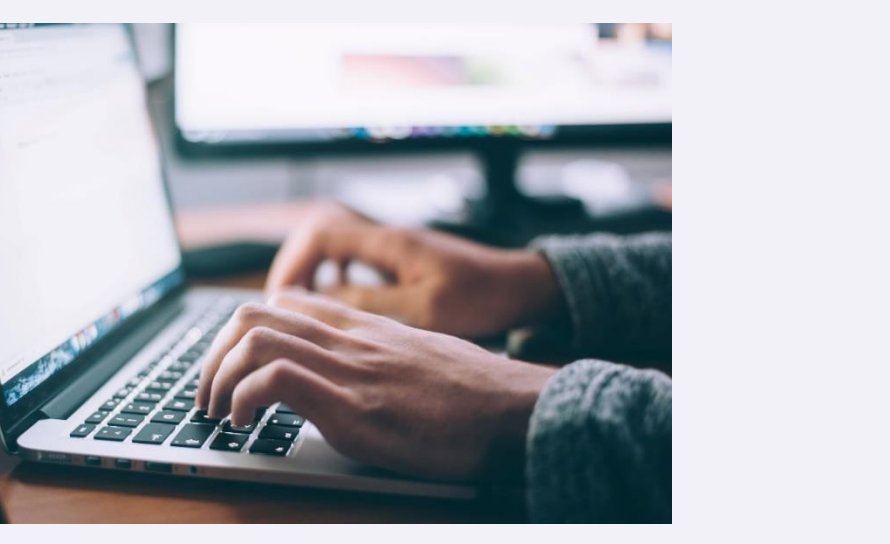
A simple time tracker and timesheet app that lets you and your team track work hours across projects.

## **Todoist -** <https://todoist.com/>

Organise all your to-do lists in one place

## **Toggl -** <https://www.toggl.com/>

Another great tool for managing and recording you time.





# What does the future hold...

The self-isolation measures imposed as a result of the Coronavirus have the potential to change the way we work once we all go back to life as normal (what that looks like now is anyone's guess!)

How we organise our work and communicate is already changing. Magic Minutes will continue to help organisations realise and release their potential by powering a positive change in meeting culture.

Try today for free!

**magic minutes**|

[www.magicminutes.co.uk](http://www.magicminutes.co.uk)

