

Don't Wear Your Pajamas, and Other Virtual Office Best Practices

As a play on the term for perfect eyesight, 2020 started out as the year of a new vision and looking forward. Instead, 2020 made a sharp turn to become the year of adapting to change. For us at Jaffe, [adapting to change](#) has been part of our mantra for more than five years, when we first saw that business-as-usual attitudes were not going to allow a firm to grow and prosper.

How firms interact with clients and colleagues has changed for the foreseeable future. Some businesses may be starting to head back to the office, while others continue to work from home. Either way, we have developed a new standard of business interaction: the virtual meeting. For some, working virtually is new and creates a technological learning curve, while others have used a virtual platform to interact with family and friends routinely, making this an easy transition. Adjusting to the home office and virtual meetings changes the way business is being done, but it should not change how you present yourself, represent your firm, or promote your [firm brand and culture](#).

This virtual environment is not new to me. I have been doing it for many years, and it has not posed any challenges during the pandemic. For a majority of professionals, though, transitioning to working from home full-time, especially on such short notice, can be a struggle. Here are tips on how to stay professional in a home environment.

Your Home Office Workspace

It is important to set up your office/work station in a dedicated space if your home can accommodate doing so. If one location does not work, try a different one until you find the one that feels right. Your first choice might be your best option, but you will not know until you test out other areas.

Working from home often makes it harder to separate office hours from home hours. I find having a space I can walk away from at the end of the day is helpful.

You probably have gained one to two hours of your day that would have been dedicated to commuting to and from work, so make use of that time to get an early start and get organized. This will allow you to take short breaks throughout the day. This is especially important since not being in the office most likely means you are not getting away from your workspace as much as you used to. (You no longer have meetings in a conference room, the ability to visit a coworker's desk or a way to get out for lunch.)

Remember that you also had a specific routine when you went to the office; maintain that work routine as much as possible.



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Your Appearance

Your home office is just an extension of the real one, so your appearance should reflect that as well. Getting dressed should still be part of your workday routine, albeit a little more casual. This does not mean putting on a fresh pair of pajamas to start your day. (This is a common misconception about those of us who work from home.) You need to be prepared for that impromptu video chat or virtual meeting. You are on worktime, so present yourself in a professional manner. Keep your firm's brand and culture in mind. Has your office always been a casual environment?

Video Conferencing from a Home Office

Setting up your home workspace means you are inviting people into your home via video. Keep this in mind when you choose your home office location. Look behind you to see what viewers will be able to see. If the view is into a room or kitchen, keep the area behind you organized and free of clutter. If you have a wall or bookcase behind you, pay attention to what is there, and ensure that nothing inappropriate or controversial is in view. Can you block out the rest of the room by setting up a foldable screen that can easily be put away at the end of the day or over the weekend?

Some video platforms like Zoom allow you to set your own background image. If you choose to use this feature, keep it simple and clean to maintain the focus on you. Check to see if your firm has a branded background to use – that is a great way to create consistency and promote your brand.

Optimal Video Camera Placement

Your camera should be at eye level. If you are working on a laptop, can you raise it up by placing it on a stand or some books? Avoid that camera angle where people are looking up your nose. If at all possible, your head should be positioned in the upper-middle area of the screen to avoid being too low or too high (or cutting off the top of your head).

Other Video Tips for Virtual Meetings

Do:

- Keep good posture.
- Look at the camera.
- Try for natural light if possible.
- Mute when not talking to avoid any unnecessary background noise.
- Give the meeting your full attention.
- Wear solid colors or simple patterns that will not be distracting.

Do not:

- Position yourself in front of a window or light source.
- Tinker with your camera/computer while on the call.
- Read emails or chats while on a call.

Adapting to the New Normal

I have spoken with a number of clients since the work-from-home shift has taken place. Some people like working from home; others feel they function better in the office environment. What has added to the home office challenge is the fact that all members of the household are working and learning from home. We have all seen the social media posts of kids, family members and pets intruding on meetings or visible in the background. Learning to adapt to change is all part of acclimating to home office culture.

Do you have any tips or words of wisdom to share? Leave a comment in the box below, or contact me, Alan E. Singles, at asingles@jaffepr.com.