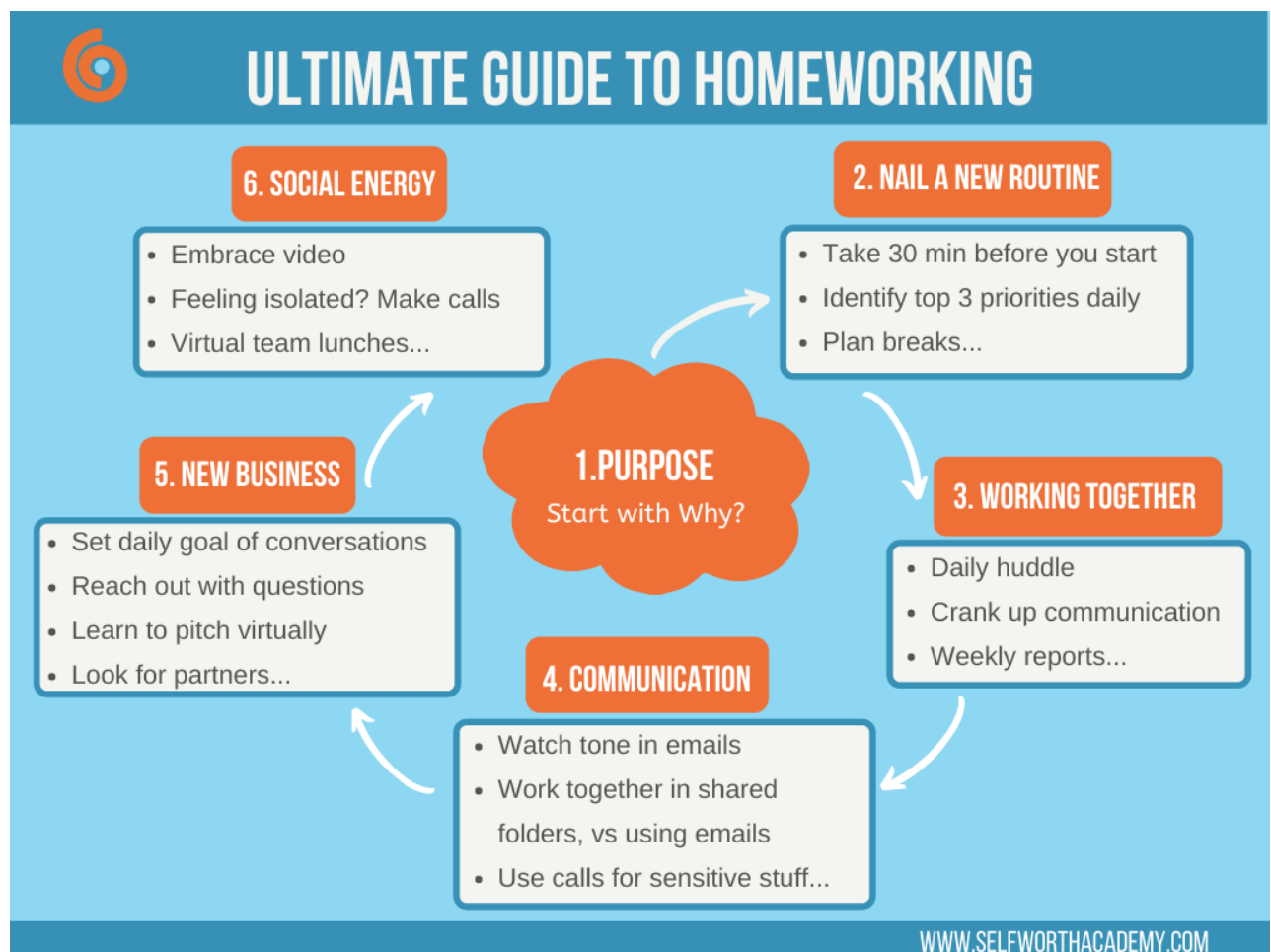


# The Ultimate Guide to Healthy Homeworking

## Raising the value of your work, in times of chaos and crisis

Welcome to this guide to healthy homeworking. Our aim is to assemble proven practices that raise self-worth and performance: to energise your days and make visible the value of your work.

