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The Greater Springfield Job Fair

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We apologize for the inconvenience and appreciate your willingness to be flexible for the greater good. Should you have any questions please contact Heather Woomer at hwoomer@gscc.org or 217-525-1173, ext. 201.

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Lydia Stuemke found herself stepping back from her career to stay at home with her kids, ages 14, 12 and 9, when their school became virtual. PHOTO BY KATE SPENCER

Women bear the brunt of COVID job losses

ASPIRE | Lana Shovlin

A teacher placed a jar filled with golf balls on his desk and asked his students to tell him if it was full. The students agreed that it was, but then the teacher began adding smaller items, like pebbles and sand, into the vessel. The new additions to the jar settled into previously unnoticed spaces, giving the illusion that nothing else could fit, but imagine the students' surprise as the teacher picked up a jug of water and slowly began pouring it over the contents. Fascinated, the students watched as the water slowly trickled down through invisible crevices. They quickly came to the realization that even when something appears to be full, there are always ways to add a few more things.

For years, women's lives have resembled

that proverbial jar. Just when it feels like they can't add one more responsibility to their busy schedules, something else comes along and they find a way to make it fit. This year, many working women found themselves disproportionately affected by the COVID pandemic. In fact, a recent study showed that women have lost a net of 5.4 million jobs during the pandemic, which is nearly one million more job losses than men.

"Stepping down from his job didn't fit into the cracks of my husband's life like it did mine," says Lydia Stuemke, a professional videographer from Sherman and mother to three children ages 14, 12 and 9. "He has more of a nine-to-five job, but my hours are pretty

flexible."

Recently, a friend of Stuemke's told her it made sense for her to stay home because she was replaceable at work, but not at home. "That's true," she said, "but I did the stay-at-home mom thing for 10 years; it was finally my time to have a career that I loved, and it was good for my kids to see that. I feel like most women are already the default parent and the pandemic just exacerbated that."

Like many women, Stuemke spent the first few months of the pandemic juggling her career and supervising her children's online learning. It didn't take long for her to realize that something had to give, though. "I had taken on this new, full-time role, but that didn't mean

that I had more time in my day to do all of the things that I needed to do. Luckily, my kids are a little bit older and they were able to do a lot of it on their own, but I still felt like the expectations were unreasonably high."

In the fall, when it was apparent that school was still going to be remote, Stuemke and her children tried homeschooling, but the experience did not go well. "It turns out that it's really difficult to run a business and home-school three children," she said. "We gave it a shot for a semester, decided that it wasn't for us, and enrolled them back into public school." Fortunately, not long after Stuemke's family made that decision, the school her children attend went back to four days of in-person learning each week.

Stuemke's story echoes those of so many Springfield-area mothers who were forced to make the difficult decision between pursuing their careers and helping their children navigate new learning experiences.

Dr. Nicole Pacheco moved to Springfield in 2011 and worked as a psychologist until last spring when the weight of COVID concerns became too much. "My husband is a medical doctor, and we knew he was going to be exposed to the virus daily," says Pacheco. "I needed to find a way to keep my patients safe and help my two very active young boys with school. For a while, I tried to do remote work as a psychologist and be a remote school mom, but I honestly wasn't able to wear either hat very well."

At the time, Pacheco's two sons were in Pre-k and kindergarten, but she noticed they had a hard time adjusting to remote learning. Seeing that her boys seemed to absorb information better with hands-on activities involving paper and writing utensils, she made the decision to pull them completely out of school, quit her practice and start homeschooling.

"I knew we needed to make some changes, but I also know how lucky we are that I was able to pull away from work," she said. "Everyone's situation is unique, and some people wouldn't have had that option."

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Marsha Funneman left her job to help her daughter with virtual kindergarten and says she's enjoyed the extra time to bond. PHOTO COURTESY MARSHA FUNNEMAN

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"I remember sitting in the hallway with my wife, Amanda, pouring over a print out of our budget, and realizing that we couldn't afford to keep sending our daughter to the learning center without my salary. There were a lot of tears, for sure."

