

# How to Optimize Your WFH Experience

BY HAILEY BRINDAMOUR, ACP



**For many military spouses,** a work-from-home (WFH) job that travels with you is the professional holy grail. I spoke with five active duty and veteran spouses who work from home and shared their best advice for maximizing a remote role.

## Constant contact

When your closest contact with co-workers is via videoconference, keeping open lines of communication is vital. Be clear with management and

team members about your availability, and times they won't be able to reach you. Amber Clark, a 17-year Coast Guard spouse who has worked remotely for several years, says that setting clear and consistent expectations from the outset has been crucial to her success in the role. "Sharing expectations is key," says Clark, "and they should be shared early on, rather than right before attention is needed."

The many platforms available to remote

workers offer flexibility in communicating with co-workers. Jenny Mitchell, a longtime Navy spouse, utilizes different tools depending on the purpose. In her work-from-home position, Slack is the quickest and easiest way to reach colleagues, and she frequently takes advantage of its voice memo feature. For more sensitive or complex issues, Army spouse Victoria Thompson prefers to set up an in-person meeting. "Don't leave [those questions]

to email or text," Thompson advises, but reach out to your co-worker and schedule a face-to-face call.

In any organization, great communication depends on great leadership. Kasey Kelly works from home while caring for her disabled Army veteran spouse. She praises her management team's "transparency and openness" and adds that "supportive leadership makes a significant difference" in her ability to work effectively as a member of a multidisciplinary team.

## Eyes on the prize

While many COVID-era news stories bemoaned the indolence of remote workers, everyone I spoke with for this piece emphasized how working in their own space has made them more efficient and productive than being in-office. "Being work-from-home eliminates noise and side chatter," says Clark of her peaceful work environment, allowing her to focus more easily.

Organization is the common thread among successful remote workers, but what works for you may differ from the "ideal" scenario. Find a system that lets you prioritize important tasks and make time for longer-term projects daily while addressing more urgent and last-minute matters. That may include blocking out specific hours for focus work, completing your most challenging tasks first, or looking at your workload for the week and breaking it down by day.

Gisselle Curnutt, an Army spouse, relies on her calendar to "organize meetings, events, and block time for administrative tasks and virtual meetings,



ensuring I stay productive and balanced.” Mitchell takes time to plan out her day each morning, explaining, “I have a really clear list of goals and follow-up items, and a time frame in my head for completion each day, which really keeps me on task.”

In her nonprofit role, Kelly supports veterans and fellow military spouses daily, which gives her a strong sense of purpose and motivation. “Staying mission-focused keeps procrastination at bay,” she says.

### Enjoy the upsides

What do remote workers love most about their jobs? It’s the big things AND the little things. When Thompson’s toddler fell severely ill recently and her spouse was on out-of-town orders, her flexible schedule allowed her to get her daughter the necessary medical care without burning through her PTO.

Dealing with unforeseen

emergencies and spouses’ chaotic schedules is a big plus, but WFH also gives workers the freedom to look after their physical, mental, and emotional health. Mitchell loves that she has a view to the outside world. “I previously worked in offices with no windows and artificial lighting,” she says. “It gave me headaches and made me unhappy.” Now, she enjoys seeing the changing seasons and even has a favorite birch tree she looks at to de-stress.

Every interviewee emphasized taking time during each day for intentional wellness practices. “I’ve developed a self-care routine that includes exercising and meditating each morning before work,” says Curnutt. “It helps me feel energized and stay focused on my mission to support the military community.”

### Maximize your prospects

Your best chance of finding a

work-from-home role starts with the jobs you target. Rather than applying for every position you see, “stay focused on the roles that align with your interests and values,” says Curnutt. She believes a purposeful approach often yields the best results. Kelly adds that you should determine what’s most important to you in a job—is it the organization’s mission, schedule flexibility, salary, or something else? This will help you hone in on the right roles for you.

Once you do land the interview, practice as much as possible, ideally with another person as the “interviewer.” For video interviews, ensure your set-up has good lighting and sound; you can get an inexpensive light and place it in front of you for an instant glow-up.

Best practices for in-person interviews still apply, says Clark. Prepare by researching the company ahead of time;

you can even set a Google alert so you’ll be up-to-date on any recent news. Keep in mind that you are interviewing the organization as well, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. And while you’re not obligated to disclose your relationship to the military, be up front about any flexibility or accommodations you may need.

Curnutt, a current American Corporate Partners mentor, urges military spouses to network widely. One of the best ways to do this is by signing up for a year-long, no-cost personalized mentorship through ACP. Your mentor will work with you throughout the year to help you achieve your professional goals and define what success means to you!

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