

# How to reduce social isolation while working from home

A big part of work is about being human and needing social connection, however, the Covid-19 pandemic and country lockdown has forced employers and employees alike to implement remote working.



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“Working remotely, especially from home, is in most circumstances a difficult task, combined with social isolation, this becomes an even more daunting task. It’s easy to feel the effects of social isolation and a lack of different interactions in your daily routines and therefore it is important to combat the isolating effects by having a plan”, says Lyndy van den Barselaar, managing director at ManpowerGroup South Africa.

Van den Barselaar offers some specific advice on how to stay connected beyond task-oriented work:

## **Be social**

Not every interaction with a co-worker needs to have an explicit work function. The watercooler effect has an important

place in bringing people together. But in a digital world, that needs to be fostered by creating a place where it's permissible to open up, share photos of pets or children or simply to blow off steam.

"Set up a weekly check-in team meeting just to catch up. It's a good idea to initiate video calls where possible as we all need some face-to-face time every now and again," suggests van den Barselaar.

### **Stick to a quitting time**

Working all the time can make anyone feel disconnected from the larger web of social frameworks. Setting and maintaining a time to stop work for the day will allow you to reconnect with family, get in touch with friends or even take a walk in your garden to get a breath of fresh air.

### **Seek out a (remote) mentor**

For people struggling to adapt, there's no reason to go at it alone. Assigning or seeking out mentors can prevent someone from spiralling into problems. "Change and working remotely is a difficult process for anyone but asking for help and some guidance can ease the process," adds van den Barselaar.

### **Grow your network**

Socialising doesn't just take place with co-workers. Your extended network of professional connections also provide valuable social contact, and you can continue to build that network through digital platforms. Make use of the online tools available such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Skype to schedule video meetings with peers in the same industry as you. This will also help you to stay on top of changes in your industry.

### **Take an actual lunch**

When in the office, most of us take a hurried lunch by ourselves at our desks. At home, you have the luxury of making a real meal in your kitchen and sitting down at your dining room table. "Use this time to make lunch and connect with people who are either at home with you or through scheduling an online chat with a friend or family member," suggests van den Barselaar.

These measures are important not only personally, but also professionally. According to a study published in Harvard Business Review, 35% of the variation in a team's performance can be accounted for simply by the number of exchanges among team members, and the "right" number of exchanges in a team is as many as dozens per working hour. "So go ahead, indulge in social conversations with your co-workers and feel and perform better as a result of it," concludes van den Barselaar.

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