On top of that, in January 2020, Funneman had accepted a new position and was looking forward to her new job responsibilities. In the aftermath, she remembers calling her supervisor to tell her that she would not be coming back to work, "We were both sad, but I left on good terms," Funneman says. "There was so much anger and blame going around, but this wasn't anyone's fault. None of us had experienced this before,

and we were all in it together."

These women represent what mothers all across the nation have been dealing with since the dawn of the Covid pandemic, and, frankly, much longer than that. For years, women have fought for gender equality in corporate America, but one of the biggest takeaways from this pandemic is that we have a long way to go before that happens. Instead of wiping out the progress that we've made in the right direction, let's work together to make women just as irreplaceable in the workplace as they are in their own homes. ■

Lana Shovlin is a freelance writer from Springfield who has been at home with her husband and three children since the pandemic began.



Pandemic worsens gendered inequalities in workforce

ASPIRE | Madison Angell

Experts confirm working mothers are bearing the brunt of the pandemic. They overrepresent frontline workers and are taking on more responsibilities at home. “This could be a ticking time bomb for women in the workforce,” Elizabeth Powers, associate professor of economics with the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, told *Illinois Times*.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported March 3 that the number of mothers working decreased significantly more than fathers last year when schools shut down. Nationwide, mothers in the work-

force declined 21.1 percentage points, but the share of fathers dropped only 14.7 points, according to the report. In Illinois, capacity restrictions and revenue loss led businesses in retail, service, hospitality, health and leisure to lay off workers en masse last year. As a result, more than 120,000 workers from these labor markets sought unemployment benefits. In Illinois these are labor markets traditionally dominated by women, particularly women of color.

An Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) report from December 2020 shows women made up 46.9% of all

workers in the state. Women represented 99% of preschool and kindergarten teachers, 89% of child, family and school social workers, 77% of restaurant servers and 88% of maids and housekeeping personnel throughout the state. “Overall, mothers across all race and ethnic groups faced challenges in the labor market but nonwhite single mothers were hit hardest,” according to U.S. Census Bureau analysis.

Last year in Illinois, 46% of women who provided housekeeping services were Latina. Black women represented more than a third of women working as home

health aides in Illinois and 25% of women working in social services, according to IDES data. Accommodations allow some women to work remotely from home. But those who work in housekeeping and as caregivers aren't allowed that privilege. The pressures of COVID-19 and lack of affordable child care is "especially hard for many women of color," according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

American Center for Progress (ACP) reported last October that women of color are "feeling the multiple effects of being more likely to have lost their jobs." This is true for several reasons, including "policy choices grounded in racism and sexism," that leave low-wage workers, single mothers and women of color without access to affordable and stable child care. This has been exacerbated because of COVID-19, according to the report.

"Some women are getting discouraged in the labor market, more so than men," said Powers. "There's a core of women who have all these home responsibilities that actually keep them out of the labor market," she said. "Then I think there might be a group of other women who are underemployed," Powers added. These are women holding jobs but rearranging work schedules to limited hours based on a lack of child care. Other mothers may not be actively searching for employment opportunities "because it is just not practical given their home arrangements," said Powers.

White and wealthier women are more likely to leave their jobs, while women of color and low-paid women are more likely to stay in the workforce by rearranging schedules or seeking alternative child care solutions, a Feb. 1 ACP report found. Powers and other experts suggest access to child care is the primary reason for women's hesitant reentry into the workforce. "Child care has long been severely underfunded, leaving child care providers with razor-thin budget margins, child care workers with low pay, and families without affordable, quality care," the ACP article reads. ■

Madison Angell is a UIS Public Affairs Reporting intern with Illinois Times. Contact her at mangell@illinoistimes.com.



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Post-COVID employment trends

ASPIRE | Carey Smith

The ripple effects of COVID-19 on the job market have been brutal. Its impact was heavily felt by younger and older members of the working population, low-wage earners and those with less formal education. In addition, women left the job market at quadruple the rate of men to care for young children and to assist school-aged children in learning at home.

Significant job losses were seen across several low-wage industries that traditionally employ a full quarter of the U.S. workforce: the transportation, food service, hospitality, cleaning and maintenance, retail, customer service and personal care industries. According to a *Bloomberg* report ("One in ten in U.S. may have to switch occupations post-pandemic," Feb. 18, 2021), 17 million workers – about one out of every 10 U.S. workers – will be working in a new occupation by 2030 due to the long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on the job

market. A *Politico* report ("Coronavirus reshaping job market," Oct. 23, 2020) estimates that 42% of jobs lost due to COVID-19 will eventually be gone for good.

