



Comfy Couch Conduct – learning to work from virtual

The Big Comfy Couch aired on PBS from the mid-1990's to the mid-2000's. You may remember your children or grandchildren watching the star of the show, a clown named Loonette and her doll Molly, spend her time on the couch solving the mysteries of the day. Or maybe you're like my youngest daughter who spent hours singing and playing along with Loonette. Regardless of where you find yourself in the analogy, The Big Comfy Couch was a make-believe world.

The pandemic has created our own sort of make-believe world. One I'm sure we would have liked to be over by now. But until that happens, many of us find ourselves either working remotely or needing to collaborate with those who are similarly remote. This can be as exciting as it is challenging. For some it requires adjusting expectations, and others must learn new procedures or technology.

Some might opine working in a virtual environment is like being on your big comfy couch. Truth be told, working remotely does have its benefits. You immediately regain time lost to commuting. This will save money and help reduce stress. Most of us will choose to spend those extra minutes with family, running an errand, or working out.

There is greater flexibility. Working virtually allows you to time shift and choose your most productive hours. And who doesn't enjoy the casual work environment, working from your comfy couch while wearing sweatpants? Some believe this can also reduce stress and provide for a more creative, dare say productive, work environment.

Distractions can be minimized while working remotely. Or can they? Sure, you'll have fewer interruptions from co-workers, office equipment, and phones ringing, but your family, pets, and friends can find a way to cut into your day. They never seem to understand that just because you are working home, it doesn't mean you're not working. Be sure to create boundaries for those that are in the home with you.

It's important to have a designated workspace while working from home. First, you will lose living space if you don't have a dedicated office. And second, it's easier to maintain a proper work-life balance when you have set aside time and space for work-related tasks. Your workspace should have room for your laptop and a printer, as well as a few supplies. It's okay to personalize the space but keep it professional for those times when you're on a video call or webinar. Secure adequate lighting. More light is better, especially when it comes to video quality. An extra lamp nearby is usually helpful. Just make sure the light is in front of you because you're harder to see when backlit.



Talking face-to-face is sometimes necessary, even if that means face-to-screen. Like it or not, doing business in the age of the pandemic means meeting after meeting over Zoom, Skype, and other video platforms. Research tells us only 7% of communication is verbal. The balance is tone and body language. By using video conferencing tools, every meeting with a prospect, client, or colleague will provide this important feedback.

When on a video call, it's not okay to lounge on your comfy couch wearing a clown suit like Loonette. Sit at a desk or table. Be cognizant of the background. People aren't just seeing you; they can also see what is around and behind you. Consider setting up a nicely organized bookshelf or a table with a few pictures. Maybe a backdrop that displays the firm name or your designations and licenses. And dress like you're on the job. There will be occasions when it's a good idea to put on something more professional looking. You might also find it makes you feel a little more confident and productive. Don't you want everyone to see your beautiful attire, now that you've gone to all of the trouble to put on actual clothes?

Now for some video conference etiquette. Remember to look into the camera to give the appearance of eye contact. Speak slowly and confidently, using hand gestures for emphasis. Take turns speaking. And stay on mute if you're not talking. Do provide conversational feedback. Nodding every so often will show you're engaged. It goes without saying, you should not eat while on a video call. Avoid adjusting the monitor or touching your face. You should have checked the video settings and combed your hair before joining the call!

One of the biggest drawbacks to work from virtual is the isolation. Being disconnected from your workplace can be quite unsettling. It can affect the flow of communications, stymie collaboration, and reduce the opportunities to learn from your co-workers. Not to mention, it can be lonely. While working from home, you will need to work harder to develop relationships. You must be intentional about seeking networking opportunities. Luckily, the video conference can be the antidote for this isolation.

Working from virtual sounds like a good deal. And it can be with a bit of self-discipline. One must set up a home office and plan the work environment. Increase your communication with others, especially with available video options. Change scenery or take a break if you find the work balance is going against you. And by all means get comfortable, but beware your productivity might suffer if you're too comfy on the couch.

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