



# Time Management Tips for Telecommuting Moms

[TelecommutersTalk](#)

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## Introduction

I am Victoria Vanderbilt; a working mother with 18 years of work experience in corporate America at a Fortune 50 company. I have been a telecommuter for nine years and have equipped myself with an MBA, International Marketing Certification from Thunderbird University, PMI certification and an Advanced Project Management Certification from Stanford University.

I love my job and my organization, but telecommuting comes with challenges. There are great articles that talk about the basics of being remote, but there is a need to dig deeper into the challenges of being a telecommuter. The purpose of my blog is to create a virtual and local support system, share ideas on dealing with the challenges of being virtual; finding ways to stay motivated and connected. Visit [TelecommutersTalk](#) and learn about solutions to challenges related to working remote.

This eBook provides ways to address the overwhelm that comes with being a working mom, telecommuting mom, and a mom entrepreneur by covering the following:

**Retreat and Plan:** Create a strategic plan for your family yearly as you do at work. Everything you prioritize should fall within this plan.

**Be Mindful:** Being mindful of your time and how you use it. Prioritize and implement based on the plan you created.

**Stay Organized:** Being organized before the school year will ease your mind and set expectations for the family.

**Travel Ready:** Plan in advance for your last minute business travels. Being prepared in advance will save you last minute scramble.

**Manage School Breaks:** Planning is key before the breaks begin. Include the plan for breaks and vacations into your yearly planning retreat.

**Find the Hidden Minutes:** Life can get busy, we can handle it better when we take care of ourselves and find the time to connect.

I am starting out with a few things I've learned and implemented and am hoping you can share your stories. I am sincerely hoping the ideas we share, and the support we provide can help us be the best we can be virtual.



## Retreat and Plan

We create yearly goals for work. We need to do the same for our family. Setting the goals, expectations at the beginning of the year will help you and your family achieve your best.

As a working mother it is hard to take a few days to relax and plan so here are a few ideas on how to take a mini-retreat in the middle of our busy lives:

**During Sports Practice:** This is my favorite time of the day. I use the time to exercise, listen to online courses, TEDTalks, parenting videos, etc. Now I am also going to add goal setting and planning to this list. The first 45 mins I exercise and then take the rest of the 45 mins to set a goal and plan.

We have a solid four hours per week of planning!

**During Business Trips:** I love the fact that I have focused time on the plane. I use this time to think. What are the current challenges I am facing, what is within my control and what steps do I need to take? I also use this time to connect with my friends and colleagues.

Business trips add up to at least ten hours per trip of thinking and connecting.

**During Lunch:** As a remote employee, lunchtime is ignored. Instead, the time can be used to plan the week, the month or a specific area you want to focus on like health or connection.

Lunch adds up to five hours per week of planning.

**Sunday Nights:** I like football, but the rest of my family loves football. So while they are enjoying what they love, I enjoy what I love. After we are done getting ready for the week, I retreat to my space and do what I feel like doing without guilty. There are always nights when I sneak in and watch the game.

**Summer:** WeWork has a summer camp for telecommuters and entrepreneurs—what a brilliant idea! Attending the camp is on my to-do list. I think it will be great to connect with other telecommuters. It helps create a bond and a relationship of mutual understanding.



## Be Mindful

We need to be mindful in every aspect of our lives. Research done by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley states, mindfulness is good for our overall health.

When working remotely, it is easy to get distracted by personal phone calls or laundry, etc. To overcome such interruptions, here are some suggestions for being mindful:

**Single Task:** Multitasking is exhausting. When you are on a conference call, be on the call. Do not check e-mail or surf the web simultaneously. Staying focused is hard, but if you step away, you don't have anything to distract you. Have a designated area or a chair where you can go while you are on the call. Close your eyes, if it helps you to stay focused.

**Plan your day:** Don't jump right into e-mails or social media. Instead, take at least 20-30 minutes to plan your day and set your priorities. Pick 2-3 big items you need to address that day and add them to your calendar. I have this time for planning set on my calendar every day, and it works well for me.

**Manage Your Calendar:** Take charge of your calendar and the responsibility to set up meetings when possible. Taking the initiative gives you the ability to set meetings based on your schedule and time zone. Use this approach for both personal and professional meetings.

**Use your calendar:** If you need to work on a presentation or document, put it on your calendar, so your teammates and manager know that you are busy and will not respond to e-mails right away. Close your e-mail and chat applications while you work on the document. I usually create a better document when I spend dedicated time.