However, some industries are benefitting from the societal changes that have resulted from the pandemic. With the drastic increase of e-commerce, this industry has seen a marked increase in jobs on the front line, from supply chain associates to delivery drivers, as well as gig workers who have taken jobs as personal shoppers. According to a LinkedIn report ("Jobs on the rise" Jan. 12, 2021), "hiring for these roles grew 73% year-over-year... with 400,000 open jobs in the field right now."

As stated by a MarketWatch report ("Five growing post-covid industries" July 13, 2020), COVID-19 has accelerated a market trend toward automation and the use of robots. "As farmers, meatpackers, truckers, cooks, and others got sick or

were ordered to stay home, it exposed weaknesses in our supply chain. Enter robots. Simply put: they can't get sick."

Jobs in industries such as retail and customer service have already shrunk in the last decade due to automation, and this trend advanced with many industry leaders fast-tracking automation when workers were sent home due to COVID-19. More than a million truck driving jobs are expected to be lost in the next decade due to self-driving trucks, with millions more related jobs in jeopardy.

While rapid and unexpected unemployment was a common theme for low-wage workers, probably the most standard adjustment to the higher-wage employment world was the shift to remote working, with an estimated 40-45% of Americans in the workforce working from home at the height of stay-at-home orders. While some workers enjoyed the lack of commute, flexible scheduling and increased productivity due to privacy, others reported the lack of office culture was detrimental to productivity.

Remote work is predicted to remain a key employment trend in the future, with a Gartner poll ("9 future of work trends post-Covid-19," June 8, 2020) showing that "48% of employees will likely work remotely at least part of the time after COVID-19 versus 30% before the pandemic."

With a portion of the population no longer tied geographically to a job, coupled with the tendency of people to move from densely-populated cities to less dense areas, the adaptation to a focus on remote work has fueled the real estate market, and subsequently, jobs such as loan and mortgage officers.

Another market trend likely to continue, according to Gartner's report, is that of hiring contingent workers, with 32% of employers surveyed replacing full-time workers with contractual workers as a way of saving money and increasing flexibility.

Other high-wage jobs that are booming are digital content creators and marketing, mental health professionals, data management and workplace diversity managers.

If the 2008 recession is any indicator, it may take at least a decade to recover from the effects of COVID-19. This recovery will be marked by an increase in technology and other investments to strengthen resiliency for the future. ■

Carey Smith is a freelance writer in Springfield who participates in the gig economy.



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How to make working from home work for you

ASPIRE | Holy Whisler

I learned a valuable lesson early in my career – going to the same place at the same time every day and sitting behind a desk for eight hours is punishment to me. As my career evolved, I found myself drawn to positions that allowed me to work from home, even prior to the pandemic. Currently, as a freelance writer, I work exclusively from home.

I thrive on flexibility, change and independence, and working from my home office provides that for me, but some people find it more of a burden than a benefit. As a job seeker, would working from home be for you? Before you answer that question, consider a few things I've learned about working from home and see if it speaks to you.

When working from home you have the gift of time: there's no commute, and you'll spend less time getting dressed up, except when necessary. This extra time can be devoted to whatever makes your life fulfilling. I like to walk my dog and get some exercise before sitting at my desk.

Speaking of getting dressed, even though you are not going to an office, it is important to get dressed and show up for yourself. Don't fall into the trap of wearing your pajamas or sweats every day. It is best for your own mental health to be dressed appropriately and signal to your brain that it is time to work.

Having a dedicated work space is a must. Ideally, a separate room with a door works best for separating work and home. But if space is a luxury, find a place in your home that is free of distractions and mark your territory with a card table that can be easily put away when you're not working. Going to your office also signals to your brain that it is time to focus and work. And when you leave your office and shut the door, it signals to your brain that it is time to disengage and relax.

