

# **Stressed over the Prospect of Handling Impossible Individuals? Discover the Best Strategies to Deal with Difficult People**

Difficult people can be a part of our lives in several forms; they could be family members, spouses, co-workers, bosses or acquaintances. Simply having a conversation with them can prove to be a dramatic and stressful experience that leaves us feeling drained and overwhelmed. Some people can be so prickly, aggressive and challenging to handle that you may be tempted to simply walk away from the conversation. Alternately, we may be inclined to complain to friends about the thorny personality, but these options do not always represent lasting solutions. For example, you may work under a difficult boss and it may not be practical to walk away from him or her. Hence, it's better to use effective techniques that allow you to deal with such individuals while keeping your serenity intact at the same time.

The secret often lies in taking responsibility for our own reactions and emotions arising from the interaction. At the end of the day, dealing with a difficult boss or co-worker depends on our confidence, esteem and communication abilities. However, dealing with people who are considered generally difficult by most is easier than dealing with someone who displays animosity specifically towards you. This article will explain useful strategies that help you deal with difficult people in an effective manner to preserve your emotional balance and confidence at the same time. Dealing with unreasonable people can be a frustrating, annoying, exasperating and, at times, even frightening experience.

Let's begin by defining what we mean by a difficult person.

The broad category could include those who will not let you speak a word in the conversation, others who refuse to honour commitments, still others who intimidate you and so on; they come in every conceivable variety. From the person who cuts in front of you in the traffic to the boss who does everything they can to make your life a living hell; they all fall under the category of difficult people and each one of us has had run-ins with them at some point in our lives. Overall, these are generally people who compete for privilege and power, as well as the spotlight. They may also be those who enjoy putting others down in order to feel better about themselves. We will examine different type of difficult people, explain how to handle each type and also describe some excellent general tips that help you deal with difficult people.

## **Controlling Personalities**

Controlling personalities are driven by the need to constantly criticise others and prove themselves right. They will invariably furnish excuses for their own mistakes and will exhibit a strong propensity to micro-manage every task. Proving by rational argument that you are right will not work because they will always find something to criticise and will not back down. The best way to handle a controller is to refuse to be intimidated and simply say that you have done a good job and stand up for yourself. Avoid giving excuses or mollifying them and above all, avoid playing the blame game with them.

## **Competing personalities**

Competing personalities perceive every situation as a contest of sorts in which they have to win, no matter what. They are often encouraged by weakness as they see this as a 'win'. The best way to deal with competitors is to refrain from showing

emotion (including exasperation, exhaustion or irritation). For example, instead of saying that you are feeling exhausted, choose to suggest that you will get back to them the next day when you feel fresh. Competing personalities are also prone to jealousy when they see you praised or commended. Similarly, they will also pitch in with their bit (about them) whenever you want to say something. Such people usually behave in a competitive manner due to a sense of insecurity, which is why they feel the need to constantly prove themselves. Also remember that just because they think they're better than you does not mean it is true. Simply refuse to play the game, concentrate on your work and avoid trigger situations. If you feel, for example, that the conversation is veering towards competitiveness, change the subject. Diversify your group at work so that you have other people to talk to.

## **Clingy or Excessively Needy Personality**

On the surface, this may not sound like a difficult personality, but constantly having to reassure a co-worker or colleague can be exhausting and tedious. Such personalities will usually take a mile if you offer an inch. Confrontation will simply end up hurting their feelings and make it awkward to work together. In such situations, you can try helping them out sometimes but offering alternatives at other times. For example, you can try saying, "I don't have time to help you complete your report, but maybe you can try working on it at your house". Offer an independent option that does not involve sponging off your time or energy.

As a busy mum at work, you will need time and energy to deal with other chores once you return home so it's better to draw subtle boundaries where needy colleagues are concerned. Avoid making a habit of offering assistance every time they ask for it. Another subtle tactic is to make yourself less available

to the clingy character. You can always give work as a reason. If all else fails, sit them down and gently (but firmly) explain that you simply do not have the extra time to keep helping them out as you have your own responsibilities to deal with.

## **Chronic complainers**

It can prove to be extremely annoying to have someone grumbling and complaining in your ear all the time. Chronic complainers are not really negative people (we will discuss negative people in the next section), but they view the world and all the events happening to them as negative. Remember that complainers are usually looking for a place to vent their feelings and simply nodding will help a lot. Do not roll your eyes or get tempted to check your text messages or proffer solutions (this will prolong the conversation). Show that you have been listening and acknowledge the fact without getting deep into the conversation. Validation, redirection and sympathy will usually soothe them and get them going on their way. Please remember that validation is not the same as placation at all and mollifying them will only end up fuelling their bitterness.

For example, you could try saying, "It must be very difficult to have to deal with that malfunctioning printer again. We'd better get back to completing the presentation for ABC Company as it needs to be completed by tomorrow".

Listen to their problem and ask them how they intend to resolve it. This will help deflect their thoughts in the direction of searching for a solution.

## **Aggressive Personalities**

Aggressive personalities can come across as dominating, abusive, confrontational, hostile or even intimidating. Simply

put, such people try to stand tall by cutting off the heads of others. Although it may seem challenging at first, keep your calm and maintain composure. The aggressive person wants you to lose emotional balance so that they can take advantage of your weakness (as they see it). De-personalise the situation in your mind because the things that they say are not directed at you, the words are an extension of their personalities. By reducing personalisation, we are able to distance ourselves mentally and avoid overreaction. You can also consider physically distancing yourself from such people and minimising engagement. Keep your questions probing and constructive and shift the onus back to the aggressor.

For example:

Aggressor: You're so stupid.

You: If you're going to be disrespectful to me, I am going to walk away. Are you sure that this is what you want?

Another way to deal with an aggressive personality is to change the topic when you notice that the conversation is threatening to become intense. This helps deflect their attention and it also puts you in charge of the flow of conversation.

## **General Tips and Techniques to Deal with Difficult People**

- Listen quietly: people want to be acknowledged or heard and listening helps them feel validated. With unreasonable people, we may be thinking of what we want to say next, but a little patience can go a long way. Most people will lose steam in less than five minutes.
- Focus on your breathing and stay calm. This may seem challenging to do at first and you may be tempted to respond strongly, but try to avoid giving in to the

impulse. Like the old cliché, counting up to 10 helps control disproportionate reactions. You will find that with consistent practice, this habit will begin to come naturally to you.

- Although you may feel that the temptation is severe, avoid saying things that you will regret. The conversation is likely to degenerate into a shouting match and will do nothing to resolve basic issues. Ugly confrontation is more likely to worsen the situation and make workplace situations awkward. Even if we lose our cool and shout back, this is our choice. After all, our reactions lie under our control.
- Look for the hidden emotions and needs of the difficult person. Most difficult people have a strong underlying reason for their behaviours. The causes may boil down to insecurity, need for attention or craving for approval and so on. Try to identify the hidden inner need of the person.
- While humour is a useful tool in some situations, it can be tricky to use in others. Humour or even smiling may backfire and come across as mocking or sarcastic. Make sure you understand the situation before infusing humour.
- Stop insisting on compliance from the other person to calm down or stay quiet – this will only serve to make them more irate than before. Ask them what the problem is and ask them to vent. Most people look for an outlet to express their feelings.
- Pay special attention to the tone of your voice. Raised or shrill voices imply heightened emotion and shouting is usually associated with anger. Try to speak in an even monotone, even though you are annoyed. Although this is easier said than done, it goes a long way in defusing a negative conversation.
- If you find that the person is crossing limits and boundaries (this is especially relevant in cases of aggressive persons) or if the person is using abusive

language, assert yourself and display confidence in your body language.

