



In-house at Home: Avoiding Burnout When Working from Home

Skills and Professional Development



“In-house at Home” is a new column about working from home, inspired by the coronavirus lockdowns and work from home orders. Greg Stern, author of ACC Docket’s Tech Toolbox in the print magazine, has been working from home for five years steadily and three years intermittently before that. In this column, he offers insights on how to make teleworking work for you and your company.



It's hard turning off work mode during the pandemic. Since working from home for the past few months, you've become a closet workaholic. Literally a closet, because that was the only place you could get enough solitude to make a feasible home office.

With so much solitude and work to do, you start work in the when you roll out of bed ([or not](#)), blink, then it's suddenly bedtime. You suspect that this is not good for you, because you are starting to look like an extra from the zombie apocalypse. Your eyes are red and heavy and your back looks like Quasimodo's. You realize that you need to make some changes, but where should you begin?

1. Stop making work your only priority

Of course you have too much work to do. You will *always* have too much work to do until you retire (or collapse, which is becoming more of a possibility). Even when you retire, you may still have too much work to do, because, like most lawyers, you are a closet workaholic.

You are too driven not to make work a priority, but you can and should elevate other things above it, like your family, friends, health (mental and physical), sleep, and meditation. Make your own list — those are mine, but feel free to borrow them — just make sure you make at least some things a higher priority than work.

What's nice about most of those other priorities is that you can't do any of them for an extended, indeterminate period, like you can with work. An hour of exercise, dinner, or more sleep, and that ceases to be a viable priority for that day.

So, make them a *higher* priority than work because you will still have enough time left over after doing them to do a healthy or even unhealthy slug of work. Don't just mentally prioritize them either. Add them to your task manager, planner, or calendar to help remind you when your workaholism infects you.

2. Improve your posture

Next, let's do something about your posture, Q. Your shoulders, neck, and back ache and look like that because your chair isn't healthy for your spine and you don't spend enough time standing.

Get a good desk chair and standing desk and arrange them so that even when you are sitting you maintain a good ergonomically correct position for typing. Try to spend at least a third of your time working in a standing position. Your back will thank you — and the bell tower will survive without you.

Use the [Pomodoro technique](#) or something similar to schedule regular stretching breaks. Avoiding your keyboard for five minutes twice an hour will help live longer and feel better.

I know how it is when you feel like you are in a working groove and don't want to stop, but believe me, taking a break won't break the groove, it will just make it more, well, groovy. [Studies show](#) that you will be more creative and open-minded if you take breaks now and again.

3. Take a break

Speaking of breaks, solitude is fine in moderation, but we are social animals. Interact with others, whether at home or at work. If you are home, call a colleague and kick some ideas around, even if they don't pertain to work. You need the interaction and so do they, whether or not either of you realizes it.

Have a Zoom or FaceTime call so you can see each other for a few minutes. This is human. This is healthy. And again, you will work more effectively this way.

When you need to mull over work or other things, take a walk. Even during the pandemic, there is always somewhere most people can walk safely. Don't forget to bring your smartphone so you can dictate some of the inspiring ideas you will have on your walk. Remember to wash your hands before and after your stroll, and don't forget to wear your mask (correctly!) — I keep forgetting mine.

Hang in there — we *are* going to get through this.

For more well-being tips, visit the [ACC In-house & Wellness Support](#) page. For more advice and resources on coping during the pandemic, go to the [ACC Coronavirus Resource](#) page.

[Greg Stern](#)



Former Global Integration Counsel

Chubb, Independent Consultant