Sometimes you can take your office outside and enjoy the sunshine, but don't succumb to the temptation of taking your laptop to bed, to the couch or the kitchen table. The bed is for sleeping, the couch is for relaxing and the table is for eating – not working. When you blur the lines between work and home, you'll find that you cannot get away from work because work is everywhere you go.

Time is different when you work from home, and balancing your time is key. There are fewer distractions at home. You are not interacting with



Like many others, Feana Nevel had to suddenly begin working from home in March of 2020. PHOTO BY KEISHA BARBEE

colleagues, and it's likely that meetings aren't eating up hours of your day. As a result, you can find yourself sitting for too long, and you'll burn out if you don't take frequent breaks.

Set an alarm so that you take a five-minute break once an hour and do something physical. When you engage your muscles, your mind relaxes and you return refreshed. Stand up and stretch, do a couple of yoga poses or walk briskly around the house.

Additionally, set an alarm for two 15-minute breaks and your lunch hour. I like to walk outside during the 15-minute breaks. If time allows, go out for lunch or eat at your dining table. Do not bring work to lunch or eat lunch at your desk. Do not answer your phone during these breaks. This is your time to disengage. If work follows you every minute of the day, you'll be climbing the walls by 2 p.m. Breaks are vital to your stamina and ability to work effectively throughout the day.

Respect your time and others will, too. If there are neighbors or friends who stop by or call frequently because they know you work from home, remind them that you are on the clock and

will be available to catch up with them when you're finished for the day. Until a pandemic forced a majority of the workforce to work from home, I'd bet that many held the belief that working from home wasn't legit.

At the end of each day, clear your desk and make note of the top three priorities for the next morning. Close the door or fold up your card table and do whatever ritual you've devised to make the transition from work to home. Again, this transition signals to your brain that it is time to relax and your work for the day is done.

If this sounds appealing to you, then you might be a work-from-home candidate. Either way, while on your job search, consider the pros and cons of jobs that require working from home at least some of the time. Americans spend more waking hours at work than we do at home, so choose the environment that is best for you. ■

Holly Whisler is a freelance writer from Springfield who has long enjoyed the benefits that come from working at home.



Use contract work to advance your career

ASPIRE | Caleb Yen

Whether you're between jobs, looking for a more flexible work arrangement, or just testing the waters of something different, short-term, contract work assignments are a great way to advance your career. Contract work comes in all shapes and sizes. And for those professionals who embrace the opportunity, the reward is often much more than a foot in the door for the job of their dreams.

Develops your skills and experience

First and foremost, contract work assignments provide an incredible opportunity to develop your skills and build expertise. From young professionals who want more hands-on experience in their chosen fields to seasoned veterans of the business world looking for a new challenge, the shorter-term nature of this type of work assignment allows exposure to broad range of projects, team dynamics, and work environments,

which in turn, creates more well-rounded professionals and stellar resumes.

Shows your commitment

If you find yourself between jobs or long-term unemployed because of changes in your industry or factors like a global pandemic, contract work assignments are not only an effective way to bridge the gap financially, but it also shows you're serious about your career and want to stay engaged in the workforce. Extensive gaps on your resume are often a red flag for employers. So, if you can demonstrate that you've taken the initiative to pursue work opportunities in the interim, it shows your commitment to hard work and willingness to do what it takes to get the job done.

Builds your network

As you advance in your career and move up the corporate ladder, you may find that

many higher-level open positions aren't posted publicly. These types of jobs often get filled through word-of-mouth within the industry or via professional search firms. So, building a robust and diverse professional network is the key to ensuring your reputation precedes you in the local job market.

Contract work assignments are ideal for expanding your network because you're not only building your skills and expertise, but you're also working with a wide range of people and decision makers across a broad spectrum of businesses and industries. And, those connections can be valuable when it comes to advancing a career. ■

This article first appeared in the Jan. 28, 2021 edition of Job Journey. Visit blog.expresspros.com/movinonup to sign up for this monthly newsletter by Express Employment Professionals, which provides tips and advice for every step of your working life.



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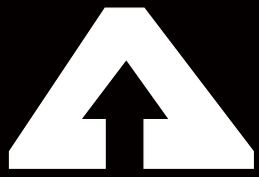
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that I had more time in my day to do all of the things that I needed to do. Luckily, my kids are a little bit older and they were able to do a lot of it on their own, but I still felt like the expectations were unreasonably high."

