

Transcript: 3 Steps to Stop Remote Work Burnout

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You might think that working remotely is an introvert's dream: you're in your own home hidden behind a computer, possibly in your pajamas. But the truth is, for many introverts, remote work is kind of a nightmare.

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[TED: The Way We Work]

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Now that the pandemic has chased many of us out of our offices, we're chafing under the new remote rules of work: too much screen time; a lack of boundaries between work and home; endless video calls. The same things that make remote work difficult for introverts make it difficult for everyone.

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Far and away, the worst part of remote work is video calls. Being on camera is a performance. Thoughtless scheduling can mean you're basically onstage performing for eight hours a day. There are none of the nuanced cues that help you read a room. Staring at disembodied heads on a screen offers only a pale imitation of real human connection. Social anxiety only makes this worse. When you have a camera in your face, that can really trigger your social anxiety. It takes energy to be on. So the key to managing remote work is to protect your energy.

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First, pay attention to ritual and routine. As much as we hated our commutes, they were a ritual that created a boundary between work and home. And we need that. For many of us, those little breaks that we would build in to the work day -- going to get a cup of coffee or a chat with a coworker -- those are gone, too. For me, those rituals are when I gather my energy, assume my work character and get into the right headspace to dive in. So how can you recreate those breaks and boundaries at home? The key is to be intentional. It could be music or lighting, a pep talk with a friend. You could take a walk around the block at a certain time of day or even a breathing or stretching routine before you sit -- whatever it takes for you to delineate the transition between work and home.

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Second, we need to manage our pace, place and space. You can think of pacing as managing the interactions that tax your energy versus those that recharge you. You could schedule fewer videoconferences, because remember, those are performances. You could schedule downtime or

recharge time after performances. Oprah does this, as do many introverted performers and CEOs. You could consider the time of day. Think about when you can typically summon the energy to be on and save other times for quiet work.

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For place, use your workspace to help you enforce good boundaries. Even if your desk is in your kitchen, make it feel like a workplace. For space, build in some alone time every day. And this includes time away from your kids. It's really key to avoiding burnout.

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Finally, if you're a manager, you have a special role to play to help employees protect their pace, place and space. Manage the room during video calls. Even remotely, chatty extroverts tend to dominate. To create a space where everyone can be heard, structure agendas, assign presentation rules and minimize brainstorming. Brainstorming can trigger social anxiety, and it can freeze up introverts. Instead, create a shared space where people can write their ideas before a brainstorming session.

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Favor audio over video calls. Research shows that we actually communicate more emotion and nuance via audio alone. Try asynchronous communication for more complicated or provocative one-on-ones. You can steal this idea from author Robert Glazer: record a voice memo or video on your phone explaining your perspective and send it to a colleague. And that way, they can respond and react in their own time.

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Along with a lot of challenges now, we have an opportunity. Remote work is here to stay, so don't just transfer old habits and old company culture to remote work. Build something better. To get started, ask the introverts in your office what their ideal day looks like and take your cue from there.