

## Adjusting to Telework Vlog

### Transcript

- Carin Lefkowitz: All right. Hi, everybody. I'm Carin Lefkowitz. I'm a Senior Military Behavioral Health Psychologist at the Center for Deployment Psychology and I'm joined by two of my colleagues this morning. I'm with Diana Dolan, another Senior Military Behavioral Health Psychologist at CDP. And Aric Bowie, who is a Program Manager at CDP. We are here today to talk a little bit about full-time tele-work. Between the three of us, we've been doing tele-work full-time on and off for many years. And so consider ourselves to be a little bit of experts in this process. And we know from the recent COVID outbreak that many of our friends and colleagues are being tasked to work from home for the first time, often overnight without any preparation. And folks have a lot of questions and concerns about doing that. So we thought we might take this time to share some of the tips that we've put in place to stay productive and also to stay sane as we're working from home. So I'm excited to be here with my colleagues. Good morning, folks. How are you today?
- Aric Bowie: Doing well.
- Diana Dolan: Good morning. I'm good.
- Carin Lefkowitz: Good morning. Well, I thought I would get us started with just a question about how long we've each been doing this. For myself, I've been full-time tele-work for a little bit over five years. And so I've been doing this for a while. How about you, Diana?
- Diana Dolan: About the same, it'll be six years for me in May.
- Carin Lefkowitz: And how about you, Aric?
- Aric Bowie: About most of 10 years. I started around 2010 or 11, so for a while.
- Carin Lefkowitz: Yeah, it's fair to say we have some experience in this department and hopefully can share some wisdom with folks. Why don't I jump right in with the first question along those lines. One thing that I've been asked a lot by my friends and colleagues recently is how to stay productive in your workspace. Again, for folks who've just recently started doing this, they worry about getting as much work done as they did before and staying efficient. So I'm curious how you have each structured your time and your workspace to stay productive. And Aric, perhaps I'll start with you. What have you done?
- Aric Bowie: Sure. I kind of set as much self-discipline as I can while I'm in my working hours. So, between the hours of like eight and 4:30 or whatever the workday happens to be that day, I try to just maintain a focus on work. That doesn't mean I ignore everything that's happening around me because things happen and this isn't as controlled an environment as an office. But I do kind of try to keep a focus on

work. And I'll kind of compartmentalize, so I will sit at my desk and work for my desk and not from the couch or bed.

Aric Bowie: So that I'm not kind of distracted by if on the couch, there happens to be a TV in front of the couch and I'm not kind of tempted to get into that. And I think that's kind of helped a lot and kind of maintaining flexibility too. Because while I am working from home, I am the maintenance person for where I live, basically. So I can't just ignore things that are happening around me. So keep two running lists, like one for the tasks for work and one that I can't really get to, but I still needed to handle for home stuff that I can get back to after work.

Carin Lefkowitz: That makes a lot of sense. And somewhat similar to what I do. I try to keep a daily schedule. I work most days, 8:30 to 4:30, unless there's a meeting or a training that has to happen outside those times. And I'm really fortunate to have my dedicated space in my house to be able to work from there and I really make a concerted effort to just get in there at 8:30, stay there till 4:30 with the exception of some breaks, and just like you're saying, not work from other locations. I also really try to maintain that boundary by shutting my work phone off at the end of the day, shutting my computer off. I'm not so great during the work week, but definitely Friday at 4:30 everything gets shut down and I don't come back into my home office. I'm curious how that that fits in with your experience, Diana?

Diana Dolan: I second both of you. I think it's important to have a consistent schedule and you have to learn to structure your own day. So there may be days where I have structure given by meetings, but there may be days where I have nothing scheduled meeting wise and it's up to me to schedule that time. And so, I have to look at what am I going to do for this period of time and that period of time, it helps to know. I'm pretty organized, so I find that it's helpful for me to end my week by summarizing what I've done. So I make a list of the tasks accomplished, where I'm at with them and what I want to do next, because I know I'm going to forget over the weekend. And then Monday morning when I come back in, I'll reorient to what was I going to do this week?

Diana Dolan: What are the things that I need to do? And I take that and I break it out over each day of the week with what's my major task that I want to work on that day. Not that I'm not going to do email or other things, but it helps me to know what the big goal that day is. I think the other thing is consistency in not just schedule, but when I eat, when I take breaks, I try to make everything as consistent as possible. And I try like you all to close the computer or not look at it at the end of the day because I am one of those people, if I see a new email has popped up, I will absolutely go check it. So I agree with everything y'all said. And again, planning out ahead of time is key.

