

# Strategic Leadership Consulting

## Day 2: Leading from Home - Spaces

Note: Estimated read time for this article is 6-8 minutes

Colleagues,

Your routines create *behavioral structures*, and your spaces create *physical structures* for healthily leading from home.

Remember that we have three overarching themes:

1. Make intentional decisions
2. Limit distractions and transitions
3. Engage fully (and healthily)

In general, your “home office” will fall into one of three categories:

- A dedicated individual space is a true office in your home that can be sealed off from the rest of the home, like a converted bedroom or basement room. This is an ideal situation for maximizing your productivity.
- A dedicated shared space is a specific area that is yours, but which exists within a space that others use and cannot be easily sealed off, such as a desk in the family room. This presents challenges, especially in terms of distractions, but is workable.
- A non-dedicated space basically means that you work wherever you happen to be sitting (or standing). This is an unworkable situation that can negatively impact your health and ability to lead. This is not an acceptable option for any serious leader. Before you bristle, read on!

In this article, the term “home office” refers to your situation regardless of category.

Your home office should do several things for you:

1. Signal to you (and others) that you are working
2. Limit distractions and interruptions
3. Enhance productivity and workflow
4. Help you feel professional

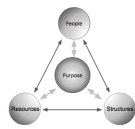
Let’s look at each of these more closely.

**Signaling** Having a dedicated space (individual or shared) creates a physical signal that you are “at work.” Sitting down (or stepping up to your standing desk!) cues your mind to engage in your work. It serves as a notice to others that you are working, and that they need to observe any interruption protocols you have established (more on that in the [video](#)).

How-to:

1. Dedicated Individual Space: Shut the door!
2. Dedicated Shared Space: Establish a set procedure for informing others in the house that you are “going to work.” Turn off sources of noise and distraction (talk shows)  
Move to your workspace and settle in. You could use a specific type of music as a way to

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mask background noise and provide an additional cue to others. Put a note/door hanger to alert others who might enter.

3. Non-dedicated space: Create a dedicated space. If you can find a corner to set up a small desk or table, do it. If there is absolutely no room, choose a seat at your kitchen or dining room table. Use that same seat consistently. Consider using a seat that is not your normal seat for meals to emphasize the table as a workspace.

**Limiting** Physical signaling through being in an “office” space is a first step to limiting distractions and interruptions, especially those in your household environment. Complete a household check by eliminating noise and information distractions from sources outside of your space. Inform others that you are “going to work.” Complete a space check by eliminating sources of distraction within your dedicated space. There are two primary sources of distraction in your home office environment, personal clutter and communications.

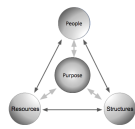
Personal clutter may include actual objects (e.g., a stack of household bills, basket of laundry or pile of dirty dishes) or digital ones such as your news and social media feeds, personal browser pages (Amazon, airfare, more news, facebook, etc...). Try the following:

- De-clutter physical items by removing them from your space.
- Close out of all personal applications and browser windows. They really have no place in your workspace and undermine your productivity.
  - If you have tabs in a browser that “cannot” be closed, you can group those tabs separately from your professional ones and minimize that collection of tabs.
  - If you have a Mac, you can use the multiple desktops feature to keep personal stuff on a separate personal desktop (that’s what I do).

I’ll do a communications deep-dive in part four. Until then, here are some communication things to think about:

1. Communications can intrude into your work via alerts.
2. Communications can extrude you from your work when you check to see what’s new.
3. Both of these issues interrupt your concentration and prevent you from getting into a flow state.
4. Ideally, you should turn off all notifications when you are doing priority work.
5. If your work is communications, try and find one or two brief periods of time when you can turn everything off for some concentrated tasks.

**Enhancing** The physical layout of your space can make work easier or more difficult. Try and arrange furniture appropriately. be reflective about inefficiencies or challenges and consider changes to your equipment. For example, six months ago I bought an adjustable desktop so I could alternate between sitting and standing while at my computer. It was awesome and improved my health and my productivity. Last week I replaced that desktop with an adjustable table. Wow! I have so much more space! The result is that I can stay in my office when I need to write stuff out on paper or take notes. I can keep more material within easy arm’s reach. This saves me from having to move away from my work which aids flow and productivity.



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**Professionalizing** Imagine sitting on your couch in your PJs amidst a pile of laundry, paint swatches for your living room, and equipment for your favorite hobby. Now imagine sitting in an office chair at your computer in your business attire amidst your professional books, diploma(s) and teacher/leader memorabilia. The second scenario is a lot easier if you have a dedicated individual space, but have you moved some of the important trappings of your leadership into your home office? Even in a dedicated shared space, you can “stage” the space like a movie set. Hang your diploma(s) on the wall above your computer. Stack your three favorite leadership books on side of your desk. Choose one meaningful piece of “favorite teacher” memorabilia and set it on your desktop or even mount it on the edge of the monitor. The point is that you want to provide subtle emotional cues that reinforce your professionalism and will aid in your focus.

Best practices:

- Create as much physical separation as possible
- Ruthlessly eliminate distractions
- Be intentional about communications
- Professionalize your workspace

Remember that you can view a video that expands on this content at my YouTube channel [here](#).

Do good and be well,

Frederick