In times of stress and isolation, it helps to focus on what you *can* control.



## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

Whether you are adapting to a new regime, or have been teleworking now for some years, this is an ideal time to review your homeworking practices. The purpose of this guide is threefold:

- a) To empower you to be as **productive** and effective as possible
- b) To make **visible the value** of your work, which can become invisible when you are not meeting key people
- c) To **enhance your energy**, wellbeing and self-worth during anxious times of isolation

The guide is organised as a set of routines, to help you develop your own healthy practices. Suggestion: please don't try to implement all of them at once! If you improve a little every day for two weeks, you can achieve quite a lot. Sections are organised as follows:

**A: Personal routines: from morning until night**

**B: Tips for working together**

**C: Dealing with client relationships**

**D: Business development practices**

**E: Social energy, how to prevent isolation and boredom**

## A: PERSONAL ROUTINES

### Before you go to bed

1. **Power up** all your devices: laptop, headset, phone, tablet, lithium batteries etc. You don't want to be frantically searching for a cable in the middle of a sensitive discussion tomorrow.
2. Unless you fall into one of the exceptional groups in the next point, consider setting a **digital switch-off time** c. 2 hours before bedtime. Why? So that you can wind down and get a good night's sleep.
3. **Exceptions:** Parents who want undisturbed time while children sleep, night-owl creatives whose inspiration peaks after dark, managers who manage staff in another time-zone, people on call, etc. But for most of us, it's really wise to stop checking email (and the news) at least two hours before going to bed.
4. **Set your alarm** for the morning, so that you get enough personal time before you "switch on". Consider using an alarm that *isn't* your work phone, so that you are not greeted with work WhatsApp's first thing in the morning.

## Morning routine

1. Take at least 30mins for **yourself**, before you switch-on. One hour is better. It's always tempting to reach for that smartphone, news app etc, but if you learn to break this habit, you can create a much stronger and empowered start to your day.
2. Do you start your day with anxiety? Even before the current crisis, many of us formed this unfortunate habit way back in our school days. If so, try to **make your first hour as physical** as possible. Exercise, hot/cold shower, yoga, meditation are all ways to assert your sense of self-worth, and they enhance your capacity for action, too.
3. **Get dressed** as if you were going for a "real job". While you may find it fun to lounge around in your pyjamas for the first few days, this attitude will quickly show up in your work and in your motivation.
4. Consider your **plans for the day** ahead. What **purpose** guides your work life, whether in good times or in bad? What are your top three priorities today? How do these fit into your schedule? (Some people do their daily planning the evening before, see "End of Working Day" routine below.)
5. Don't try to put all of your **task list** into your schedule: this is usually too difficult, and things will change, anyway, in the course of the day. Focus instead on the top three.
6. **Emails:** No matter what I write here, you are going to be drawn into that Inbox. Let your mantra be: "Respond rather than React". (More about this in the section on Written Communication)
7. **Messaging apps:** More and more, these resemble yet another Inbox, so the same rules apply: respond rather than react!
8. If you can dispose of an email in a one-sentence reply, then by all means do so. Ditto if it's genuinely urgent. But otherwise, it's best to **focus on your top three** for the morning. You can do the "stuff" in the afternoon.
9. See the "Morning Routine", pages 68-69 of "[The Self-Worth Safari](#)" for some effective self-worth practices, that are an antidote to anxiety or issues of energy. Self-worth is a vital foundation for valuing your life and your work: now more than ever.
10. Plan a few short (5-10 min) **breaks**. In an office, you would often have random breaks as people appeared at your desk, or ad-hoc conversations happening by the coffee machine. When working from home, you can get totally absorbed and before you know it, it's lunchtime.