Carin Lefkowitz: I knew you were organized, Diana. I didn't realize you were that organized, but that is really great to hear and I'm sure there are some people who will find that helpful to kind of have that built in structure. I also appreciate what you said about keeping things consistent in terms of breaks and things like that. I try to

eat breakfast at the same time every day and lunch at the same time every day. But, one thing interestingly that I'm realizing for myself is that I need a lot of frequent short breaks over the course of the day. So I tend to work really intensely for 45 minutes or an hour and then if you're sitting in front of a computer by myself most of the time, I have to get up and go do something.

Carin Lefkowitz: Whether that's going for a quick walk, putting in a load of laundry, playing with the cats, whatever it is, I need to sort of clear my mind for five to 10 minutes and then come back and work intensely for another hour or so. And so in addition to figuring out how to stay organized, I think folks also are probably going to have to work on figuring out how to take breaks, how to use that time, their workday as well as possible. Recognizing that breaks should be a part of that. And if you are in an office, you'd be doing that by chatting with your coworker who walked by or walking to get a cup of coffee or sitting in the break room for a few minutes. So I think it's important to recognize that breaks are a part of your work from home day as well.

Diana Dolan: Absolutely. And Carin, one thing I wanted to add, it's a little different for me is I do not have a dedicated workspace. I don't live in ... the space I'm in is not big enough to have a separate study. And so that has been a challenge for me because when I first started teleworking, I did have a study. So I know there are some folks that may be out there that may not have space to set up a whole nother office from home. And so, I would say for me one of the things that's helpful is I make my setup as consistent as possible. So, I have my laptop in the same place. I have my calendar in the same place. I keep my headphones in the same place and they all pack up. I have a bag where everything can store and slide away, but when I'm working I keep the same layout and set up so that at least I have that consistency, if I don't have the same space.

Carin Lefkowitz: That is a really helpful tip because as we're chatting about some folks have been thrown into this overnight and certainly won't have their dedicated space. Even if they have the room for it in their home, they might not have that space. So I love that tip of kind of keeping things organized, keeping things consistent and just having your own personal tiny space to work in. You've sort of segued into my next question a little bit, which is how you each maintain a work life balance working from home.

Carin Lefkowitz: Some of us have different spaces, some of us don't. Things get ... the lines get blur. And Diana, if you don't mind me saying, you're a great example because we have heard your kiddos in the background a little bit. So I know that you work hard to maintain the work life balance and figure that out. So I don't know if you can speak a little bit to that and I'll start with you on how you do that.

Diana Dolan: Sure. I think maintain is an interesting word, because I think it's always a work in progress. So it implies there's always some kind of maintenance that has to be going on or some kind of adaptation that needs to be going on with that. For me, I am lucky enough that my kids are in a full-time school. And so I'm able to work as much as they are gone. And so it's about making use of the time that I

don't have them there. So one of the things that's important for me, for example, is I walk them to school, so that I can get my exercise. So that when I'm at my desk, I've started off the morning with some exercise. And then at the end of the day I'm fortunate enough to be able to meet them at the bus. So I log off right before the bus comes and I and I have that defined time.

Diana Dolan: I think, again, maintenance is a key word because I always struggle, especially with all of us working on different time zones to want to be available. To want to say, "Oh, well I could do this time or I could do that time." Because mentally I could. But as you all have seen maybe in the background there, and so it's a challenge because there are some days where, again, I want to be available when my kids are home, when I have scheduled meetings then. But, it is hard to kind of fully be present. At the same time, I have had times where my kids come up to me and said, "Momma, put the computer down. Please pay attention to me." So, that has been a challenge. And we'll talk a little bit more about COVID, I think more so with that.

Diana Dolan: But, the key for me again is consistency. So when things are not disrupted with school, to plan out my time, how I'm going to make use of the time when they're not in the house. And kind of go from there. And just accept that it's not going to be perfect, that there are going to be times when I'm not as productive during the day as I would like and sometimes I do go back after they're asleep and catch up on things and then recognize that there are going to be times similarly where I'm not as engaged with them as I would like. And there's always the next day. There's always a time in the future.

Carin Lefkowitz: I really don't appreciate your take on that and I really like the way you talked about maintenance, this idea that you're sort of, you keep going back to it and figuring out what's going to work today, what didn't work yesterday, what might work tomorrow and sort of renegotiating that balance as you need to. That makes a lot of sense to me. Aric, I don't know if some of this resonates with you or if you have different ideas about this.

