Working from home

Below are a number of tips, some of which might suit you and your team, some of which might not. These should be viewed as a pic-an-mix selection of tips around the themes of working with purpose, being adaptable, being efficient, and having a focus on wellbeing.

Working with purpose

Meeting Agenda
Ensure every meeting has an agenda – shared prior to the meeting - allocate specific time slots to each point on the agenda to help remain on time and achieve meeting purpose.

Understand the purpose of your meetings
Keep your meetings truly focussed with clear outcomes by answering the following, "At the end of the meeting we will have …" Be specific, clear and realistic. Summarise your actions and next steps at the end of each meeting.

Create a Team Challenge
Challenge your team mates to an exercise challenge that gets everybody contributing and supports wellbeing. Set a Goal (e.g. 1000 miles in a month / xx number of steps in a month). Keep a running total throughout the month as the team contributes as little or as much as possible.

Team Charter
As a team, create a Team Charter, what does the team do, how do they do it, and what do they want to be known for? A great activity to complete as part of a team meeting and a chance for colleagues to link our Future State to their day to day roles.

MS Team Channels / Chats
Share ideas in one place by setting up Channel or use a meeting Chat where colleagues can constantly add ideas and reduce email traffic.

MS Teams Whiteboard
When in a meeting use the Whiteboard to collate colleagues ideas, anyone in the meeting can type onto the Whiteboard and then the Whiteboard can be saved.

Replicate the office environment
Set up a virtual office with colleagues and bring back the feelings of working as part of a team. Arrange a period of time where you all log into MS Teams but you all carry on with your normal working day - even carrying out all of the advantages of working from home such as putting the washing on, collecting parcels. If anyone wants to ask anything they have someone to hand as well as combatting the feeling that we're working on our own.

Use Voting Buttons
Using the Voting Buttons in Outlook is an ideal way to obtain colleagues views on a subject. Using these buttons mean that you'll get concise responses to a question as well as making it quick and easy for people to respond to you. Simply open up a new email, click on the *Options* tab and click on *Use Voting Buttons.*

Be Adaptable

Mix it up
Try working or even just sitting somewhere different at home. Change seats to make the most of the natural light changes that occur during a day, or use a different cup, have something different for lunch, get your mind and body used to small changes to your environment.

Support others to adapt
If you're working outside what might be deemed standard working hours include something similar to this on your email
"I work flexibly and I am sending this email now as it suits my working hours to do so. I do not expect you to read, reply or action the email outside your working hours."

Be Efficient

45 minute meetings
Schedule meetings for 45 minutes (and stick to the time). This will allow us time to reflect, take a break from our screens, stretch our legs etc between meetings. If you're struggling to keep to time, allocate someone the role of time keeper and they're responsibility is to ensure the meeting keeps to the agenda.

Utilizing the 'status tab'
Use the different statuses in MS Teams to give your-self some undisturbed time for research, reading or focussed activity.

To Do list
a) Allocate time at the end of a day to draw up your to do list and prioritise the key actions for the following day, this will give you opportunity to start the day clearly focussed.
b) Mix up the tasks on your to do list. As well as the high priority tasks include other tasks that break up the day and contribute towards your own personal growth.

Focussed Sprints
Brains are more productive in focused sprints. Try batching similar tasks in no more than 90 minute chunks and then either rest or focus on easier tasks for 20 minutes.

Don't hold a meeting if it's not required
If you've arranged a meeting and you find that there is no update or updates can be communicated via a different method, why not gift the time back to the attendees and either cancel the meeting or send a note out explaining it's not required.

Code your internal email
Agree as a team different codes or abbreviations that could be added to your internal email subject lines that make it really quick for the reader to assess what they need to do with the email.
Codes might be Not For Now (NFN), PRT (Please Read Today) Keep As A Reminder (KAAR), Exclamation marks to signify urgency, etc.

Turning your Smartphone to Greyscale
If you're having trouble focussing and finding the allure of your smartphone too much a tip that might help is to change the colours on the screen to Grey in Settings. The thought behind this is that your phone will be less attractive to use meaning that you won't want to keep picking it up to use it. .

Stay focussed
A fun way to stay focussed and remove the temptation of Smartphones is through apps like *Forest.* The app allows you to set a timer (min. 10 mins) and enables you to plant a virtual tree seed. If you open any other app whilst on this timer the tree will die. Once you've completed the timer you've set for yourself, the tree survives, enabling you to build up your forest. You can also collect points and eventually use those points to plant a real tree. There are plenty of other apps available that can help you to limit your smartphone usage. *Offtime*, *Stay Focused*, and *Flipd* are just some of the apps available.

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Get ready for a day in the office
To ensure that you start a day fresh and are not overwhelmed by various jobs you need to do, ensure you complete all of the chores such as washing up and tidying the night before.

Schedule lunch
If you're finding that you don't have time for lunch or a break, schedule it into your calendar. Then choose how you spend it - eating lunch, going for a walk, reading a book. Don't make it optional to have a lunch break, make it mandatory. Why not align your lunch time with colleagues and take the opportunity to catch with team mates whilst having lunch together virtually.

Commute to work (without the traffic)
Start and end the day with a 30 minute walk, this will energise you as well as provide you with a perfect opportunity to unwind and help separate home and work.

Take screen breaks
Set a timer that goes off every 20 minutes, when it goes off look away from the screen and blink 10-20 times to prevent dry eyes/ screen headaches and stretch or stand up.

Pack up your equipment
If it's possible, physically pack up your laptop and equipment at the end of the day rather than leaving out or moving to one side.

Work from a virtual Coffee Shop
There are lots of different apps or websites that provide ambient background noise in the form of coffee shops. It can boost creativity, productivity, as well make you feel less alone. There are lots of different sites such as Coffitivity.com and rainycafe.com. Spotify also have playlists such as *Coffee Shop Background Noise for Studying.*

Combining exercise with work
If you want to get out and about during the day but feel that you want to utilise this time for something other than relaxation why not listen to a podcast, Ted Talk or catch up on an linkedIn learning session. Many podcasts can be downloaded but some will use the data allowance you have on your phone.

Don't forget to take annual leave
Although we're spending more time at home, we shouldn't forget that we still need to take regular annual leave so that we can take a complete break from work. Regular time away from work will re-energise you and even if you're not going away it will still enable you to take a break from your laptop.