## Managing Focus

1. Put all Group chats on **Mute**, or you will be continually distracted. Turn off Email notifications. You don't need them – you always have mail.
2. **Focus** on one thing, for each 5-10-minute period. If on a call, turn off devices that go Ping. This is particularly true on video, where people can see when you are distracted.
3. Your desk is now your office, so consider it carefully. Have you adequate **space, light and air**? Is your chair and desk comfortable?
4. Consider using **two displays**, and/or a docking station. Crouching over a laptop for long periods of time is a recipe for sore neck and shoulders. Spreading your workload across two displays will make you more productive.
5. **Environment**: define a work area in your home, as separate from your living or relaxing space as possible, and ideally not in a bedroom. You need to be able to switch off.
6. **Create rituals** around the beginning and end of work. For example, I know one professional who used to leave her building for a brief walk, then re-enter her apartment block as if she were going in to the office. It helped to define her focus.

*For an online learning course on “21<sup>st</sup> Century Time-Management”, see [here](#). In our current circumstances, we all need to rethink time-management. The rules have changed!*

## Video-calls

1. **Video calls** are the closest you can get to in-person working. So, use a good quality camera and headset, and ensure that the camera is not facing the window or you will just appear as a silhouette.
2. Pay attention to the **background**. A plain wall is better than clutter. Bookshelves and plants are good. Under no circumstances show a bed, even if your home-office is in the spare bedroom! Consider a bright tapestry, a screen or a large picture.
3. **Quality**: You don't have to portray luxury (it may even be counter-productive) but you do want your colleagues and clients to know that you are **focused and attentive** to them. Plan your background with this in mind. You can use some creativity here 😊
4. If you may be **interrupted** by a parcel-delivery, or a child, a pet or anyone wandering across the background, please say so early in the call. It's better if they don't... but the world is learning that many of us are parents and workers at the same time, so you don't have to apologise too much! Nevertheless, it does help to warn people.

5. **Stability:** If using a phone, please place it in a stable position. Otherwise your arm will ache and other participants will experience sea-sickness!
6. **Sound:** In general, noise on group calls can be a lot more disruptive than something happening in video background. I recall a client once being freaked out by a cough in the same room as me, beyond her field of vision: to her it sounded like there was someone eavesdropping on our call! Again, if there may be background noises, it's best to let people know and to assure them about confidentiality as appropriate.
7. When you know people well, and/or you (or they) don't need the video or screen element, **consider turning off the camera** for individual calls. Many people are more comfortable with this. In my coaching work, I find it often creates a more intimate conversation. Rule of thumb: use the camera for the relationship-build: we can then turn off video when getting into substance. (This also allows you to walk around!)
8. **Use a headset** whenever you can, particularly for **group** calls. When not speaking, use Mute. If possible however, keep your video on, otherwise you appear to be "lurking" or not fully present.
9. **When sharing your desktop display** on group calls, turn off notifications from messaging apps. Or you may find yourself sharing a bit more than you intended!
10. On group calls, **create structures to encourage participation**. Otherwise, people will drop back into "easy mode", often with camera and microphone off. Create questions to get them involved. Use the Chat feature. Build on what participants have shared, so that contribution is encouraged and appreciated.

## Security

1. Avoid sharing **passwords** and pin numbers via email or WhatsApp. This is like leaving the key in the door for criminals... with hot coffee and biscuits waiting for them in the kitchen!
2. Your devices should be **password protected**.... always. If you lose your phone and there is no password, thieves can not only empty your personal bank account, but potentially that of your company, as well. Insist that colleagues and suppliers follow the same rule, if they have access to sensitive folders.

## Mid-Day & Energy

1. Do you have the possibility of **exercising** in your home? Trampolines, exercise bikes, gardening, gym-equipment that anchors on doorframes, push-ups.... Create a routine to energise your day.