Aric Bowie: Absolutely. No, I think it's ... I'm not in a controlled environment in my office, so things that are going to happen. I might get a maintenance requests at my door for my apartment or I might have an emergency come up with my fiance because she is a medical office manager and has a lot of stuff to do. So, I try to give myself a little bit of wiggle room but maintain as much structure as I can. And kind of making the mental reservation for work for the work hours. Sometimes I might have to go handle something, but I try to just keep the priority on my job while I'm working. And like Diana said, I try to structure it where I'll give myself cues for when work starts and when work ends.

Aric Bowie: And I think for me a big useful thing is exercise. So when it becomes quitting time at the end of the day, I will put my computer away and go exercise, do something that is completely removed from my job, so that I have that kind of barrier or boundary in my head about what I am not doing after a certain hour. So, it's not that endless cycle of like the computer is in my apartment, so

shouldn't I just go get it? It's done when the day is done. And it's out and it's time to work when the day begins.

Carin Lefkowitz: I like that too. And I am a huge proponent of that as well, that I usually have something planned right at my quitting time or shortly after my quitting time that physically pulls me away from my workspace. So that works for me as well. It sort of leads me into my next question, at least for me personally, which is aside from staying productive and finding that work life balance, what other obstacles have come up traditionally working from home. And for me the biggest obstacle for me is that I am a really social person. And I like having social contact and I do get to connect with a lot of coworkers virtually as we're doing right now. I mean this is typically a huge part of my day. I'm connecting virtually with my coworkers. But I do like to be physically present with folks and I like to be engaged and I don't like sitting for eight hours at a time in front of a computer.

Carin Lefkowitz: So that is always really hard for me. So for myself, one way that I've managed that is by taking those frequent breaks. And like I said, sometimes those five or 10 minute breaks are me taking a walk around the block or just sitting outside, if the weather's nice, or maybe connecting with a friend by phone. But then at the end of the day I typically have something planned. So I have my social routine every week. Monday, I have a gym class that I like to take with my friend. Tuesday, I have Quizzo with a group of friends. So I usually have a pretty good routine that I know at the end of the day I'm going to have some social contact. And I've really had to work on that quite a bit for myself because I know that's a huge obstacle for me. How about you all, Aric? What are some of the obstacles that you've run into?

Aric Bowie: I think, let me see, I'm sorry. I actually wrote something down. It didn't occur to me until I was working from home frequently, but limiting caffeine intake. I try to stop drinking any caffeine after 11 or noon, nothing after that, because I do not want to be messing up my sleep. And I think maintaining self care is really a challenge. Not comfort eating or panic eating or whatever because this is kind of a weird uncertain time.

Aric Bowie: And I know my natural impulse sometimes can be just go eat something because I'm scared. And that's just kind of maintaining a little bit of a discipline with that. And being flexible, maintaining flexibility, which is kind of interesting to say, I am disciplined at flexibility. But, to be able to bounce back and to be able to understand maybe there's something that requires 30 seconds of my time, as long as it's not something that's a big deal outside of work, I can bounce between the two. And sometimes that might even help me out with maintaining that focus at work where maybe just tech checking in with my fiance while she's at work and then coming back to my job. And then putting the phone away.

Aric Bowie: Or I don't know, doing something that's completely helpful with stress, something that helps me de-stress, because if I'm in one spot and confined or if it's a stressful time, which it is, I'll do something that is somewhat relieving. I'll

write or I'll do drawing or something, that will kind of help me to, I guess like you said, refocus back on work. So I take a little micro break and then get back to work so that I can actually do the full work day.

Carin Lefkowitz: Yeah, I appreciate that. The role of self care is so important and as we're going to talk about perhaps even more important now in these times. Before we get to that, let me check in with Diana. How about for you, other obstacles that you've run into and how you've handled them?

Diana Dolan: Absolutely. First of all, I just want to say I second completely feeling socially distant in a way that existed before current events. Just feeling, I see other people on the screen but you're not in the same room as them and ... you know that you miss social interaction when you start to look forward to meetings. Like, oh I can see people. So, I think there's a couple things that have really helped and I think, we at CDP, have really done a good job of this where sometimes we'll just connect to say hi and check in with other folks or stay after meetings and see how folks are doing. And rather than just be about the topic, checking in about how the person is doing, which I think has been really helpful.

Diana Dolan: I also tend to get, I've been more active in volunteering, because for me it's compounded with I work at home and then I'm with my kids, which is not necessarily, I love them, but not necessarily adult interaction. So I volunteer at different places, their school and different community organizations so that I have that to look forward to outside of my role at work and outside of my role as a mom. I also think that one of the interesting challenges to working at home are things that you don't think about.