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Marsha Funneman left her job to help her daughter with virtual kindergarten and says she's enjoyed the extra time to bond. PHOTO COURTESY MARSHA FUNNEMAN

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On top of that, in January 2020, Funneman had accepted a new position and was looking forward to her new job responsibilities. In the aftermath, she remembers calling her supervisor to tell her that she would not be coming back to work, "We were both sad, but I left on good terms," Funneman says. "There was so much anger and blame going around, but this wasn't anyone's fault. None of us had experienced this before,

and we were all in it together."

These women represent what mothers all across the nation have been dealing with since the dawn of the Covid pandemic, and, frankly, much longer than that. For years, women have fought for gender equality in corporate America, but one of the biggest takeaways from this pandemic is that we have a long way to go before that happens. Instead of wiping out the progress that we've made in the right direction, let's work together to make women just as irreplaceable in the workplace as they are in their own homes. ■

Lana Shovlin is a freelance writer from Springfield who has been at home with her husband and three children since the pandemic began.



Pandemic worsens gendered inequalities in workforce

ASPIRE | Madison Angell

Experts confirm working mothers are bearing the brunt of the pandemic. They overrepresent frontline workers and are taking on more responsibilities at home. “This could be a ticking time bomb for women in the workforce,” Elizabeth Powers, associate professor of economics with the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, told *Illinois Times*.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported March 3 that the number of mothers working decreased significantly more than fathers last year when schools shut down. Nationwide, mothers in the work-

force declined 21.1 percentage points, but the share of fathers dropped only 14.7 points, according to the report. In Illinois, capacity restrictions and revenue loss led businesses in retail, service, hospitality, health and leisure to lay off workers en masse last year. As a result, more than 120,000 workers from these labor markets sought unemployment benefits. In Illinois these are labor markets traditionally dominated by women, particularly women of color.

An Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) report from December 2020 shows women made up 46.9% of all

workers in the state. Women represented 99% of preschool and kindergarten teachers, 89% of child, family and school social workers, 77% of restaurant servers and 88% of maids and housekeeping personnel throughout the state. “Overall, mothers across all race and ethnic groups faced challenges in the labor market but nonwhite single mothers were hit hardest,” according to U.S. Census Bureau analysis.

Last year in Illinois, 46% of women who provided housekeeping services were Latina. Black women represented more than a third of women working as home

health aides in Illinois and 25% of women working in social services, according to IDES data. Accommodations allow some women to work remotely from home. But those who work in housekeeping and as caregivers aren't allowed that privilege. The pressures of COVID-19 and lack of affordable child care is "especially hard for many women of color," according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

American Center for Progress (ACP) reported last October that women of color are "feeling the multiple effects of being more likely to have lost their jobs." This is true for several reasons, including "policy choices grounded in racism and sexism," that leave low-wage workers, single mothers and women of color without access to affordable and stable child care. This has been exacerbated because of COVID-19, according to the report.

"Some women are getting discouraged in the labor market, more so than men," said Powers. "There's a core of women who have all these home responsibilities that actually keep them out of the labor market," she said. "Then I think there might be a group of other women who are underemployed," Powers added. These are women holding jobs but rearranging work schedules to limited hours based on a lack of child care. Other mothers may not be actively searching for employment opportunities "because it is just not practical given their home arrangements," said Powers.

White and wealthier women are more likely to leave their jobs, while women of color and low-paid women are more likely to stay in the workforce by rearranging schedules or seeking alternative child care solutions, a Feb. 1 ACP report found. Powers and other experts suggest access to child care is the primary reason for women's hesitant reentry into the workforce. "Child care has long been severely underfunded, leaving child care providers with razor-thin budget margins, child care workers with low pay, and families without affordable, quality care," the ACP article reads. ■

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Post-COVID employment trends

ASPIRE | Carey Smith

The ripple effects of COVID-19 on the job market have been brutal. Its impact was heavily felt by younger and older members of the working population, low-wage earners and those with less formal education. In addition, women left the job market at quadruple the rate of men to care for young children and to assist school-aged children in learning at home.