2. **Drink lots of water:** ideally from a large jug on your desk. Many symptoms of fatigue are really symptoms of dehydration.
3. During working hours, it is wise to make the fridge or food-cupboard a **No-Go area**.... Perhaps even the entire kitchen. When homeworking, it's all too easy to consume a lot of calories, and there is no commute to walk it off.
4. **Air:** It's very wise to get some fresh air at lunchtime. If you cannot go outside, at least open the windows. This is also a great time to exercise. Working in the garden (or with plants on a terrace) is a great way to combat stress and anxiety. Fresh air and sunlight are a boost to mental energy and also to your immune system.
5. **Carbs:** It's unwise to eat a lot of carbs at lunchtime, or you may be sleepy all afternoon. For most people, salads are better than sandwiches. Homeworking can be a great opportunity to eat healthily.... but also, to lose all semblance of routine and self-control! Your choice!
6. **Self-worth:** Whatever is happening, stay loyal to yourself. This is a time when self-worth is deeper than self-esteem. Maybe read a few pages of "[The Self-Worth Safari](#)" at lunchtime? Unconditional self-worth is an inner anchor of great value when there is chaos all around you.

### End of Working Day

1. Define a **finish time** that works for you. Expect some resistance from colleagues and clients: not everyone understands healthy boundaries. But you are the leader in your own world, so your boundaries are your responsibility: not theirs.
2. **Set a reminder** c. 30mins before the finish time, when you consider what you have achieved today, update your weekly report, and do your planning for tomorrow.
3. Review what you **have** done: not just what you didn't get finished, or even started. What projects have moved forward? What's your focus for the **next** day? Some people find it useful to write that down. First, because you'll have some headspace for the rest of your day without worrying about forgetting something. Second, on the following day, you'll have some written guidance that will help you organise your work and your day (as these notes may refer to work as well as other activities).
4. **Put notifications on Mute.** Otherwise, you are leaving the door open to clients and colleagues interrupting your evening.
5. If you can, **switch off** and physically go outside, even for just a few minutes. This will serve to demarcate the end of your day, just as a commute does for people working in offices.

## B: WORKING TOGETHER

### Things to Agree with Colleagues and Clients... if you can!

1. **Clear priorities and expectations:** In a remote setting, clarity of expectation is paramount. Unlike in a traditional “office”, they cannot see how hard you are working, and you don’t bump into them at the coffee-machine to ask questions. So, there needs to be clarity about expectations: ideally in a weekly call with them, even daily when things are fast-moving. The guiding question: *What do we want to see end of day/ week?*
2. While some dinosaurs will still try to control by hours (even using cameras and keyboard-monitors to check you are actually working!), sooner or later they will find this is impossible (or will themselves become history). So, the key to success is managing by **clear daily/weekly outputs**, not by time-monitoring.
3. Even if you don’t have to, **do a weekly report**, with the highlights at the top. This makes the value of your work more visible and also sharpens your own focus. So why not be proactive, and do it even before you are asked? Even if your boss or client does not read it, the report reassures them that you are still focused on your job.
4. **Messaging apps:** Can we try to keep routine communication via emails and/or workflow apps, keeping WhatsApp and Skype messages for urgent / high-priority stuff? Otherwise the multiplicity of media will be a recipe for distraction, plus message threads get lost.
5. **Weekly team Zoom or WebEx?** Ideally on Monday morning? Or is there a better time? Who manages the agenda and the actions? Could this be you? Again, there are opportunities here to demonstrate leadership and to be useful, and so to enhance the value of your work. Your boss probably has enough on their plate... so consider stepping up (but check with them first!)
6. In general, **crank up the communication** e.g. a daily huddle. Consider a 10min call early or late in the day. Or at least a few times per week. If you can build a routine with your boss, all the better. Remember, we need to compensate for those lost “water-cooler moments”. Also, many bosses just don’t know how to manage remote teams, it’s often a new experience for them.
7. Many managers **fear** that remote workers are not really working, but just fitting in the minimum around home projects (or even another work activity). A frank conversation about this can be reassuring for everyone; particularly when coupled with weekly reports and frequent communication.
8. When it comes to close collaboration, **working together over a draft** (in a shared folder or app) is better than exchanging finished, polished material. Consider planning 30-50min chunks of time to do this. You build closer relationships **and** get exchange of ideas.

