

Speaker 1 ([00:04](#)):

Please stand by, we are about to begin. Thank you for joining us for today's webinar, Work at Home: Keys to Success, brought to you by Cigna. Please note that copies of the presentation slides and handouts are available for download in the dropdown box on the lower left side of the player window. Our presenter today is Samantha Smith. Samantha has worked as an educator and seminar presenter for over 10 years. She facilitates sessions in the US and abroad to promote healthy, balanced living, stress and time management, and mindfulness. She has also participated in national and international relief projects, and worked as an EAP counselor, assisting employees to manage the challenges of their work and personal lives. And now, Ms. Samantha Smith.

Samantha Smith ([00:53](#)):

Great. Thank you so much, and thank you to each of you for tuning in today. Welcome to Work at Home: Keys to Success. And gosh, I'm sure that like me, you're finding that daily life has changed radically in a very short space of time, hasn't it? While we are finding our way, we're learning how to adapt to these ongoing changes, there can be challenges. And I think that the uncertainty and disruption can feel especially stressful when it comes to managing work place changes. So if you've suddenly been transitioned to a work-at-home arrangement there will be aspects of your work experience that are perhaps new and different. And the challenge of acclimating to this new arrangement can be compounded by all the unexpected changes to home life that have also come with all of those COVID-19 precautions. You may find yourself working side by side with your partner or your roommates. You may have children, teens, and pets with you all day every day in your home, or needing your attention on some level. So being able to just focus, let alone develop work-at-home routines, may feel like an impossible, or at least an overwhelming task right now. So talking, um, together today, we want to really help you to navigate these challenges, and, and help you to prepare to be as successful as you can be.

Samantha Smith ([02:24](#)):

So let's go over what we have planned for our time together today. We're gonna be reviewing factors that support a successful transition to virtual work. We're gonna be evaluating your work practices and your work environment to help maximize success. And we're gonna be discussing ways to stay connected with your teams, your manager, and even those all-important career goals. And then we're gonna be exploring how to maintain our own well being, and perhaps that of our family, as we balance being a virtual worker, as well as our personal lives and family member lives.

Samantha Smith ([03:02](#)):

All right, so going virtual. Whether you'd been hoping to work from home someday, or you are facing this as a change that wasn't exactly anticipated, or even sought after, it's important to give yourself time to adjust. Perhaps just being a little kinder to yourself than you may usually be. Change of any sort can be difficult, can't it? Shifting to working at home in the midst of the rest of the constant, unprecedented, and impactful changes we're experiencing right now can feel overwhelming. Can even trigger an array of emotions and reactions, even for those of us who may usually be very grounded and centered. And this was brought home to me recently when my neighbor hailed me from across the street. I was just snatching five minutes in the sunshine to enjoy a bowl of oatmeal, um, and I said, "Yeah, sure come on over. Uh, um, stay six feet away." (laughs) So she did. And the long and the short of it was she was requesting advice for her own daughter, a middle-age professional who, um, in my neighbor's words, had just experienced a meltdown. And- and in many ways this was related to the changes and the

concerns around the whole COVID-19 situation, and trying to juggle that along with her work, um, situation, too.

Samantha Smith ([04:24](#)):

And so it just underscore for me how this can get to the best of us at times, right? We- we can feel upended without that stability of our office routines and norms. We might experience a sense of loss. Maybe loss for how we used to do things, or the people that we saw everyday. Maybe even concern over family members or friends who may be sick themselves. Um, there may be feelings of frustration or irritation about tackling all of this on the fly, or- or trying to navigate working and caring for kids at the same time. You may perhaps feel nervous about how you're gonna succeed in this new environment. So it's- it's important to recognize that- that all of these feelings, they're, they're normal reactions to change. You know, that primitive danger-avoiding part of our brains, it- it- it hates disruptions. It doesn't like those unknowns, especially in important areas of our lives such as our work.

Samantha Smith ([05:24](#)):

And in this perfect storm of change, uncertainty, lack of control, sometimes we just feel downright powerless. And- and that can make us anxious. But while it might take a little time, just know that you can, and you will adapt, right? This too shall pass. It may not be perfect right away, but gradually you're gonna figure out how to reintroduce some structure and predictability into your day. Remember, you're not alone with this challenge. You're gonna find systems that will help you to successfully manage this personal and professional juggling act. I think that establishing at the outset the best practices that we'll be discussing today can help smooth the way ahead.

