

BY JULIE WEAVER,
PLACEMENT COORDINATOR





Practical Principles for Working at Home

When I was young, like most little girls, I wanted more than anything to be a mom when I grew up. (Something similar to June Cleaver from the show *Leave it to Beaver*.) To me, a mom consisted of holding baby dolls, going grocery shopping in the kitchen pantry, wearing my mother's clothes (including high-heels), and serving anyone who was brave enough to eat raw hot dogs, green apricots, and dried spaghetti noodles. Little did I know back then that my idea of being a mother was far from reality - - I was close but not by much.

I did have the good fortune of fulfilling my dream of being a mother - - a stay-at-home mom of 5 children for 23 years, key words being *stay at home*. There were days when things ran rather smoothly, but most days went as one could expect with 3 rambunctious and inquisitive boys, and 2 overly sensitive and dramatic girls. My job of raising my family and my subsequent career supporting MT students and graduates have given me some perspective on the blessings and challenges of balancing stay at home and work at home.

Working from home definitely has its advantages - - flexibility, being your own boss, hands-on parenting (for those of you with children), the money you save on clothing, daycare, not to mention avoiding the aggravations of a commute at today's gas prices.

However, working from home takes a great deal of self discipline, self motivation, and definitely the ability to be an effective time manager. It takes a bit of creative strategizing to find a happy balance between working and managing your day-to-day activities - - not an easy task when your professional life and your personal life occupy the same space. I'd like to share a few strategies for you to consider as you strive to balance personal and professional success.

DEFINE WORK SPACE

A key element in successful balance is to define and separate your work space from the rest of your family living space. Keeping the two separated will alleviate a lot of chaos, confusion, and frustration. Whether your physical work space is large or small, take time to discuss your work space with your family. One MT who has worked at home for 18 years shared with me that from the time her children were very small she set rules and boundaries for interacting with her when she was "in her office." To this day, her teenage and grown children will wait at the door if she is on her phone or wearing a headset.

SET A SCHEDULE

Things will also run much more smoothly if you create a schedule. This might take some time, but you will find that following a schedule will help you utilize your time more effectively and efficiently. With a schedule, your productivity will increase. If you have children at home, establishing a set schedule will help them understand that there are times when it is appropriate to request your attention and that you are still available to attend to their wants and needs. Consistency in work time helps children (and spouses) feel confident that there is time set aside for them just like there is time set aside for work. This isn't to say that every day will be a picnic and run as smooth as melted chocolate, but for the most part, you will find that your days are pretty manageable.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

Interruptions and distractions throughout the day can become definite annoyances, and can be detrimental to your produc-

Practical Principles for Working at Home

tion, but you can easily control them if you can minimize the chances of them happening in the first place. For instance, turn the ringer *off* on your phone or let the answering machine pick up incoming calls. Hang a “working” or “do not disturb” sign on your door for those who may not know you are working, and eliminate distractions like the television and radio if they interfere at all with you getting your work done.

SET DAILY, WEEKLY AND MONTHLY GOALS

You can stay excited and motivated working at home by setting daily, weekly, and monthly production and financial goals. Money is a GREAT motivator and when you hit production and financial targets, it's easy to feel good about what you are accomplishing. Having a goal in mind, and a schedule you can adhere to, creates a great foundation for long-term success.

REINFORCE YOUR REASONS

Constantly remind yourself why you became an MT in the first place. There are multiple reasons why one would want to become an MT, so find a picture that depicts the reason *you* became a medical transcriptionist and chose to work at home, and then post it where it is visible on a daily basis. It will serve as an anchor when things start to get a little rough.

PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Maintain your professional identity. By accepting a professional MT position, you have made a commitment to do the work that has been assigned to you. You are responsible to see to it that the work you do is complete, accurate, and on time. If your employer does not reward your contribution except financially, reward yourself! If you hit high production goals, treat yourself to something you love, or a quiet bath. Always see yourself as a professional and conduct yourself as a professional – call in when sick, communicate concerns and needs to your employer, and set professional development goals. You will feel good about yourself and your profession.

NETWORKING

Networking is another essential part of the equation. I can't begin to tell you how easy it is to get lost in the everyday monotony, or to feel a sense of loneliness while staying at home. Networking with other MTs, or any other organization for that matter, will help you to keep your sanity intact, as well as preserving and enhancing your sense of self. There are multiple MT forums available to support you with this matter, and local AAMT chapters for you to join if you want to associate with other medical transcriptionists who can offer camaraderie, advice, and encour-

Working from home is a dream for

most people and can be a happy reality for those who

choose a career as a medical transcriptionist.

agement. There are also many organizations available in your community that you might want to consider joining such as play groups, book clubs, community school instructional classes, etc. Use the Internet to locate such organizations. Most local phone directories include a community section with information about museums, art exhibits, and recreational opportunities.

FIND TIME FOR YOURSELF

No matter what it is you do to support you as you work from home, it is extremely important for you to schedule some time for yourself. When everything takes place under one roof, it's easy to go from taking care of home and family to taking care of work and work responsibility. There is no commute time, lunch out with colleagues, or other personal time. You will feel much better about yourself and your capabilities as a transcriptionist if you are taking the time to nurture your own wants and needs.

REWARDS

Working from home is a dream for most people and can be a happy reality for those who choose a career as a medical transcriptionist. Take time to carefully consider what it takes to work from home. Implementing some simple yet effective suggestions can prove to be very beneficial in assisting you with managing your time, creating a stress-free work environment, sustaining a feeling of motivation, and establishing a support system.

I am no longer a stay-at-home mom, but I have many fond memories of being at home with my children. I now get to experience the joys of watching my granddaughters playing the role of mom as they dress-up in my clothes - - including my high-heeled shoes, while serving me popcorn, Pixie Stix, and ice water.

Whatever your reasons for choosing to combine your home life and your professional life, you can find peace, harmony, and a sense of well-being as a home-based medical transcriptionist. **P**