9. Do a **lunch WebEx or Zoom**. This can be social, just as a normal team lunch would be. Your colleagues may be experiencing lots of stress and uncertainty that they may not wish to show. Many struggle with homeworking. Consider sending them this guide, or other tools to help them. (This goes for your family members, too.)
10. With a bit of practice, you can do **30-min calls** (or shorter). The experience of time in virtual space is quite different to face-to-face meetings. As a rule of thumb, time in a phone call or video-call is experienced as c. three times faster than in-person.

*Need some team training on virtual collaboration? We have a global network of trainers at Self Worth Academy, all working remotely. Email [john@SelfWorthAcademy.com](mailto:john@SelfWorthAcademy.com)*

### Written Communication

1. You will probably be relying more on written communication than ever before. One of the key things missing in emails and texts is **tone of voice**. For example, just imagine all the ways your boss / client can ask you “*Why are you doing that now?*” (Even with emojis :). So; think about the tone of each sentence before you hit Send.
2. Therefore, consider using **calls for sensitive exchanges**, rather than emails or texts. This allows not only for tone of voice, but also for wrong impressions to be swiftly corrected, and unintended effects to be discussed on the spot.
3. For any substantial email or text: start with **Why**. “The purpose of this email is...”, or “As I understand it, the key issue is...” If you need to explain the issue / goal / objective, then please do so first. This helps the reader to understand your proposed solution.
4. Be careful with imperatives... like the one I’ve just used! It’s just about OK on a tips list or user manual, but in normal communication imperatives sound abrupt / authoritarian / commanding / annoying. For example, it’s better to write “a video call would be best”, rather than “use a video call”.
5. If you are angry or upset, then perhaps put that email in the **Drafts folder** until tomorrow, before you send it. It takes weeks and months to build a relationship, and only minutes to destroy it.



## C: CLIENT RELATIONSHIPS

1. **Value Mindset:** With homeworking, it's very easy to adopt an attitude of "meeting requirements". However, top professionals always go further than merely meeting requirements: they look for ways to be useful and to add value. This is self-worth in action. What is your mindset? Are you just trying to "get by", or are you focused on adding value? Where is this value visible?
2. Check with your clients **how** they like to communicate. Some will prefer calls; others will prefer emails or status reports.
3. Show progress / achievement **weekly**, whether this is requested or not. As already noted, a weekly report is a good idea – even better if it's your initiative.
4. Keep the focus on your **client's** objectives, rather than chasing ratings of your own performance or contribution. Self-preoccupation just weakens your credibility. This is one of the key differences between self-esteem-based client work, and self-worth-based work: the latter is less needy for validation. (More about this in Chapter 5 of "The Self-Worth Safari").
5. Some clients fear that remote suppliers are not really focused on their needs, and are just **fitting in** work around their own lifestyle or other projects. Having a frank conversation early on about outcomes and concerns can help prevent a lot of problems later.
6. Your clients may be **experiencing all the same stress and uncertainty** that you are. Many are struggling with homeworking, too. Consider sending them this guide, or other tools to help them.

*Need some help managing clients remotely? Such as running reviews, engaging with senior stakeholders or managing scope? Email [john@SelfWorthAcademy.com](mailto:john@SelfWorthAcademy.com)*

## D: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

1. Set a goal for the **number of conversations per day**. If business is built from the molecules of trusted relationships, then conversations are the atoms of these molecules.
2. You can start any conversation by being **interested** in what other people or organisations are doing. What **question** can you ask, as a reason for your call or message? It's easier to reach out with questions, than with offers, or pitches.