Samantha Smith ([06:11](#)):

So how do we find our footing in this situation? Let's identify and address the key aspects of what you're gonna need in order to be successful, and help to ease this transition. First and foremost, be aware of your resources, and clarify with your employer if there's any area of uncertainty, such as how is the internet connection managed now that you're working at home? Do you order your office supplies or is the company gonna do that for you and have them mailed out? What IT and other supports are available? How do you access these? Are there coworkers that you can turn to for help with questions and concerns? Knowing how to get the resources that we need in times like this can really help relieve that natural sense of worry that can come up. And then it's important to understand expectations. Will your job requirements, duties, policies all be the same? When and how will you interact with your manager, your coworkers? How are meetings handled?

Samantha Smith ([07:17](#)):

Now don't just guess on these things. Have a chat with your manager, ask the questions, right? Having a clear understanding can really make the transition easier, and also set a precedent of clear communication going forward. So be proactive. There will always be new questions about details, logistics, resources. So develop the habit right away of being proactive about getting what you need, and comfortable reaching out if you're unsure. So don't wait for someone to notice that you're struggling. Make contact with your manager, or with others on your team. Ask for what you need, because they might be currently preoccupied with their own challenges, and not so readily able to notice when you're struggling, unless you speak up. And lastly, stay flexible if you can. Working outside the office, yeah, it's gonna be different at times, right? Be attent- intentional about trying different approaches until you start to find that rhythm and the structure that works for you. And for the rest of

the presentation I want to share some strategies, some tips, for maximizing professional and personal well being in a virtual setting. The Success Factors Checklist handout is a great takeaway of these tips and more.

Samantha Smith ([08:41](#)):

So first and foremost, you want to create a setup that really helps you stay focused and on task. Address childcare. Now under traditional circumstances we just simply advise just establish childcare, simple as that, right? But today, that might not be so straight forward. If you're in a situation where your children are at home, explore current guidelines and policies with your manager. Understand what flexibilities are possible. You may need to tag team with your partner or others. I know my niece back in the UK is considered an essential worker, but she's also a single mom, and so getting creative with her neighbor, who's also a single mom, um, and- and supporting each other around caring for their two girls has really been critical, right? So sometimes it is just getting creative in these situations and seeing what we can make work. So I've had several parents share with me over the past few weeks that using structure and routine to shape the day is key. Such as having consistent sleep and wake times. Still having your child dress as if they're going to school. You know, you look the part, you feel the part, you play the part, right? And if there are no online classes, arrange for more involved projects or activities to keep children occupied and learning each day.

Samantha Smith ([10:05](#)):

Create dedicated office space. Now if possible a set pro- quiet room with a door (laughs) that you can close, um, can it really help keep you physically and mentally separated out from the rest of the home. And that- that would be best. But if that isn't possible, designate a space for yourself that's as far away from busy areas as possible, just to minimize those distractions. You know, you might be able to use things like bookshelves, a divider screen, or even rig up a curtain. Now check your company's policies. They may have specifications related to data privacy, equipment security, things like that. Be sure you and your surroundings are as neat and tidy as possible, and appropriate for video calls, 'cause I'm sure a lot of you will be- be utilizing those over the coming week. And mind your ergonomics, right? Forget about this oftentimes, but you really want to have supportive seating, good lighting, and that right computer distance with the right angles. You're space and your bodit- budget may be dictating what's possible, but try to create a setup that's not only comfortable and appealing, but is also protecting your health, your body. So be ready to make adjustments if you start noticing some pain or strain. Um, and it may be an idea just to even search ergonomics online for detailed tips.

Samantha Smith ([11:30](#)):

And think about this for yourself, too. Dressing for success, right? Although many see sweatpants and bunny slippers as one of those perks of working at home now, um, just like for our kids, be conscious of how your mindset is affected by what you wear. You may not need a suit and a tie, but recognize what helps you to feel motivated and energized. Now I promise you that even though I'm working from home today, I don't have my PJs on. I've even shoned up and showered and brushed my teeth, right? So finally, when you were thinking about all of these different things in maximizing our professional success and setting the stage, request training if you're unsure of how to use a particular system, program, or type of technology. Now it can be tempting, can't it, to rely on workarounds? Uh, but usually your efficiency is gonna suffer, over time at least, and stress levels are gonna go up. So don't just avoid it, get some help to get yourself up to speed.

