

How to make the most out of your days in the office

Tess Bennett *Work & Careers reporter*



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For Sara Wexler, the head of technology at EnergyAustralia, getting back into the office involves careful planning to make sure she makes the most of her time, starting with her one-hour commute.

The Melbourne-based executive, who plans to spend two or three days a week commuting when her office reopens, will continue her daily meditation practice on the train, followed by preparing for the day ahead.



When she returns to the office, Sara Wexler plans to schedule fewer meetings to allow more time for informal incidental conversations. **Elke Meitzel**

“Getting back into the office is really about being intentional and being more structured about what you do with your time,” Ms Wexler said.

It's also important to consider who else will be in the office, Ms Wexler said, adding that her leadership team has agreed to meet face-to-face on Thursdays. However, those days won't be booked with back-to-back meetings.

“Day-to-day meetings work well from home and the office is excellent for building working relationships and group planning sessions and workshops. And again, in the office take advantage of the incidental hallway/café conversations.”

Ms Wexler is hoping that the structure will help her avoid what workplace experts have described as the worst of both worlds: travelling to the office to spend the entire day in Zoom meetings.

“After restrictions eased, I found myself one day in a meeting room with a mask on in back-to-back virtual meetings for the day,” Ms Wexler said.

“One day in the office I went through the entire day without drinking water, missed lunch, sat in the same spot for nine hours except for short bathroom breaks between meetings.

“I also missed the opportunity of human interaction. At the end of that day, I returned home with a headache and feeling physically and mentally exhausted.”

Angela Ferguson, co-founder of workplace consultancy Future X Collective said days in the office should offer some extra that workers can't experience at home.

“Whether that be mentorship, collaboration, social connection, or renewed energy and motivation. To make the most of your days in the office, prioritise activities that simply can't be done at home,” Ms Ferguson said.

Leave room for socialising

Elizabeth Briggs, the director of legal for PayPal Australia, plans to group her calls and meetings together during the two or three days she is in the office, to leave time to build relationships with her colleagues.

“One of the things we really lost during the pandemic was the fun of the impromptu coffee, the catch-up in the corridor with somebody unexpectedly or the lunch with a colleague,” Ms Briggs said.

“I want to be able to make that time when I'm in the office to let those impromptu kinds of situations happen so that you can be more flexible in your day in the office

as well.”

She also has a plan for her junior lawyers, who have missed two years of professional development from attending clients meetings and observing how the business operates.

“My junior lawyers have paid a bit of a price in terms of learning by osmosis. I feel like there’s so much nuance, and a lot of that is lost down a video camera,” Ms Briggs said.

Say hi to your boss

Executive coach Amanda Blesing teaches women tactics to help them negotiate a pay rise. Lately she has been coaching them on what to do when they are back in the office.

Ms Blesing said working from home during the pandemic had given women much more flexibility, but they risked their career stalling if they lost their connection with the office.

“If you’re invisible people forget about you,” Ms Blesing said.

Her advice is to be strategic about which days workers spend in the office.

“Choose your days wisely to ensure you are seen by the right people. Ensure you are visible in the office on at least one day per week when your boss and boss’s boss are around – and be deliberate in ensuring that you either have a meeting with them, or you drop past their office so they both see you and engage with you.”

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