- Remember that one size usually does not fit all situations. Use your knowledge of the person to decide on your response. The responses that would work for a complainer, for example, may not work for a complaining personality.
- After a stressful encounter, take proactive steps to de-stress yourself. Talk to a friend, play with your child or pet or else, go for a run. Release pent-up emotions through physical activities.

Difficult people, situations and relationships exist in every workplace. You may suffer from working under a boss who belittles you at every opportunity, co-workers who form cliques and deliberately leave you out or colleagues who resent your presence and constantly undermine you. The emphasis should not be on changing the difficult person but on consciously monitoring your reactions and behaviour. How we react (rather than the actual difficult behaviour) decides our subsequent mood, feelings and thoughts. In certain cases, if nothing works, you may be obliged to resort to a confrontation to thrash things out. Angry confrontations can be draining so it's a good idea to try other tactics first and to use them consistently. Most of the time, the situation will be resolved without any bones broken. Dysfunctional approaches can often result in workplace disasters and lead to devastating career consequences.

The important thing is that we must learn to deal with difficult people because one will meet them in every walk of life. If you leave the situation unaddressed, it will become progressively worse and prove more difficult to deal with. In fact, your emotions may then begin to fester to a point when you may find it impossible to go to work. Addressing the issues early on helps maintain objectivity and control; our reactions will be rational and calm. The truth is that most of

us would tend to be shocked and embittered when faced with unprofessional and dramatic behaviour. It is a good idea to pause and understand what is happening around us. Else, failure to deal with difficult people may lead to constant conflict in the workplace and you may be perceived as a person who is unable to resolve your own problems. Learning to deal with difficult people can help de-escalate potentially explosive situations at work and resolve situations objectively.

It can take a lot of patience, control and integrity of character to avoid overreacting while dealing with difficult people. Give yourself credit every time you succeed in doing so.

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## **The Best Accessories for your Home Office**

Whether you are a stay-at-home mum or working professional, having an at-home office is crucial for staying organised, ensuring your focus and maximising your productivity. For many mums, a home office can be not only a space for work, but also a space for respite from the craziness of everyday life as a mum. If you are looking to create your first home office, or simply looking to revamp your current home office, it is key that you fit it out with the right accessories. This article will showcase some of best accessories for a busy mum's home office.

Before buying any home office accessories, first think about the space that will be your home office. This is important if you are choosing that space for the first time or re-

evaluating the space in which you currently have your home office. The needs you have for your home office space will be different for each mum. However, there are several things everyone should consider. First, how isolated do you want your home office to be? If you are a mum of small children, you may want an office in which you can leave the door open and still keep any eye on your children. For example, a home office that opens onto or connects to a playroom may be a good fit. If you are a mum of older children, you may want a home office that is set away from louder parts of the house and that has a door you can fully close. Next, think about the amount of space you need for your home office. You will want to make sure that you will have room for a desk and chair, as well as additional storage. Finally, you will want to pick a space that offers ample lighting, whether through overhead lights, plugs for lamps, or windows. While working, it is necessary to have enough light to comfortably be able to read whatever you are working on.

## **Office Desk & Chair**

Now that you have considered the space in which your home office will be, it is important to select the right accessories for your home office. The most important thing you will buy for your home office is a desk and a chair, as this will be the spot from which you do your work. With a desk, it is important to think about your specific needs. The first thing to consider is the size of the desk. How much surface area do you need? The second thing to consider is if you want your desk to have built-in storage. Do you want desks and shelves built-in or would you rather purchase storage separately? Once you have selected your desk, you must pick a chair. Be sure to pick a chair that you feel comfortable sitting in for extended periods of time. Remember, you could potentially sit for hours working in this chair. When shopping for a home office chair, pay attention to special features such as lumbar support, extra cushioning, armrests and

adjustability. Check that your chair be can be raised or lowered, as this will allow you to ensure that your chair is at the right height for whatever desk you have selected.

There are many great home office desks and chairs available on the market at a range of prices. Regardless of your budget, you can find something that perfectly suits your needs.

Desks such as the [Coaster 800434 Nesting Computer Desk](#) or the [Songmics L-Shaped Corner Computer Desk Workstation](#) offer style and space (both available on Amazon UK). Some potential chairs to look at as suggestion or inspiration include the [LANGRIA Comfortable V Shape Medium Mesh Back Home Office Desk Chair](#) and the [Herman Miller Aeron](#) (both available on Amazon UK). Both chairs offer comfort, support, adaptability and style. If you are shopping for a desk and chair for your home office on a budget, consider exploring options at IKEA or at your local charity shop. You can also buy a cheaper chair and add a supportive cushion for extra comfort. Great cushions for your home office chair include the [LoveHome Memory Foam Lumbar Support Back Pillow and](#) the [Seat Doughnut Cushion](#) (both available on Amazon UK), as well as any of the cushions available through retailers like [Temper Pedic](#).



**Working remotely from home** means a decrease in stress, with statistics showing **it can reduce stress by as much as 82%**

# Stability Ball

In addition to purchasing a desk chair, you may also want to consider purchasing a stability ball to substitute occasionally for your desk chair. A stability ball is a large, rubber exercise ball which you use in place of your desk chair. The stability ball helps you build and tone your core muscles, improves your posture while you work and prevents back pain. For busy mums, this means you can sneak in a bit of a workout while you work! Investing in a stability ball will not only offer you a choice of seating in your home office, but will also help you stay toned and ward off back pain while at work in your home office.

## Storage

If you didn't purchase a desk with built-in storage, you may want to consider purchasing additional storage accessories. There are countless options for home office storage accessories to choose from. Before purchasing, think about what your specific storage needs are. Do you have enough space in your home office for something large, like a bookcase, or do you need something small and compact that could fit under your desk? Also think about the décor in your home office. Do you want something sleek and modern or fun and colourful? When shopping for storage accessories, consider a classic wooden or sleek metal bookcase, small drawers which you can fit under your desk and fabric or wicker bins which you can stack. If you are on a budget, there are many DIY options for building your own storage bins. Many mums love the ease of storage bins, as you can simply toss things into them and close the lid, without having to worry about dusting or tidying bookshelves.

## Other Decorative Items

Once you have your desk and desk chair (or ball) sorted, it is time to focus on other accessories for the walls and surfaces of your home office. One of the most important accessories for your home office is a calendar. A calendar is necessary for visually keeping track of your schedule. Consider a large, paper calendar for your wall, which will help keep detailed account of your daily, weekly and monthly schedule. Paper calendars are available in a wide variety of themes and many online retailers will even let you customise your calendar. That means mums can feature their own family snapshots on their home office calendar. If you are looking for something more minimalist than a wall calendar, consider a [desktop block calendar](#) (available online through retailers like Etsy and Amazon UK). Made up of interchangeable, stacked wooden blocks, this calendar lets you track the month and date with style. Another stylish yet playful option is a weekly planner pad. Each sheet of the pad is divided into seven sections, one for each day of the week. Jot down your meetings or list of things to do, then at the end of the week, simply rip off that sheet and throw it away.