Samantha Smith ([12:38](#)):

All right, how else can we maximize our professional success? Without office norms in play it's up to you to set a tone of professionalism. So organize your day. Work priorities may be the same, but working at home requires you to supply the disciplines that's needed to achieve them, and structure can help keep us on track. The goal is to find the system that works best for you, but consider some basic strategies, such as maybe ending each day with a review of where you're at, what you've accomplished, and then creating that prioritized task list for the next day. Schedule things as if you're in the office, including breaks to get up, move around, maybe eat. And evaluate how you work best, and schedule you're most challenging task at your pu- peak performance hours. Build in motivators. You know, working at home sometimes means you may also need to supply more of that in-the-moment encouragement. So figure out what feels like a virtual high five for you. Maybe it's the old paper and pen version of crossing something off your list, or perhaps connecting with a coworker, taking a simple break, right? Figure out what feels like a reward for you, and use that to energize and propel yourself through those tough tasks.

Samantha Smith ([14:05](#)):

Now for me it's real simple things. It's like having an old fashioned tea break, or perhaps a more energizing dance break with my cat. She loves those. Um, but be prepared, speaking of cats, be prepared for distractions. Things like meowing cats, barking dogs, ringing doorbells, TV on in the background, right? Kids wandering by, or even those visible home to-dos. Things like dirty dishes stacked up in the sink. So try to anticipate and get ahead of disrupters. Things like leaving a note for the delivery person, getting dishes done before clocking in, or better yet, where possible, delegate those dishes to another family member who may have more time on their hands. Perhaps use break times to get up and accomplish some lingering tasks. Close your door or use headphones to block out disrupting sounds, and really try and stay focused on your work that way. Create and maintain boundaries with family members, and- and even friends. Talk about when you can interact, and when you can't. Some friends may not be working right now, they may think it's a free for all to be in touch with you at all hours of the day. So you may need to be flexible about this in the current environment, especially if you have kids in the home. But a closed door, maybe a Do Not Disturb sign, that could help during important tasks or meetings.

Samantha Smith ([15:31](#)):

Encourage others to communicate with you as if you were at the office. Now if you have a pet, set a routine with them, too. Separate them from your work area, or if they're becoming too distracting. Yes, my kitty is currently on the other end of the house, as she otherwise likes to chime in if she hears me talking. So setting up a well functioning office is likely to be a work in progress for some time. Be patient, again, be kind to yourself, and your family members, and think creatively to develop your own best practices. It may be worth mentioning here, the idea of setting boundaries around listening to news coverage regarding the coronavirus. You know, consider setting limits with yourself to prevent raising angst around the ongoing situation. 'Cause we may be dealing with this for some time, so we really need to pace ourselves. And I think it's also really important if we have kids in our home, not to be subjecting them to a constant barrage of anxiety producing noise, and sometimes scary, and even maybe sensationalized news reports.

Samantha Smith ([16:44](#)):

We also know that work success isn't only about the work. Most humans are wired to be social. Yes, even us introverts. And in virtual settings it can be a struggle to maintain the energy and cohesive team connections that happen naturally in an office. It takes effort, doesn't it? So what can we do? Well one thing is, we can be accessible, we can be responsive. The more virtual we are, the less sure we can be

about what others are doing. And this can over time start to erode working relationships. So be that person who's easy to reach quickly, and respond in kind. Send an email- uh, an email alert, or use an out of the office or busy setting to speak for you if you're unavailable. Try and deliver work on time, and be an active contributor in meetings. Be proactive about out of sight, out of mind fears. Check in regularly with your manager. Be your own advocate. Don't be shy. Describe your successes, and what you've accomplished. Ask for opportunities to show your talents, to grow, to make connections. And touch base on a personal level.