Significant job losses were seen across several low-wage industries that traditionally employ a full quarter of the U.S. workforce: the transportation, food service, hospitality, cleaning and maintenance, retail, customer service and personal care industries. According to a *Bloomberg* report ("One in ten in U.S. may have to switch occupations post-pandemic," Feb. 18, 2021), 17 million workers – about one out of every 10 U.S. workers – will be working in a new occupation by 2030 due to the long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on the job

market. A *Politico* report ("Coronavirus reshaping job market," Oct. 23, 2020) estimates that 42% of jobs lost due to COVID-19 will eventually be gone for good.

However, some industries are benefitting from the societal changes that have resulted from the pandemic. With the drastic increase of e-commerce, this industry has seen a marked increase in jobs on the front line, from supply chain associates to delivery drivers, as well as gig workers who have taken jobs as personal shoppers. According to a LinkedIn report ("Jobs on the rise" Jan. 12, 2021), "hiring for these roles grew 73% year-over-year... with 400,000 open jobs in the field right now."

As stated by a MarketWatch report ("Five growing post-covid industries" July 13, 2020), COVID-19 has accelerated a market trend toward automation and the use of robots. "As farmers, meatpackers, truckers, cooks, and others got sick or

were ordered to stay home, it exposed weaknesses in our supply chain. Enter robots. Simply put: they can't get sick."

Jobs in industries such as retail and customer service have already shrunk in the last decade due to automation, and this trend advanced with many industry leaders fast-tracking automation when workers were sent home due to COVID-19. More than a million truck driving jobs are expected to be lost in the next decade due to self-driving trucks, with millions more related jobs in jeopardy.

While rapid and unexpected unemployment was a common theme for low-wage workers, probably the most standard adjustment to the higher-wage employment world was the shift to remote working, with an estimated 40-45% of Americans in the workforce working from home at the height of stay-at-home orders. While some workers enjoyed the lack of commute, flexible scheduling and increased productivity due to privacy, others reported the lack of office culture was detrimental to productivity.

Remote work is predicted to remain a key employment trend in the future, with a Gartner poll ("9 future of work trends post-Covid-19," June 8, 2020) showing that "48% of employees will likely work remotely at least part of the time after COVID-19 versus 30% before the pandemic."

With a portion of the population no longer tied geographically to a job, coupled with the tendency of people to move from densely-populated cities to less dense areas, the adaptation to a focus on remote work has fueled the real estate market, and subsequently, jobs such as loan and mortgage officers.

Another market trend likely to continue, according to Gartner's report, is that of hiring contingent workers, with 32% of employers surveyed replacing full-time workers with contractual workers as a way of saving money and increasing flexibility.

Other high-wage jobs that are booming are digital content creators and marketing, mental health professionals, data management and workplace diversity managers.

If the 2008 recession is any indicator, it may take at least a decade to recover from the effects of COVID-19. This recovery will be marked by an increase in technology and other investments to strengthen resiliency for the future. ■

Carey Smith is a freelance writer in Springfield who participates in the gig economy.



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How to make working from home work for you

ASPIRE | Holy Whisler

I learned a valuable lesson early in my career – going to the same place at the same time every day and sitting behind a desk for eight hours is punishment to me. As my career evolved, I found myself drawn to positions that allowed me to work from home, even prior to the pandemic. Currently, as a freelance writer, I work exclusively from home.

I thrive on flexibility, change and independence, and working from my home office provides that for me, but some people find it more of a burden than a benefit. As a job seeker, would working from home be for you? Before you answer that question, consider a few things I've learned about working from home and see if it speaks to you.

When working from home you have the gift of time: there's no commute, and you'll spend less time getting dressed up, except when necessary. This extra time can be devoted to whatever makes your life fulfilling. I like to walk my dog and get some exercise before sitting at my desk.

Speaking of getting dressed, even though you are not going to an office, it is important to get dressed and show up for yourself. Don't fall into the trap of wearing your pajamas or sweats every day. It is best for your own mental health to be dressed appropriately and signal to your brain that it is time to work.

Having a dedicated work space is a must. Ideally, a separate room with a door works best for separating work and home. But if space is a luxury, find a place in your home that is free of distractions and mark your territory with a card table that can be easily put away when you're not working. Going to your office also signals to your brain that it is time to focus and work. And when you leave your office and shut the door, it signals to your brain that it is time to disengage and relax.