## Lighting

Once you have chosen the best calendar for your home office, it is time to focus on lighting accessories. Even if you have chosen a space for your home office with lighting in mind, you will still want to purchase a lamp. A lamp will help you to see better at night, supplement any overhead lighting and allow you to move your light source closer to you or your work as necessary. With lighting, consider whether you want a standing floor lamp or a lamp that you can place on top of your desk. You may also want to consider purchasing a floor or table lamp that has dimming capabilities. A dimmer will allow you to customise the brightness of your lamp. This is useful for ensuring that the light is at a brightness that is

comfortable for you to work within. You can also make the light brighter in the evening and lower during the day.

If you don't have the floor space for a floor lamp or the desk space for a table top lamp, consider a wall light. A wall light mounts easily to the wall, allowing you to benefit from the additional light without having to worry about clutter from a lamp. A wall light is a particularly good option if you have a tiny home office or if your home office is part of another room.

When selecting a lampshade for your lamp, you must consider both form and function. Your lamp shade should match your home office's décor. Lampshades are available now in a range of fabrics, textures, colours and patterns, ensuring that you will be able to find one that works with your home office's décor. Second, you will want to consider your lampshade's function. The lampshade should softly diffuse the light throughout the room, so that there are no pockets of darkness or pockets of extremely bright light. The lampshade should soften any shadows and create a soft, ambient light.

In addition to purchasing lamps, you can arrange your home office to enhance any natural lighting. If your home office has windows, leave them open during the day to usher in the sunlight. Also consider purchasing blinds or curtains that easily open, allowing you to quickly and conveniently adjust the natural light in the room. When arranging your home office, try to place your desk facing either north or south, as this will eliminate any harsh shadows from the natural light. If the natural light is too bright at certain times of the day, consider investing in a set of sheer curtains. Not only are sheer curtains a tasteful addition to any home office, they also allow the natural light to filter into the room without any harsh shadows.



# 30%

of workers say that they feel like **they accomplish more on the job while working remotely** as opposed to physically in the office

## Music Maestro

In addition to lighting, you may want a speaker for your home office. A speaker will allow you to conveniently listen to your favourite music, podcast or radio programme while you work. For many people, having background noise – such as music – enhances their productivity and makes working in their home office more enjoyable. When shopping for a speaker for your home office, the first thing to consider is size. Do you want your speaker to be small and portable or larger and louder? The next thing to consider is if you want your speaker to be wireless. A wireless speaker means that your speaker will connect to your smart phone or computer through Bluetooth capabilities, allowing you to play music on your speaker without connecting the speaker through cords. While wireless speakers are convenient, they can be frustrating to use should you encounter technical difficulties, such as an inability for your Bluetooth to properly connect. Wireless speakers are also dependent upon a Wi-Fi connection to play music.

There are numerous speaker options, both wireless and non-wireless, at a range of price points available at retailers such as Amazon UK. Brands such as Bose, Sony and Beats by Dr. Dre offer small yet powerful Bluetooth capable speakers. [The UE Boom 2 speaker](#) was recently cited by technology website

techrader.com as the best Bluetooth speaker of 2017. Features such as portability, loud and clear sound and easy to understand design elevates this speaker. The UE Boom 2 is even waterproof, meaning that if you decide to take this speaker outside the home office (or even lend it to your children), you don't have to worry about accidents or spills.

## Other Accessories

In addition to a speaker, there are many other electronic gadgets that are useful and necessary accessories for any home office. The first is a set of cable ties. Cable ties will help sort your various electronic cords, such as laptop chargers and phone chargers, and prevent them from getting tangled. Anyone who has spent hours untangling their various electronic cords knows the value of such a tool. Cable ties come in a range of styles and colours, many of which will blend in seamlessly with or even enhance your home office's décor. For example, Amazon UK offers countless cable ties in any colour imaginable. You can even get [cable ties shaped like a dog or a cat](#) (available on Etsy UK).

You will also want to purchase USB drives (also called flash drives) in order to save and share your files. Rather than a traditional plain black USB drive, consider ones shaped like [smiling pieces of toast](#) (available at Firebox.com), an ice cream or a fish (available from Amazon). Not only will these USB drives safely store and share your files, but they will also look adorable while doing so.

In addition to cable ties and USB drives, accessories such as a bright mousepad or keyboard cover can liven up any home office, as well as give you a chance to customise your electronics and workspace. There are mousepads available to suit any taste. However, the real fun is in customising them. Online retailers will let you upload your own image, which is then printed on the mousepad. This means that you can upload a

family portrait, a silly picture of your children or even a photo of the family pet if you want. This means that even when you are hard at work, your loved ones are with you. A keyboard cover is another way to customise – and protect – your electronics. A keyboard cover protects your keyboard from damage, crumbs or spills. Cleaning is also easier, as you simply lift up the keyboard cover and wipe it down. Keyboard covers come in a range of colours and patterns, letting you choose whatever best suits your taste.

You can also express yourself through other home office accessories. Consider purchasing cute or fun alternatives to the normal, humdrum office supplies. For example, rather than purchasing plain, plastic drawing pins, consider purchasing a set of delicate, butterfly drawing pins. If that's not your style, get your hands on some quirky moustache drawing pins instead (available on Etsy UK). Rather than a black, plastic tape dispenser, use an adorable otter tape dispenser or a chameleon tape dispenser (both available on Amazon), with the tape serving as his trademark sticky tongue. If you need to jot down some notes, there are countless options for fun notepads and sticky notes. Whether it's a notepad with a built in tiny catapult; sticky notes shaped like miniature beards; see-through sticky notes shaped like ghosts – convenient for notating and underlining text; sticky notes shaped like sprinkled doughnuts; or a notepad shaped like three-dimensional pieces of fruit. These whimsical office supplies will help keep your home office fun as well as functional.

No home office would be complete without writing utensils. Even though you may take the majority of your notes on a computer, writing utensils are still crucial for jotting down notes and reminders for yourself. Luckily, your writing utensils don't need to be boring. Remind yourself of your upcoming holiday with a quirky palm tree pen or keep a smile on your face with an adorable puppy pencil, for example. Correct any mistakes you may make with brightly coloured zoo

animal erasers.

You may also want to consider purchasing storage accessories for your desk. Desktop storage will allow you to easily sort, store and locate the odds and ends – like pens, drawing pins and sticky notes – that accumulate within a workspace. While there are many traditional options for desktop storage available at retailers like IKEA, you can also seek out more playful, unique storage options. For example, let a fleet of [tiny construction vehicles](#) hold your business cards, paperclips and pens (Available at Uncommongoods.com). These also double as a toy for your little ones if you're at a pinch! For something more refined – yet still fun – consider a delicately painted [wooden desk organizer](#), styled like a vintage letter rack (available at Etsy UK).

Finally, for busy, multi-tasking mums of young children, there is one more crucial home office accessory. Many mums use their children's nap time as a chance to catch up on a few minutes of work. To do so with peace of mind, consider investing in a high-quality baby monitor if you don't already have one. Many baby monitors even offer video streaming capabilities, ensuring you can both see and hear your little ones. This will allow you to keep an eye on your children from the privacy of your own home office. If you still want to keep the look of your home office professional, there are numerous baby monitor options that will stylishly blend in. For example, the [Angelcare AC517](#) is a compact, sleek, minimalist white device with a video monitor and baby breath tracker (Available at angelcarebaby.com). This device fits just as well in a home office as it does in a nursery.