Diana Dolan: So, everything from not getting to attend in person, the holiday party. Which I joke about, but sometimes you do miss that aspect too. What do you do when the lawn people start up and you're in the middle of giving a training and you didn't remember it was their day? So these are things that might happen in an office. I mean you might have lawn people or noisy airplanes. I've had all of that happen in an office, but things that you feel more responsible for when you work at home.

Diana Dolan: So definitely some aspects of that to keep in mind. And then in terms of, Aric, I think you brought up a great point about flexibility, how you manage that. When I first started teleworking, I would not take even a two minute break to do anything that related not to work. And I mean not even go restart the dryer. And so, I'd get to the end of the day and I would have wet clothes that I had started before work, or I would get to the end of the day and realize I hadn't eaten, or thing like that.

Diana Dolan: Not taking a break to even rest my eyes. And so I was feeling kind of headache from looking at the computer. And so giving myself over time that flexibility to, I know I will, I'll take a couple of minutes to start the dryer. I will take a couple of minutes to go get some more water to stay hydrated or to rest my eyes. I think

all of those things are important. We used to say in the Air Force, flexibility is the key to air power. So hopefully we model that.

Carin Lefkowitz: Those are great points, Diana. And I especially appreciate your point about how we do try to stay connected with each other and maybe chat a little bit after our scheduled meeting or even just have a social meeting planned because these are things that we would do actually in real life if we were in person. In an office, you would stick around and chat with your friend, your friendly coworker after a meeting and check in. But we forget that's part of actually the work day and being a healthy employee.

Carin Lefkowitz: So, I love that point. Now, up until now we've been talking about our kind of ideal tele-work situations, which we've each been honing over several years. But of course, they're part of the reason that we are putting this together is because times have changed recently. And globally, we are all dealing with this COVID outbreak, which has led, as I've mentioned, lots of people to be suddenly working from home under unprecedented circumstances without a plan in place.

Carin Lefkowitz: And even though we all have been working from home for a long time, things have absolutely changed with the COVID outbreak, even in our daily lives. So I'd like to shift from talking about our ideal scenario to what has shifted for each of us as a result of COVID and how we're dealing with it. So, I'm happy to start us off. I can tell you, for me, what's been fascinating is my actual day-to-day weekdays has not changed at all.

Carin Lefkowitz: I'm still working 8:30 to 4:30. I still get up, go to my office, turn on my computer and work as I've always did. The only difference is maybe that friends who have not tele-worked before are contacting me all day long because they're going stir crazy. But for me, my day has not changed. What has changed dramatically, is again, finding that work life balance because now I shut off my computer, I shut down my phone and I'm not leaving the house.

Carin Lefkowitz: I'm not going to see friends. I'm not going to my Monday gym class, I'm not going to my Tuesday Quizzo. I'm home. And so that has been probably the most difficult aspect from me because, as I mentioned, I'm really social. I really rely on that social engagement. So the good news I guess, if there is one, is that we're all in the same boat. And so many of us are struggling with that. That I have started to come up with some creative solutions for that as have my friends and family. So, I can't go to the gym. But my friends and I do go for a weekly walk and we keep the appropriate social distance from each other. But the past couple of weeks we've been walking on the local running trail and at least get a chance to catch up and talk and see people in person.

Carin Lefkowitz: And I have to tell you there are so many people out on the walking trail that we're not the only ones with that idea. We also for the first time had a virtual movie night this weekend with friends. And we all logged in to Zoom and we started a terrible movie at the same time. I won't tell you the movie. We started

it at the same time and then we had our ongoing commentary on the video platform on the side so we could at least enjoy each other's sense of humor.

Carin Lefkowitz: And feel like we were doing something together. It's weird. It's weird to have a virtual movie night, but it was really necessary and kept me feeling more connected to friends who I would typically see in person. So that has really been the biggest shift. For me, the biggest challenge. I'm curious to hear from each of you, Diana, I'll start with you if that's okay.

Diana Dolan: Sure. Well, obviously you all have noticed one of the most obvious things, which is the children running around in the background. They are not normally present during my work hours. They're at school or at a camp. So, that has been a challenge. Our school shut down for so far, three weeks, total of three weeks. And it has been interesting because the schools sent home lesson plans and things they want the children to do, but I work, and so I need to be at work. My husband also works, which is interesting. He also tele-works. So now all of us are in the house, two of us have to work and two of them need supervision. So it's a very challenging dynamic. And I went back to what I learned early on with teleworking, which is setting a schedule. So, I have a schedule listed out that the kids can see, from this time to this time is free play.