Sometimes you can take your office outside and enjoy the sunshine, but don't succumb to the temptation of taking your laptop to bed, to the couch or the kitchen table. The bed is for sleeping, the couch is for relaxing and the table is for eating – not working. When you blur the lines between work and home, you'll find that you cannot get away from work because work is everywhere you go.

Time is different when you work from home, and balancing your time is key. There are fewer distractions at home. You are not interacting with



Like many others, Feana Nevel had to suddenly begin working from home in March of 2020. PHOTO BY KEISHA BARBEE

colleagues, and it's likely that meetings aren't eating up hours of your day. As a result, you can find yourself sitting for too long, and you'll burn out if you don't take frequent breaks.

Set an alarm so that you take a five-minute break once an hour and do something physical. When you engage your muscles, your mind relaxes and you return refreshed. Stand up and stretch, do a couple of yoga poses or walk briskly around the house.

Additionally, set an alarm for two 15-minute breaks and your lunch hour. I like to walk outside during the 15-minute breaks. If time allows, go out for lunch or eat at your dining table. Do not bring work to lunch or eat lunch at your desk. Do not answer your phone during these breaks. This is your time to disengage. If work follows you every minute of the day, you'll be climbing the walls by 2 p.m. Breaks are vital to your stamina and ability to work effectively throughout the day.

Respect your time and others will, too. If there are neighbors or friends who stop by or call frequently because they know you work from home, remind them that you are on the clock and

will be available to catch up with them when you're finished for the day. Until a pandemic forced a majority of the workforce to work from home, I'd bet that many held the belief that working from home wasn't legit.

At the end of each day, clear your desk and make note of the top three priorities for the next morning. Close the door or fold up your card table and do whatever ritual you've devised to make the transition from work to home. Again, this transition signals to your brain that it is time to relax and your work for the day is done.

If this sounds appealing to you, then you might be a work-from-home candidate. Either way, while on your job search, consider the pros and cons of jobs that require working from home at least some of the time. Americans spend more waking hours at work than we do at home, so choose the environment that is best for you. ■

Holly Whisler is a freelance writer from Springfield who has long enjoyed the benefits that come from working at home.



Use contract work to advance your career

ASPIRE | Caleb Yen

Whether you're between jobs, looking for a more flexible work arrangement, or just testing the waters of something different, short-term, contract work assignments are a great way to advance your career. Contract work comes in all shapes and sizes. And for those professionals who embrace the opportunity, the reward is often much more than a foot in the door for the job of their dreams.

Develops your skills and experience

First and foremost, contract work assignments provide an incredible opportunity to develop your skills and build expertise. From young professionals who want more hands-on experience in their chosen fields to seasoned veterans of the business world looking for a new challenge, the shorter-term nature of this type of work assignment allows exposure to broad range of projects, team dynamics, and work environments,

which in turn, creates more well-rounded professionals and stellar resumes.

Shows your commitment

If you find yourself between jobs or long-term unemployed because of changes in your industry or factors like a global pandemic, contract work assignments are not only an effective way to bridge the gap financially, but it also shows you're serious about your career and want to stay engaged in the workforce. Extensive gaps on your resume are often a red flag for employers. So, if you can demonstrate that you've taken the initiative to pursue work opportunities in the interim, it shows your commitment to hard work and willingness to do what it takes to get the job done.

Builds your network

As you advance in your career and move up the corporate ladder, you may find that

many higher-level open positions aren't posted publicly. These types of jobs often get filled through word-of-mouth within the industry or via professional search firms. So, building a robust and diverse professional network is the key to ensuring your reputation precedes you in the local job market.

Contract work assignments are ideal for expanding your network because you're not only building your skills and expertise, but you're also working with a wide range of people and decision makers across a broad spectrum of businesses and industries. And, those connections can be valuable when it comes to advancing a career. ■

This article first appeared in the Jan. 28, 2021 edition of Job Journey. Visit blog.expresspros.com/movinonup to sign up for this monthly newsletter by Express Employment Professionals, which provides tips and advice for every step of your working life.



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