3. **Networking** does not stop just because you are homeworking. You can network very effectively by phone and digital means. When you do your weekly planning, add networking tasks.

*For an online learning course on “Value-Centred Networking in the 21st Century”, see [here](#). This course addresses online networking, as well as traditional in-person meetings.*

4. Focus on **tangible, early benefits** (or risks avoided). At times like this, short-term gains (or flexibility/capacity) are more appreciated than long-term benefits. For the same reason, this is probably **not** the time for abstract leadership theory or philosophy: the eyes of many people are on survival. (However, there is a place for initiatives that motivate people, and inspire them.)
5. For the same reason, focus on how you can add value by **reducing cost or risk**. When people are stressed, they are more likely to buy a service that reduces cost, rather than one that increases revenue. Cost-savings are usually immediate and have a positive effect on cashflow. Revenue gains are nearly always in the future and at best, are probable rather than certain. So how can you help them to reduce cost?
6. **Look for partners** and allies, not just for clients. Partners can position you to many clients, thereby saving you hours of marketing time.
7. Get your head around a **new digital world**: a future in which many business practices will not go back to life B.V. (Before Virus). We are now living in a virtual age of A.V. (After Virus). For example, how much training will ever again happen in a training room? Rather than thinking of current reality as a “blip”, make the leap into a future state and get “early mover” advantage. How can you reposition? How can you re-invent your services?

*Need some help with your business development? Online networking, designing an outreach program, virtual partnerships, keeping in touch, re-inventing services...etc? Email [john@SelfWorthAcademy.com](mailto:john@SelfWorthAcademy.com)*

## **E: SOCIAL ENERGY & PREVENTING ISOLATION**

1. **Use video** as much as possible, so that you get the fullest, richest communication. It's worth remembering that if people suddenly have homeworking thrust upon them, then paranoia and anxiety can easily set in. Video calls are closest to in-person conversations.
2. **Use email** for information exchange and details; maximise the “**conversation time**” for the things that really matter.

3. **Extraverts** suffer disproportionately from isolation (particularly in the morning), just as introverts often suffer in open-plan offices. Your normally bubbly, sociable colleague may be really struggling in isolation. Consider doing morning calls, with video, to energise the extraverts. They need social energy to get their day under way.
4. **Do calls while walking.** Not only does this give you (and the dog) some exercise, you will often have a more creative conversation, when not stuck staring at your screen.
5. **Have a routine** to your day: just as you would if you had to commute to work. Take defined coffee-breaks, and respect your work (and home) space as much as possible. Perhaps do calls with friends during breaks?
6. Other than at defined break-times, **be wary of news-binging** or social media (“weapons of mass distraction”). Energy comes by focusing on what you CAN control, not what you cannot.
7. **Give yourself a break!** At times, it may be hard working from home or alone, or with kids under your feet. So please be kind to yourself. Anyone in your situation would probably find it tough. This is a time for self-worth i.e. an attitude of loyal friendship with yourself, no matter what is happening around you.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

Need some support in these challenging times? Check out our **online events** [here](#).

Topics covered on webinars and summits include:

- Adapting your **value-proposition** for a virtual economy
- **The art of virtual selling:** Do’s and Don’t of online sales pitches and presentations
- Engaging with virtual **partners**
- Using **LinkedIn** for your networking
- **Pricing:** how to avoid discounting your value
- **Time-management** in a crowded homeworking space
- Making **virtual meetings** more engaging
- Human-centered ways to **keep in touch**
- Value-centred **online networking** (i.e. not just LinkedIn)
- Tough decisions? Focus on the **Four Cs:** Clients, Costs, Cash and Connection
- Taking care of your **energy** levels, dealing with anxiety
- **Looking beyond Covid-19:** reinventing for the business of the future

We also have a talented network of self-worth associates, with a wide range of skills and languages to suit your needs. To connect, please [click here](#) to book a call.

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