For many mums, a home office is a sanctuary in which you can get work done in a space that's all yours. When designing and outfitting a home office, there are numerous accessories to consider. Whether it's a desk chair, a lamp, a speaker, electronic accessories or a baby monitor, each purchase is an opportunity to both ensure the best function and to insert

your own personality and style into your home office. Whether you prefer a chameleon tape dispenser or butterfly drawing pins, there are home office accessories out there for you. It's just a matter of finding and purchasing the best accessories for your home office.

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## **Handy Tips to Dress Appropriately for Job Interview Success**

The importance of first impressions at interviews can never be emphasised enough. Dressing appropriately is crucial during the interview as well as when you join the workplace. Even if the company has a casual work environment (this is increasingly common in modern office culture), it's best to dress formally. Deciding on what outfit to wear to an interview may seem like a challenging task which can leave you feeling flustered and confused. In general, the rule of thumb states that you should dress for one or two levels above the level that you are applying for. For example, if you wish to apply for the position of a hair colour technician at a salon, you wouldn't dream of going to the interview in a set of overalls.

Actually, the fact of the matter is that it's not so much that you are aspiring to get the job post solely on the basis of what you wear, it's just that you would not like to jeopardise the important first impression with poor dressing choices, which in turn could put your candidature out of the reckoning. Experts suggest that while interviewers can decide in 10 seconds if they don't want you, they take much longer to

decide if they do want you. Suitable clothing can help you exude confidence and style and help you express your personality. What you wear to an interview gives a perception (which is often close to reality) of the type of person you really are. At the end of the day, the interviewer is justified in declining to offer the job to an applicant who is inappropriately dressed.

Hence, carefully choosing the right attire can help present yourself as a suitable candidate to hire for the job.

This article will describe the correct and incorrect ways to dress for an interview.

## **General Tips to Dress Correctly for an Interview**

### **Outfits and Attire**

- Three main factors play a role in deciding your outfit: the type of industry that you wish to work in, the weather at the time of the year and the geographic location of the place. For example, if you are applying for the post of a fashion designer, dress up to look chic and stylish as opposed to understated.
- If in doubt, err on the side of caution; over-dress a little bit rather than risk being too casual.
- If you are still in doubt, visit a large department store and request the help of the assistant.

Let's move on to specific tips for dressing for an interview.

1. Please do not dress in a shabby or unkempt manner. Uncombed, scraggly hair, dirty fingernails and food stains on your blouse will leave a bad impression. Shabbiness indicates that the candidate has not bothered to dress up with care for an important event.

2. Opt for understated colours. These need not look dull or drab, but they will exude class and subtlety. It's best to avoid very bright colours like yellow, red or green as these tend to be subconsciously distracting for the interviewer. Conservative colours including black, white, grey, blue and brown are safer bets compared to say bright yellow, orange, purple, pink or vivid green. Black is a strong colour and is usually associated with leadership positions. Blue or brown are perfect for team players, while grey indicates confidence.

If you really wish to, you can consider adding a splash of colour in the form of a tie or a scarf. But please keep in mind that this should not be the dominant colour of the outfit.

3. Choose dresses with small, discreet patterns like pinstripes or plain colours rather than loud patterns like polka dots. Also avoid excessively lacy, fussy dresses with frills, etc. Keep the outfit simple and elegant. The objective is for the interviewer to be able to focus on your skills and personality rather than getting distracted by your outfit.
4. Trouser suits work extremely well for most interviews. They look formal and business-like, while you have to be more careful in your selection of a skirt. Skirts should preferably be long (at least knee length). Please avoid short skirts that are likely to hike up when you sit down. There are several positives about choosing to wear trouser suits including the fact that it reduces gender disparity and portrays women as equal to men. If you are going back to work after a break, make sure that the outfit feels comfortable to sit down in. White or off-white blouses are usually safe colours to wear with a trouser suit or skirt suit.

Fashion experts suggest that skirts may be a good fit for the first round of interviews, while a trouser suit may be more

suitable for the final interview stage.

5. Avoid wearing jeans or leggings to interviews. Similarly, strapless tops, spaghetti straps and worn T-shirts below your jacket is not a good idea. Dark colours can be softened by wearing light-coloured accessories.
6. Please do not wear loose, excessively tight or ill-fitting clothing. Try on the dress that you are going to wear at home and check to see if it looks right.
7. See-through garments or a revealing cleavage are to be avoided for the interview. If the gap between buttons is too much, consider wearing a vest top underneath. Tights are a good idea for skirts; opt to go with a conservative colour like beige or black. It's also advisable to carry an extra pair in case your tights develop a run.
8. In slightly trendier job settings, like the tech industry, for instance, you can consider wearing a button down shirt and a pair of slacks. Pencil skirts are classy, formal and understated.
9. Open-toed sandals and flip-flops are not recommended. Opt instead to wear low heeled (or slightly heeled), closed shoes for the interview. Avoid very high heels as they look appropriate for parties and you may end up tottering on them. Ensure that the heels are not scuffed, broken or dirty. Make sure you wipe your feet on the mat thoroughly. You don't want to walk into the interview room leaving a trail of muddy footprints!
10. Wear colours that look good on you and in which you feel comfortable. If you prefer chocolate brown to black, wear that. Preferably do not try to wear something that you have never worn before. For example, if you have been comfortable in trouser suits, do not insist on wearing a skirt. You may end up fidgeting in the chair and pulling on the hem, etc. which becomes distracting and reduces self-confidence. The overall effect should

be sober but need not be sombre – you are attending a job interview, not a funeral.

Navy blue, for example, can easily be worn instead of black (if black is not one of your favourite shades) and is a versatile colour. It can be worn to match with cool or warm tones and gives off a refreshing look rather than the staid old neutral colours. If you are being interviewed for a senior post, please consider wearing a well-cut outfit. You need not spend too much money on the outfit, but avoid casually picking it off a rack. Your aim is to look confident but not flashy, so avoid wearing ostentatious designer logos.

Investing in a high quality outfit may be worthwhile because for the next interview, the only expense that you will have to incur is to pay for dry cleaning. You don't have to buy formal wear repeatedly.

## **Hair, Nails, Make-Up and Accessories**

Wear elegant, muted accessories and don't go overboard with bracelets that jingle. On your ears, wear simple earrings that don't dangle too much. Also avoid strong perfumes and deodorants. Spray something light and non-fussy. Many people are allergic to powerful fragrances and it can be distracting.

Hair should be neatly combed back from the face and tied if long. Do not sport hairstyles that involve fringes or flicks that you have to keep moving away from your eyes or squint through to see the interviewer. Similarly, control excessive frizz and fly-away hair by spraying it to keep it down. Also avoid outlandish hair colouring like green or purple. Keep the hairstyle simple and no-nonsense. Please avoid spikes or punk-style hairdos as these are not appropriate for interview situations. You want to be perceived as a person who is a suitable candidate for the job post. Therefore, it's best to

avoid eccentricities and frivolousness at this point.

Keep makeup subtle and light. Use a light foundation and moisturiser so that you don't have make-up dripping down your face during the interview. Use a light touch of mascara if you must but avoid garish, loud make-up. Lipsticks should preferably be neutral; go for nude shades like pink or brown. Bright colours like red and orange are best avoided. Be careful when you apply lipstick, do remember to use a tissue to blot excess amounts and take care that it doesn't bleed out of the lip area. Nails should be kept clean and manicured. You may use a neutral shade to polish them. Again, avoid outlandish and bright colours. Please do not turn up to the interview with dirty nails.