Samantha Smith ([17:59](#)):

Studies confirm that virtual interactions end up being more impersonal, more business like, and less friendly than in person interactions. So make it a habit to connect with team mates regularly, be it work-related, or even just that note of hello, and taking a moment, valuable moment, to really just check in and ask about their day, what's happening in their world. Pick up the phone. Better yet, initiate a video chat. Business consultants know that when it comes to brainstorming, problem solving, and relationship building, face to face contact is 10 times more effective than the phone. And yet the phone is 10 times more effective than email. So don't just constantly rely on the email.

Samantha Smith ([18:48](#)):

Notice and acknowledge effort and success. It's tricky, isn't it, to labor away in isolation, feeling that no one's really noticing, or that it doesn't really matter. So shout out for a job well done, either directly to a coworker, or in team meetings, or group emails, sends a valuable encouraging message. You know, we're all experiencing new challenges, yeah, new hurdles. So reaching out is especially important during this time. Just this past week I went through a drive through pharmacy, and I could just tell the pharmacy tech, such a lot of tension on her face, and I realize how grateful I was that I was able to pick up my meditation still. And so I just said to her, you know, "Hi. Thank you for being here." And just in saying that, and I actually thanked her for the [inaudible 00:19:39] difference that she's making in our community, um, she started to smile, her eyes lit up, and the energy just completely shifted in her body. And also for me, too, you know? It felt good to be able to acknowledge her and appreciate her. So notice that, not just in your work life, but also in your personal life right now. Whether it's grocery store clerks, or, um, bank clerks, or pharmacy folks, or- and definitely all of those folks on the frontline right now in emergency services and health care workers.

Samantha Smith ([20:13](#)):

So let's talk about maximizing our well being. Ah, yes, the photo on this slide, this is so me. The woman, right, prepping her greens every day for a green smoothie, no groaning. Or maybe a salad, or cutting up some fresh fruit to snack on. Eating healthily real does make a difference to how we feel, our energy levels, even our immune system functioning. So when working from home we do ha- tend to have more control over our diets. And there are fewer temptations of those celebratory cakes, vending machines, things like that. But, it can also bring some unexpected challenges, can't it, to our physical well being. You know, less activity is one of them. It can be an issue when all those incidental movements of a day at the office are eliminated. And working at home allows access to your kitchen the whole day through, doesn't it? And that can be a problem for some.

Samantha Smith ([21:12](#)):

So let's make the healthy choices the easy ones. You know, some people like to make a lu- uh, make a lunch in the morning, or perhaps even the night before, just as if you're going into the office still. And

this can help to control your portion sizes, balance your nutrition, and cuts out some of that last minute, uh, you know, all of a sudden I'm starving and I'm just gonna eat whatever I can lay my hands on type of thing. So one thing I would say is don't keep healthy snacks in the house if that's possible. [inaudible 00:21:42] just stuff you know you can't resist that's unhealthy, just don't have them in your home. Now that may not work if you have demands of others in your home saying that they want to have those things. So at least keep them out of your sight lines.

Samantha Smith (21:57):

And practice conscious eating. It's easy to overeat, forget to eat, or even eat mindlessly in front of your computer at home. So try to check in with yourself when you're reaching for food, you know? Asking yourself, "Am I hungry?" Sometimes we're thirsty and we mistake it for hunger. So try drinking a glass of water first. Engaging in emotional or boredom eating. You know, try a diversion. Get up and move around, do some deep breathing, some stretching. Maybe get a hot cup of comforting tea. Carving out specific times for eating can make meals and snacks much more satisfying. And also, it reduces that likelihood of grazing throughout the day.

Samantha Smith (22:40):

Then I'm gonna encourage you to put bursts of movement into your day, right? Take a few minutes for a quick run up and down the stairs, doing a few squats or stretches, weight curls at your desk. You know, whatever works for you. Research says that a few minutes of activity every 30 minutes is optimal. But try for whatever makes sense and is permissible in your job role. So s- set a timer, you know, that you [inaudible 00:23:05] helps you not to lose track in a busy day. Or I have a device on my wrist that end up yelling at me if I've been sitting for over an hour at a time. But ultimately try and take advantage of your location when you're home. You know, since maybe for some of us no one else is around, so you might not feel so silly doing leg lifts or squats, or for me, dancing around my home, or running in circles in my back garden.