Diana Dolan: And I will take a break and do a supervised activity with you. And then from this time to this time might be workbook time where they're at the computer with me. So yesterday we were at a meeting and the kids were behind my computer working on their workbooks and their tasks, so that I could keep an eye on them but they could still see me. So again, as much as possible, going back to consistency and structure, which is not always easy. I used to be, I would tell most folks who are teleworking to try and bunch your hours. So for me, I'm able to get more focused and get more done rather than repeat tasks, if I have one chunk a day, rather than a meeting here, meaning their time later. But with COVID, I really have had to break out my time because I can't just go seven, eight hours straight and ignore the kids or ignore other things that come up.

Diana Dolan: So I think how I structure my time has changed. Having awesome coworkers who understand that they're going to be children in the background during this. That has all been very helpful. And then I think one last thing for me, maybe a little bit more on a personal note, but I'm worried about what's going on. I don't know that I would say it's a full blown anxiety, but I do find that I am checking my phone more. I'm looking at news articles more and I'm thinking about it. And so, I've had to try to gauge is it appropriate to mention this during work meetings? When we're making plans, hey, this is due to COVID, or is that my own personal worry creeping in?

Diana Dolan: So I try and not look at my phone too much. I try, and again, just have time when I'm focused on my work, but I do also understand that it's going to come up, coworkers may have the same feelings about it or folks that I talk to in meetings and other times may be impacted by it as well. And it may be helpful just to have a few minutes of let's just talk about this and get it out in the open.



But, overall I think just taking it day-by-day at this point and giving myself that leeway that it's not going to be the same, quite the same as it was before.

Carin Lefkowitz: Those are such great points. I know that there are so many parents who are in a similar boat to you, so I think your thoughts about that are going to be really helpful to a lot of folks watching this. And I would also second what you said about that anxiety creeping in, that worry creeping in. Certainly, that has shifted and I find myself also in the middle of the workday thinking, should I log into a website to see if anything has changed, anything has developed in the past few hours? And that's not necessarily helpful, but it's there in the background. So I can fully relate to that as well. And Aric, how about you? How have things shifted for you with this outbreak?

Aric Bowie: I think it's actually become more important for me to kind of maintain a good attitude, because it's uncertain. And I think as humans we kind of rely on certainty or at least consistency and there's nothing consistent right now. So I also will not check the news during work hours, because I personally have a tendency to get really amped up when I'm looking at bad news, and I really don't need that kind of negativity in my life. So, I don't. I try actually not even to do it more than once a day because ... and I think a while ago I had to kind of accept it's kind of like the garbage in garbage out principle. If I'm just taking in nasty stuff that's just going to tank my attitude, it's going to be a lot harder for me to be helpful and focus on being helpful while I'm working.

Aric Bowie: So, during work hours I stay away from the news. I like to listen to music while I'm working. So I try not to listen to really, really dark stuff. And I try not to feed into kind of negative discussion, because sometimes I'll have colleagues checking in with me and they'll kind of pop off about something or another. And I try not to engage with that particular stuff, so I'll reroute it to something that's actually, and I'm not going to dismiss them, but I'm also going to say like, "Okay, well we can't do anything about that. I am not the CDC, I'm not the World Health Organization so I can't do anything about it. So let's just kind of reroute." And not comfort seeking. Again, it's kind of self care by way of being more mature about my decisions.

Aric Bowie: Try not to panic, try not to drink caffeine after noon, get exercise where I can, being flexible, staying in contact with friends, but trying to also keep structure with that. So being resilient. And I'm actually reminded of the movie Castaway with Tom Hanks, where he kind of had to maintain a structure because he was going to go nuts. And I'm kind of using some of those ideas. Structure is key, especially where going outside might mean at best going to the park. It's not going to be going to the mall or going to movie night or the movies. Especially not the movies. But getting what I can that's actually healthy and helpful for me is really important these days.

Carin Lefkowitz: That's great. I also really love the Castaway reference. I'm imagining that you have a Wilson volleyball somewhere behind you.

Aric Bowie: No, just cats.

Carin Lefkowitz: Well folks, this has been a great discussion and I really appreciate your thoughts on how tele-work has been in the past and how things have changed now. I'm hoping this will be helpful to folks who are trying this for the first time. I'd like to check in with you, if you have any last thoughts or any things that you'd like to share at this point that we haven't covered?

Diana Dolan: I think that covers it.

Carin Lefkowitz: Okay. Well again, thank you so much for your time. I guess we are all in this together is perhaps the only silver lining, and hopefully we'll all help each other get through these stressful times. So thank you, Diana. Thank you, Aric, for your time. Thank you viewers for tuning in and everybody stay healthy.

Aric Bowie: Thank you.