If you can, it's a good idea to get your eyebrows plucked (at home or at the salon) before the big day. The emphasis throughout is on being well-groomed and presentable rather than being fashionable or trendy. It's not a bad idea to touch up your face before the interview but be careful about taking too long in the toilets.

Carry along a leather (real or artificial) bag that is convenient to carry your purse, mobile phone and a few cosmetic accessories. Stay conservative with the colour – white, off-white, black, beige or navy blue are all acceptable colours. Avoid carrying gym bags, duffel bags, satchels, clutches and backpacks. The bag that you choose to carry need not be expensive but it shouldn't look shabby. Make sure you wipe your bag to remove any stains or spots. If you have to carry documents, pens, mobile phone, pad, etc., you may wish to use a bag organiser within the bag so that you can easily get to what you need.

As a stay-at-home mum returning to work after a gap, you may want to first take an inventory of what's in your wardrobe. You are likely to have accumulated comfortable, casual clothes that are convenient to wear. Your body may have undergone

changes in the meantime and you should always try on what you plan to wear before D-day. Start your selection of clothes beforehand so that you have time to make alterations or buy anything that you need. Keep your attire clean and spotless, although this could prove challenging when we live with babies or young children. You don't want to enter the interview room with food splatters down the front of your suit. The interview attire should be clean, well-tailored and pressed.

The objective of dressing for an interview is not to make a fashion statement. There has been a shift in thinking with regard to interview dressing. The scenario has changed from the late nineties where casual (or even scruffy) dressing was accepted. The main reason for this was that the applicants were in demand and jobs were many. Nowadays, the emphasis has returned to a more conservative, sober look for interviews. While it's not the deciding factor, poor dressing has the potential to make a negative impression. The way you dress shows a lot about you as a person and as a candidate for the job. It's not necessary to spend a fortune shopping for an outfit; you can choose from a range of affordable clothing or even select appropriate outfits from your wardrobe. The right clothing may not be a substitute for a killer CV and impeccable communication skills, but it will definitely set you apart from others.

Proper attire helps improve your chances of being selected for the post. Sloppy dressing is instantly visible and will convey the impression of nonchalance and the interviewer will be less inclined to view you as a suitable candidate. If you are in doubt, you can also try calling the recruiter or the HR department to ask for advice on what to wear. You may lose a job opportunity due to inappropriate clothing and never know why you were not selected!

Remember to dress for success!

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# Thinking of going back to Work? It's Time to Rewrite your CV

A CV is the first impression that a prospective recruiter or employer has of your education, experience and skills. A good CV does much more than simply list out qualifications, education and experience. It also helps convince the recruiter that you are a suitable candidate for the post. Regardless of interview and communication skills and other added positives, a CV remains an inevitable part of the recruitment process. It remains a foundation stone because in the absence of a strong CV, you may not cross over to the interview stage at all. The employer has not seen or met you at this stage and the CV is the only document that represents you.

Recruiters of large companies and agencies sift through hundreds of CVs each day and, as a result, they may not spend more than a minute or two perusing yours. Hence, your CV has to be impressive enough to make a favourable impression within that time. In fact, research shows that 75% of candidates are eliminated on the basis of their CV alone. This is your one and only chance to capture the interest and attention of a potential recruiter or employer. If you miss this opportunity, your CV is going to be tossed into the pile of rejects. In this competitive day and age where hundreds of candidates may apply to the same company, you need a professional and impressive CV that has a good chance of being seen.

You have spent a lot of years studying and working and you want all that effort and achievement to be properly showcased in the CV. Not only is the actual information important, how

it is relayed also plays a crucial role in standing out from the rest of the pack. Seen in this light, we are able to perceive that the CV has actually transformed into a personal brand and reflects who you are. With a little thought, creativity and meticulousness, the CV can encapsulate who you are and why you are special.

Let's begin by taking a look at the different types of CVs.

There are basically three different kinds of CVs: Reverse-chronological, functional, and combination. Each is associated with its own set of features, advantages and disadvantages. Read about each and decide on the one that seems right for your requirement.

## **(Reverse) Chronological CVs**

A chronological CV (also called a reverse-chronological CV) shows your most recent employment history and then earlier experiences. This type of CV is the most common and it emphasises job titles and history rather than skills and attributes. This CV is perfect for individuals who have worked steadily in one or two fields or have had very few breaks in their career. This kind of CV is ideal for a job profile, where your job placement titles and designation match potential job vacancies. These CVs are also recommended for situations where you are aiming for upward career mobility or are looking to work in the same field.

As a mother returning to work, you may wish to opt for the functional or combination CV.

## **Functional CV**

If you want more emphasis on your skills and achievements and the value that you can bring to the company, this is the right kind of CV. Functional CVs are perfect for those who wish to

highlight their abilities, skills and knowledge and especially if you are re-entering the job market after a gap. It's also recommended for those women who want to consider changing their career or who have had unrelated work experiences (or lack transferable skills). This would probably not be the correct choice if you are entering the job market for the first time.

## **Combination CV**

As the name suggests, a combination CV combines the features of chronological CVs and functional CVs. This kind of CV works extremely well for those who have a lot of experience in a specific industry. A combination CV is usually split into two parts: one part highlights your skill set and achievement and the second one communicates your work history in a chronological format.

Now that you've learnt about the different types of CVs, let's learn how to write an attractive, legible and interesting CV.

Just so you know, there are numerous CV templates available online. A template is a pre-designed format where you have to simply enter the information that it asks you to enter. If you want to rewrite your CV in a hurry, templates may be useful, but a personally written CV is usually more impressive.

## **How to Rewrite your CV**

### **Font Styles, Layout and Sizes:**

CVs should preferably be no longer than one or two pages long. Allow for margins about 1 inch on the right and left and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch on the top and bottom. Use a simple, legible font like Arial or Calibri. Avoid choosing very stylised and curvy fonts as they are difficult to read. In particular, avoid fonts with tails. The size should be preferably 12 and you can use sizes

14 to 16 for headings and titles. Keep the style uniform and consistent.

## **Contact Information:**

Ensure that you mention your name (preferably in bold and capitals), address, telephone contact numbers and email address. Put your name prominently on top of the CV. The contact information is very important because prospective employers often search for your social media profiles using your name. Do not give nicknames.

Make sure you provide a phone number that you answer at all times. Check your voicemail messages so that you do not miss any calls and please do call back in case the recruiter calls for you. Your email should also be straightforward and acceptable, ideally first name.last name@\_\_\_\_\_.com. Using an inappropriate email address may give a negative impression, for example, lovepartying@.....com would not be suitable.

## **Value statements or core strengths:**

Describe (use effective language) what you can bring to the job role or company. Remember to use industry specific keywords and skill sets that will capture the attention of the recruiter or employer. Creating an interesting value statement can help your CV stand out. If you are a mother returning to work, focus on emphasising your skill set rather than your job title. For example, you could consider writing, 'A dedicated worker who offers excellent customer service'. If you do not have experience in the field that you plan to join, emphasise your adaptability instead. Highlighting your transferable skills is an excellent way to promote your candidacy.