Samantha Smith (23:28):

Um, turn that unused commute time into your committed workout time, not unending listening to the news. Um, so use your breaks, even your lunch hour, to be physically active. And where possible, try and get outside. You know, walking the dog. Or even if you don't have a dog, just go for a walk. Garden, mow the lawn, take a run or jog, something, right? Ride your bike, if- if that's possible where you live, that- that's a great way. But even if you just have a balcony that you can go out on, just ge- getting some fresh air and sunshine each day can really help. So overall, just try to notice and course correct. When your food, your activity choices are moving away from what you know to be healthy, just do a, make a little adjustment. Because, you know, natural ex- exercise really is such a great natural de stressor, so just keeping you in a good place mentally as well as physically.

Samantha Smith (24:24):

And finally, let's talk for a moment about work/life balance. So the idea of balance can suggest this precision point at which, uh, work needs and duties align perfectly with personal needs and duties. Well guess what? That point doesn't actually exist. Balance is, is quite fluid, isn't it? And- and a constant adjustment to demands and desires. That's why I like the analogy of a gymnast walking on the balance beam, sometimes leave- leaning hard to one side, sometimes making those small course corrections. In today's environment we're all doing a lot of learning, but the trick is to learn to notice those signs that you're leaning in one direction too far for too long. So signs of overworking include rarely taking breaks,

consistently working beyond the end of the day, and responding to, or even initiating calls or work meetings after hours.

Samantha Smith ([25:23](#)):

Overworking sometimes springs from a feeling that we need to prove ourselves by going above and beyond. But the result isn't optimal, and it can lead to burnout. So signs that more structure is needed might be having difficulty setting boundaries with family or friends during the work day. You may struggle with time management and prioritizing. Distractions can easily pull your focus, start/stop times keep varying, and your availability becomes inconsistent. Now on any given day we may be closer to one end than the other, but drifting regularly towards an extreme tells us we may need to employ some rules for ourselves, until being in that center range becomes more of our norm.

Samantha Smith ([26:07](#)):

Let's close with some key, um, some keys to help us keep our balance. So use all of your resources to find your rhythm. Ask for tips from veteran telly workers. Explore apps for time management and organizational strategies. Try time blocking and reward systems. Be honest about your challenges, and motivated to find solutions. Take those important breaks. As noted, it's not healthy or productive to sit in front of the computer all day long. Studies show that taking a break can restore our motivation, it present- it prevents decision fatigue, and it improves our creativity and productivity. So set an alarm if you have to. And bookend your day with routines. A ritual can really help reinforce the work/home separations, and create a mental shift from one mode to another. So perhaps start each day prioritizing your task list, and at the day's end turn off your computer, silence your work phones, close the door where applicable, and commit to the idea that the office is closed until tomorrow morning. You know, the mere sight and sound of simply closing up your laptop can be a cue that the workday has ended. Maybe even consider changing clothes at the end of the day.

Samantha Smith ([27:33](#)):

Counter balance isolation or overload. For some, working at home, and the context of physical distant-distancing restrictions might mean that we rarely connect with another people, especially if we're living alone. And it can be easy to grow lonely in these situations. So make an effort to engage and socialize with others outside of work. If you can't connect in person, think about sharing a meal via video. Call an old friend, join an online group. Be creative to get this core need met. Now conversely, if the house is packed jam- jam packed, sorry, with people all day, think about how to carve out time for yourself at the end of the day. Going out to a, maybe a, your garden, or a park, or spending some time on a creative project. Maybe talking a relaxing bath with the door locked, and your favorite tunes playing. What works to fill your spirit? And keep in mind, balance is an ongoing process. It's not a magic destination. You may need to keep working on finding your be- best practices. Notice what works, notice what doesn't. The Success Factors Checklist can be a good reminder. These are extraordinary times. There will be challenges, but we are not alone with them. Reach out for help when you need it, and be patient with yourself as you adapt and find your way.

Samantha Smith ([29:00](#)):

So everyone, thank you. Thank you for tuning in today. I hope that you have found the information shared to be helpful on your path to becoming a successful work-at-home employee.

Speaker 1 ([29:14](#)):

Thank you Samantha. And ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for being with us today. That concludes today's webinar.