**Take breaks:** I'm still working on this one! Either set up an appointment on your calendar or an alarm on your phone for a break and take it when the time arrives. Take it for you, and not to start laundry or clean. Do what relaxes you—enjoy an article, go for a short walk, or call a friend for 10 minutes.

**Breathe:** Do this especially if you are working on a timeline or dealing with a difficult co-worker. Put things in perspective and move on. I know this is easier said than done, but practice makes perfect. Breathing does reduce stress and helps you calm down.

**Exercise:** This used to be last on my list, but now it is one of the first things I do. It gets me going, and helps me to keep moving and working for the rest of the day. Direct sunlight and fresh air are invigorating, and you will carry that energy with you all day.

**Shutdown:** This includes your computers, cell phones, and any similar devices after your work hours. I have my work phone set to turn off at 6 pm. Unplugging helps me stay focused on after-work activities and obligations.

**Close the Office Door:** When I am working, I close my door and use my “Do Not Disturb” sign. Closing the door adds distance to household responsibilities and informs family members that I am in work mode.

**Say “No” Nicely:** Running to school to deliver forgotten homework or shorts need to stop. This approach keeps the focus on work and teaches the kids to be responsible.

**Use Weekends:** I would multitask during the work week, and it was exhausting. Now, I focus on a single task. When I am working, I am working—no additional chores. I use my breaks as downtime and to walk. Most household-related responsibilities are handled after work or on weekends.

**Get Help:** Delegate and move on. Assign household responsibilities to your family and hire help as needed. Working from home is the same as going to work—the only difference is that you are wearing yoga pants!





## Stay Organized

Teaching the kids to stay organized and keep the clutter under control is a sanity saver! So here are a few things to do this year:

**Clean monthly:** I started with clean weekly, but it was not realistic for my family so decided on once a month. We have a set schedule when we do homework on the weekends, and right after homework, we spend an hour getting things organized.

**Get the right organizing tools:** I have a binder for each child with a separator for each subject. At the end of the week or month, they place all the work into the binder. Keeping binders helps us keep track of what they need to study for the next test, and once the school year is complete, we could take the binder and trash the papers instead of dealing with piles and piles of paper at year end.



**Scan and store:** When I have downtime I will scan awards etc. and store them electronically—save space and the memories. For artwork, I like to keep the real thing, I laminate and place the work in a binder.

**Schedule it:** I've added organizing to our monthly chore list and keep track. Adding the task to our list will help the kids to stay organized and in control of all the paperwork.

**Opt-out:** I don't think our schools have this option yet, but I would like to opt out of receiving all communication via paper and use e-mail for all notifications. It will save time and the environment.



## Travel Ready

Traveling is an essential part of being remote. There are meetings you need to attend in person. Sometimes, you have enough notice, and sometimes, you don't. Use these tips to be travel ready for business:

**Pack in advance:** If you know that you have a quarterly or a bi-yearly meeting, pack in advance. Have all the essentials and toiletries you will need already packed. Then, all you need to add are your clothes based on the type of meeting and weather.

**Plan in advance:** If you have noticed, plan household affairs, such as lunches and dinners. The kids don't have to eat unhealthy while you are gone. Also, plan sports activity pick-ups and drop-offs. If you have help, inform your sitter or other parents who can help with carpools.

**Have a “Plan B”:** Planes get delayed, so have a backup plan. Inform friends in your area or moms who help with carpooling if you need to ask them to pick up a child at the last minute due to a flight delay.

**Take time to recharge:** Usually, travel days include meetings, dinners, and plane rides. If you can use the time at the airport, in the car, or on the plane to recharge, it will be an added perk. Take things you want to do during this time—your painting essentials, your phone to catch up on your favorite shows, or the book you have wanted to read for the past two months but have not found the time. The best thing about this interval is that it comes without guilt—you are not taking away time from your family; you are just sitting on a plane!

**Connect with people:** This is your chance to bond with your colleagues face-to-face and meet new teammates. Make sure you set up lunch with the team and your manager for you to connect and not talk shop. Meet with colleagues who have become good friends—go shopping, to a movie, or to the museum. Do all the things you usually do not find time to do with the people you like. It is incredibly refreshing.

**Reduce stress:** If traveling seems daunting to you, find ways to avoid things that cause you stress. If driving in a new city is stressful, then use Lyft. If flight delays impact you, sign up for airlines alerts. If checking your bag will cause a delay to get to your destination, pack light and take your bag with you as a carry-on. Plan your business meetings and after-work activities, and take breaks in between.