Valuable core competencies (that also double as transferable soft skills) could include positive attitude, ability to work well with others, flexibility, strong work ethics, self-confidence, time-management and ability to accept criticism

and use it constructively, etc. If you know a foreign language, please remember to mention it as well as the level of your proficiency (beginner, intermediate, advanced, fluent, etc). Keep in mind that in many companies, soft skills are highly valued and highlighting them in an appropriate manner can land you the job of your dreams.

## **Experience:**

This section often forms the heart of the CV. Even if there has been a gap in your CV, talk about previous experience. For example, 'Six years of offering after sales support for X company'. Companies always look out for experience; its value is likely to override any time-gap in your CV. Ideally, you would want this part of your CV to show growth in responsibilities, skills and knowledge. It does not matter if your experience is zigzag instead of linear. Experience in unrelated fields can also translate into solid growth; in fact you'd be interested to know that some of the best candidates often show zigzag growth patterns in their CVs. It all depends on how well you can present the information.

The best way to write the experience section is to list your different experiences with different companies along with names, duties, responsibilities and achievements. Feel free to add experiences as a volunteer, temporary jobs or summer jobs, etc. Work-at-home jobs also count as experience so please do mention details. For jobs that you may have done at the very beginning of your career (that date back to more than ten or fifteen years) can be mentioned in a truncated format under 'additional experience'. It's not necessary to get into too much detail, but you can mention them. Be selective about the skill set that you want to include and choose those that pertain to the job profile that you are applying for.

(At this point, we should mention that one CV should never ever be used for different job profiles). Try and quantify your accomplishments as far as possible. Something that can be

measured has more effect and is more believable than something merely stated. Also keep in mind that many applicants may provide a lengthy work history; what will help you stand apart is your ability to emphasise your accomplishments. As a general norm, it's a good idea to provide 2-3 bullet points to describe your duties and 3-5 lines to describe achievements.

Writing 'action-benefit statements' is a good way to describe work experience. An action-benefit statement explains the action you took in the face of a challenge and the benefit that it provided to the organisation. Begin action-benefit statements with empowering verbs, including organised, managed, resolved, spearheaded and implemented, etc.

## **Education:**

Education should ideally be listed after experience since you are returning to work. For fresh graduates, it may be a good idea to describe education before experience because they have yet to gain experience on the job. You must mention the university, date, name of the course and academic honours (if any) in reverse chronological order (listing the most recent one as the first). Also describe any projects and publications. If there is a lack of education, emphasise your experience and skills. You must also remember to include any seminars, conferences, training workshops or apprenticeships. If you have currently enrolled in any course, make sure that you mention it, along with commencement and finish dates.

You can either write out any degrees and qualifications in full form, for example, Masters in Science or simply use the abbreviated format 'MSC'. If you have obtained certification in communication or business writing, etc., make sure you describe the coursework in your CV.

## **Hobbies:**

This section is optional and you may wish to mention

recreational hobbies or extracurricular interests that are related to your job. For example, if you plan to join a food company, you can mention your passion for cooking. While you can describe your pastimes and general interests, keep it short and concise. When you tell your employers about what you do in your spare time, it reveals a lot of important insights about your motivations. Social work, volunteer or community work experiences are great hobbies to mention.

CVs may contain a branding statement that summarises skills and suitability in a few short lines. In the next section, we shall understand what it means to customise a CV for a particular job profile.

## **References :**

Please note that references should be included only if the job requirements ask you to include it. If the job description does not mention it, refrain from including references. If you need to include references, mention the name, title, position, organisation name, email and phone number. It's better to leave out the physical address as it's very unlikely that the recruiter or employer will contact them through snail mail. Besides, your reference may not like you to share too many personal details. The best references are former colleagues, managers or bosses who can vouch for your skills or experience.

## **Customising your CV**

It's ideal if you can tailor your CV to correspond to the requirements of the job that you are applying for.

- First, read the job description properly and understand the job duties and profile. You cannot tweak your CV unless you've understood what the job involves and how you can correlate your experience and skills. In general, it's a good idea to get one more pair of eyes

to view your CV before you upload it onto a job board or forward it to a recruiter.

- Read through your CV and make the first point relevant to the job application at hand. For example, if you are applying for the post of 'customer service executive', highlight your communication skills as the first point. On the other hand, if you are applying for the post of 'Online Maths Tutor' you may wish to emphasise your knowledge and skill in maths.
- Show your CV to a friend or mentor and see if they are able to identify *why* you are applying for the post. If your reason for applying is not clear to a friend, it may not be clear to a prospective employer.

## Brief Side-Note on Social Media and Job Success

Tweak your social media posts and comments to support your application. Preserve photos and images that present a positive image about you. This is not to say that you must falsify your social media account (presenting false information to prospective employers is the worst possible thing to do), but keep the mood upbeat. For example, photos of graduation, travel photos and other images of you at company events, etc. can serve to strengthen your application.



71%

of job seekers utilized **online resources** in their most recent search for employment

At the end of the day, you want your rewritten CV to be as

perfect as possible. The following checklist describes the salient points of a good CV:

- The CV should appear and read as original and not as contrived or based on a template (sometimes, using a template can lead to disastrous results so it's better to type it out from scratch)
- Make sure that you incorporate a lot of white space and demarcate sections clearly so your CV is legible and neat. Use bullets, bold fonts and underlines to help the recruiter navigate your CV with ease
- Keep the length of your CV proportionate to the job level that you are applying for. Include a career summary so that the employer is able to read your experience at a glance
- Label the different sections clearly in order to highlight your strongest credentials and check to see if your CV content supports your career highlights
- Read the CV again to ensure that it is geared towards the current job application. If there is a career change, then check to see if you have managed to connect past experience to suitability for the current position

Please check to verify that there are no spelling or grammar errors lurking in your CV. A single typo can ruin the overall effect of a well-written CV.

Once you've rewritten your CV, it's a good idea to update it every six months or so. Eliminate any mentions of outdated terminology (for example, the 'objective' is no longer mentioned in CVs), obsolete software or weak verbs. Your language should convey passion, interest and enthusiasm for the current job. Increase your chances of getting selected for an interview by including links to your social media and web pages.

# CV Mistakes that can ruin your Chances of Landing an Interview Call

- Your CV is stuffed full of stereotype, corporate jargon just like everyone else's CV
- It contains reams of irrelevant information and is too lengthy as a result
- The CV fails to highlight your accomplishments and only talks about duties
- It contains incorrect or falsified information
- You are sending the same CV to every recruiter and employer
- Omitting to include facts, figures and quantifiable information
- Including excessive information onto a single page

You will invariably have to write a covering letter along with your CV for each job that you apply for. Cover letters are often underestimated, but, written properly, they can help generate interest in your CV. Cover letters differ from CVs in that they are geared specifically towards the job at hand. A well-crafted cover letter can help highlight your personality and objectives and what you can bring to the company. It's an absolute must to include a cover letter with your CV. In addition, it's an important tool that helps you tailor your application for the job post in question.

## How to Write a Cover Letter

Cover letters should not exceed half an A4 sized sheet. Keep the content concise, short and snappy. Further details can be viewed in the CV. Include your name and contact details (even though these will be mentioned on your CV) and also remember to mention where you found the job vacancy advertised

# How to Address the Letter and Salutation

Make sure that you find out the individual person to whom the covering letter should be addressed. Call the recruiter or the company to find out the name of the hiring manager. In case you are unable to find out the name of the right person, you can use a general salutation such as: Dear Sir/Madam or Dear Hiring Manager. Sometimes, if the name is non-gender specific, you can leave out the 'Mr' or 'Ms.'