## Managing School Breaks

Do you have mixed feelings about breaks, too? I look forward but also dread breaks. I look forward to a relaxed schedule and kids having fewer sports activities and less school work. Summer and winter breaks mean extra time with the kids, vacations and good planning!

We need a game plan that will work for us. Here are some options:

**Volunteer:** If you have older kids sign them up to volunteer at the library or other locations. Help them get their National Honor Society (NHS) hours for Middle and High school. They can volunteer, and you can work. Once both of you finish, you get to do fun stuff!

**Sports:** Get kids involved in sports/club travel teams. It is a great way to keep them active, continue their social connections and give you time to focus on your work.

**Education:** It is critical to keep the kids engaged with math and reading during the breaks to avoid learning loss. Older children can start working on SAT preparation. Edutopia and Khan Academy are great resources.

**Library:** Every break, the first thing we do after school ends is to go to the library to stock up on books. During the summer we all sign up for the reading program. With online access to library books, it is easy to listen to audio books as a family while driving.

**Restrict technology:** This is the hardest one, but during breaks we restriction technology time to 1.5 hours daily, then finding other things to do like projects. Clean out last school year's papers and save the important awards and documents. Organizing may not be fun for them, but if you do it together and play some music, it may help.

**Share:** If you have to work during the break see if your partner can take time off. You can take a week off. Your spouse can take the following week off. Breaking up your vacation will help you stay on task and give each parent a chance to spend time with the kids. Each parent can be a stay at home parent for a week while the other goes to work.

**Plan the break:** Have a list of activities that you can do as a family and a few where the kids get one-on-one time with each parent. It does not have to be fancy outings just something where you spend focused time with them.

Despite all the challenges, remember to spend at least nine minutes daily to connect with your children. It makes a difference.





## Find the hidden minutes

Juggling multiple things every day leaves us with little time to take care of ourselves or to connect with people. Here are a few ways we can find time to do small things that add up:

### **Health:**

All you need is 20 minutes of exercise per day, and it does not have to be at the same time. Use some of these ideas that will add up to 20 mins/day:

Do the wall chair while on a conference call. No one can see you!

Do a cardio workout in 5 mins when you take a break. You can run up and down the stairs at home or use the [Cardio App](#).



Take breaks and use them wisely: do jump rope, sing or dance to your favorite song and be grateful because you would not be able to do this at your desk at work!

Make meditation your new commute. Take five mins before and after work, and for me, it has had a positive impact. It clears your mind.

Find a walking buddy so you can talk and walk while the kid's practice. Having human interaction with others outside of your work and home has a positive impact on you.

### **Family:**

Run short errands before or after drop-off/ pick up. You are already out of the house use that time.

Prep for meals during the weekends. Have lunches prepared and ready for the whole week over the weekend. Sunday afternoons are great.

Plan breakfast over the weekend and get buy-in from the kids to ensure they will eat what you set out for them.

Clean the car, store the mail or do paperwork while the kids are at practice.

Scan important documents periodically while the kids are doing homework.

Create a schedule of your focus area weekly or monthly and follow-up. I have a weekly schedule that I use. Half focused on exercise, and the rest is broken up amongst other tasks.

### **Professional:**

Take five mins to send a nice note to a teammate.

Listen to classical music while you do deep work. Stand if you can while you do the work.

Volunteer for charity events within your organization or community. You get to meet new people and do good work at the same time.

Do administrative tasks during downtime. Friday afternoons are great to backup files, clean out the inbox, clean the office space and plan for the next week.

Do training during downtime. I keep a training folder that keeps all the training/webinar etc. e-mails I get during the day. When projects are slow, I go to the folder and train. I share any documents/eBooks that I think will be helpful to my teammates.



**What change will you make Mama Bear?**

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## Additional Tools for Telecommuters

**A Mobile App to connection in real-time** with like-minded telecommuters at your convenience locally. An option that is outside of the co-working spaces, coffee shops, and networking events. A setting for introverts to connect one-on-one with a fellow telecommuter. At a time when it is convenient for you.

If you are interested in being a beta customer, please send an e-mail with subject line: App to: [telecommuterstalk@gmail.com](mailto:telecommuterstalk@gmail.com)

**A training program and coaching** focused on addressing the challenges of telecommuting parents. The program is for both employers and employees.

If you are interested in the training, please send an e-mail with subject line Training to: [telecommuterstalk@gmail.com](mailto:telecommuterstalk@gmail.com)