For example, you could write: Dear Taylor Brown.

Describe the reasons for your interest in the job and your suitability for the role in question. Include closing statements and thank the employer or recruiter for their time.

Deciding to return to the world of work and career opportunities after a gap can be an intimidating prospect. You may be wondering about how you would go about marketing yourself and find a suitable job in the process. The very first step towards searching for a job involves rewriting your CV. For one thing, formats of writing CVs have changed from earlier years. Secondly, you may wish to re-create yourself and present your skills and experience in a polished and effective manner. Your CV should be an accurate representation of who you are, what you have accomplished and what you can do. It's alright to mention the gap in a straightforward manner instead of trying to hide it. Log in to any job board and update yourself on the best ways to rewrite your CV in order to make the best first impression that you can. Eliminate boring language, obsolete technology mentions and update it with snappy links to your social media accounts and web pages.

Rewriting your CV is the first key step that marks your return to work. It's a very important document that should contain

transparent and honest details about yourself, career, employment and education. Please note that stating false information on your CV is illegal and may lead to being blacklisted. So keep it upfront and honest.

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## **Is your Body Language Reinforcing your Presence?**

Body language is a subtle and subconscious form of communication that drives the quality of our interactions in daily life. Not many people realise that our body language has a profound effect on our self-esteem, confidence and general feelings about ourselves. Understanding our own body language and the gestures of others helps us attain better control over our emotions, feelings and attitudes towards others. In fact, people who enjoy successful careers, run thriving businesses or savour satisfying personal relationships are all adept at reading signals and being mindful of the signals that they, in turn, send out. When body language is used consistently and in conjunction with other nonverbal cues, they can have a significant effect on the way we feel about ourselves and others. According to a popular study on body language conducted by Albert Mehrabian at UCLA University, body language and nonverbal communication contribute to about 55% of our communication with voice tone, etc. accounting for roughly 38%. Actual, spoken words contribute to only 7% of communication! In effect, people speak more with their bodies.

As a mother, body language is important on several counts. We need to use our own gestures and postures to communicate with our children, spouses, relatives and friends. Young children,

as a matter of fact, are extremely intuitive at reading body language and will unconsciously react accordingly. By choosing to transmit the correct messages and understanding nonverbal cues, we can enjoy greater peace of mind in our daily lives. There are fewer chances of misunderstanding and miscommunication with people and consequently lesser chances of experiencing stress. Gaining insights into the secrets of body language has long-term, lasting effects on our lives. If you're thinking of returning to work, using the right body language can help you create a killer first impression and help you bridge communication gaps across age groups, ethnicities and professions. Using suitable body language and targeted gestures can help accentuate our communication while minimising ambiguity. Our facial muscles, for example, are capable of showing as many as 10,000 expressions.

Men and women tend to differ in their expression as well as understanding of body language. For example, men prefer to be approached from the side while women like to be approached from the front. Similarly, men usually nod to indicate agreement while women nod to show interest in the conversation. Women's voices also tend to become very high-pitched and squeaky under stress while men stay within a certain voice range. Very often, our body language may contradict our verbal communication and the recipient may be confused; this happens much more than we realise.

Body language can be subtle or blatant and can be consciously or unconsciously sent or received. Our responses and behaviours are largely driven by this subconscious communication and inner beliefs and attitudes will be clearly revealed.

Let us understand how body language helps us in various powerful ways:

## **Body language and attitude**

Just like negative feelings such as anger, sadness or diffidence can affect the way we hold our heads or shoulders, the converse is also true. Changing our body language can send empowering messages to the brain. Head held up, making eye contact with people, walking with a spring in your step and smiling can help reinforce positive self-talk and, when we practise this regularly, we begin to believe in what we're telling ourselves. People who use positive body language are perceived as more likeable, pleasant, confident, persuasive and more likely to attract friendships.

## **Body language has an impact on hormones.**

As a matter of fact, empowering body language reduces cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and increases testosterone (women's bodies also have testosterone), which is known to boost self-confidence. If you're thinking of going back to work, it's a good idea to practise some positive gestures and postures (we will discuss these later) to enhance clarity of thinking, boost decision-making and reduce nebulous thinking. The increased balance of hormones in turn helps you to keep your cool and function under pressure. These effects are not only applicable to an office environment, but also to home and children. A sick child, juggling chores and staying up all night can leave us feeling stressed and confused. Positive body language helps us relax and cope with work and domestic pressures better.

## **Improved Communication and Relationships**

Conscious usage of body language and clear understanding of nonverbal cues help us forge more compassionate and empathetic connections with others. We are able to identify the behaviours that precipitate insecurity, fear and hostility in others. This is even more important because we are able to

consciously avoid behaviours that send negative signals.

## **Career and Business Success**

Whether you are looking to return to a career or start a business of your own, positive body language can help you feel more self-confident and assured. Your posture, tone of voice, gestures and manner of making eye contact can add depth and meaning to your verbal communication. If you are in sales or customer services, you can learn how to establish trustworthy and friendly rapport with prospective clients and improve the chances of making successful sales.

The right body language can also help you develop more confidence for public speaking (while making presentations on stage, for example) and help you communicate with your colleagues. Those who practise mindful and conscious body language make effective team players and leaders and are ideal candidates for being trained for wider responsibilities. People who use their body to communicate the right emotions and feelings develop a high emotional quotient.

Body language can achieve the following end results:

- Validate, echo or underline verbal communication
- Substitute actual words
- Contradict or conflict what is being said
- Accentuate or moderate language

## **Positive Body Language in the Workplace**

If you've been busy raising a family and are now ready to get back to work, the first key step involves paying attention to your body language. Read on for useful tips on how to use positive nonverbal communication for career and workplace success.

## **Body Language during the Interview**

- You can extend your hand first for a handshake. Offer a soft but firm handshake. Avoid squeezing too hard as this indicates dominance or insecurity. Please avoid crowding into people's personal space. Maintain a respectful distance.
- Make regular eye contact but break away occasionally and look away. The eye contact should be confident without staring at the other person (this may be perceived as intimidation). Avoid looking down when you respond as you may appear insecure, shy, indecisive, unsure or diffident. If there are multiple interviewers, make brief eye contact with each one in turn.
- Sit all the way back in your chair with your back straight. Avoid slouching or angling your body towards the door as this indicates a subconscious wish to escape. Lean slightly forward as you answer questions; this indicates a healthy attitude of engagement and curiosity.
- Keep your hands on your lap and avoid clenching your fists or waving your hands about. Dramatic gestures would come across as inappropriate. Please avoid biting your nails as this indicates extreme nervousness.
- Avoid too much nodding. Nod only when you agree with what is being said. If unsure, simply mirror the body language of the person who is speaking to you; this will establish a constructive rapport.
- Avoid sitting with your arms crossed (this is a closed-off gesture that implies defensiveness) and do not play with your hair, jewellery or watch, etc. Sit calmly and quietly without distracting gestures.

## **Unique Body Language Tips for Career and**

# Business Success

- While making formal presentations, try moving towards the audience and then move away to signal a change of subject. For maximum impact, blend movement and pauses in order to break the monotony. Before an important meeting or presentation, breathe out through your mouth in order to release tension in your neck and shoulders.
- If you observe someone who moves forward to the edge of the seat or positions their knees, they are probably indicating that they want to leave. In that case, finish your conversation early.
- In order to exude authority, place your feet hip-width distance apart. This helps you breathe easily, amplifies your voice and calms down the nervous system. Taking up more space (traditionally a stance associated with males) helps demonstrate authority.
- If you're working with a team, keep your body language relaxed, open and inclusive. Human beings have an instinctive habit of mirroring gestures and postures. Hence, if you display friendly body language, your team will automatically display friendliness too.
- Make eye contact with any person that you're speaking to. If you are speaking to a group, make eye contact with each person briefly.
- Nodding, smiling, palms open, etc. can indicate engagement or agreement and can help conclude a meeting successfully and punctually. Nebulous or doubtful body language (chin tucked in, shoulders hunched, arms crossed, etc.) often results in confusion in interpretation; other team members or your customers may be unsure of how you actually feel.
- Focus on the person that you are engaged with rather than paying excessive attention to yourself. This will help you understand the other person and, consequently, you can mindfully control your own body language.
- If you want to defuse a tense situation, try realigning

your body so that you slightly lean in towards the person or sit or stand side-by-side. Women tend to stand facing each other when they are in a confrontational mood.

## **Important Body Language Mistakes to Avoid**

The following gestures may give the wrong impression to other people.

- Avoid texting or checking your mail on the phone as this is considered a sign of disrespect as you are withdrawing your attention.
- Slouching or sitting low in the chair with your legs extended in front of you may be perceived as apathy or a don't-care attitude.
- Keep your lips loose; pursed up or tight lips may indicate disapproval or disagreement.
- Avoid leaning backwards or away as people speak as the gesture may be perceived as disinterestedness or boredom. Lean in slightly without crowding into people's space.
- If you wish to demonstrate authority, avoid over-exuberance and excessive enthusiasm in your voice. Overexcited or impassioned gestures can exhaust or overwhelm your audience. Keep calm and quiet and restrict your gestures to waist level instead of gesticulating wildly with your hands.
- Shifty eye contact, hands covering your lips, jerky changes in breathing, repetition of certain words several times (trying to validate the lie to yourself), excessive pointing, talking too much and shuffling your feet, etc. often indicate deceptive or lying behaviours. Be mindful of your own behaviour and watchful of others during meetings and negotiations.

Body language is subtle, complex and multi-faceted and may project itself as a continuous communication or in disconnected units. We use our body language all the time even though we are unaware of it. Paying conscious attention to your gestures, postures and voice helps you to reinforce your presence at work, bond better with colleagues, family and friends and subtly motivates others to trust you. Empowering body language can help you feel confident and boost your self-esteem as well as help you project charisma and charm. The way you carry yourself reveals a lot about how effective personal and professional relationships and interactions are going to be.

Our body language not only indicates how we feel about others, but also how we feel about ourselves. In other words, people rarely merely say something; they convey feelings or emotions along with their statements and these invariably make a crucial contribution to the overall communication. The wrong body language can often contradict our words and take away from the intended impact of the communication. Learning how to stand, walk, talk and sit and speak in the correct tones can help reinforce the meaning of our spoken words. Body language and nonverbal communication are difficult to quantify and work on a subtle level, but have a profound impact on day-to-day communication. Mindful gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and eye contact can help minimise conflict, misunderstandings and confusion at work. In today's multicultural and multi-ethnic workplace environments, knowledge of body language and nonverbal cues can help clarify communication and establish trust and warmth.

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# Six Stay-at-home Mums Who Made It Big

For today's modern mums, staying at home with the children doesn't have to mean staying bored. Whether through blogging, social media or building a culinary empire, many stay-at-home mums have found ways to not only stay busy, but to build successful brands and businesses. Many mums even manage to build their brands and businesses from the comfort of their own homes, while still managing to take care of their families. The following six mums did just that – going from full-time stay-at-home mums to making it big!

## Alison Perry

Alison Perry got the idea of her blog, the cheekily named "[Not Another Mummy Blog](#)", while staying at home on maternity leave with her daughter. Leveraging her fourteen years of experience as a writer and editor at women's magazines and websites, she created a vibrant and approachable blog. Alison's chatty and down-to-earth writing style make each post read like a conversation with a close girlfriend.

Since its creation in 2011, Alison has grown her London-based lifestyle blog into a multi-platform destination for parenting, travel and style advice. Posts chronicle Alison's adventures with her now six-year-old daughter and her husband, coyly referred to as "Mr. P."

In addition to browsing her website, readers can shop Alison's looks on her Instagram page, tune in to her Not Another Mummy Podcast or peruse her Pinterest board. Content is divided neatly into categories including 'Life', 'Travel' and 'Style' and ranges from the light-hearted to the hard-hitting. Recent articles include "10 Free Things To Do In London With Kids", "7 Things That Happen When You Go Through IVF" and "Revamp

Your Make Up Bag for Under £10". Posts are accompanied by bright photographs featuring Alison and her family, both in their day-to-day London life or on one of their many holidays.

Readers can also connect directly to Alison via Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. In her "About Me" section, she notes that she "[loves] hearing what readers think, even when (actually especially when) you don't agree". That willingness to engage with readers has fostered a space in which readers can come together to discuss the intricacies of life as a parent, as well as just life in general.

Since its creation in 2011, Not Another Mummy Blog has been featured in The Telegraph, Grazia and Daily Mail. In 2011, Alison received the title of Best Blog Writer at the Gurgle Awards. In 2017, Alison created her podcast, which soon after rose to the top of the iTunes Kids & Family chart. She has also spoken at the 2013 Mumsnet Blogfest and chaired a 2014 panel at Mumsnet Workfest.

## **Clemmie Hopper**

Another stay-at-home mum who made it big through blogging is Clemmie Hooper, a South London-based midwife and author. Through her blog, "[Gas & Air](#)", Clemmie communicates her passion for helping women through pregnancy, birth and motherhood. She also shares photos of and stories about her four adorable daughters and her husband.

Despite having previously worked in advertising, Clemmie feels she was born to be a midwife. Joking in her 'Hello' section, she describes how, "According to my mother when I was 4, I declared that I wanted to be a midwife. So I put on my nurse's dressing-up outfit, wrenched one of my beloved dolls out from under my dress, and made the obligatory new born baby crying sound (if only it was so easy)". Clemmie's lifetime of knowledge and insight shines through her blog posts, each of which offers frank advice on the various stages of pregnancy,

birth and motherhood. Whether discussing maternity clothing, nursing bras or what to pack in your labour bag, she writes with honesty and humour.

Readers can engage directly with Clemmie by asking her questions via the “Ask the Midwife” section on her blog. She also shares (with the mother’s consent) a “Birth Story of the Week”. These posts offer weekly insights into real women’s joys and struggles during pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. Readers can send their own birth stories, comments or questions to Clemmie via Twitter. They can also follow her photogenic life via her Instagram, *mother\_of\_daughters*, which has over 380,000 followers.

Clemmie has since expanded her blog into a book, *How To Grow a Baby And Push It Out*. The book was published by Penguin Random House in February 2017 and is available for purchase as a paperback or Kindle edition on Amazon UK. Readers rave about how informative yet funny the book is, as well as the helpful, practical advice it offers mums and mums-to-be. *Gas & Air* has been featured on the Mumsnet Blogger’s Network and at Brit Mums Live! 2015, as well as recognised as one of the Tots 100 Love Blogs. Clemmie has also been featured in the Mail on Sunday, Mail Online, Closer Magazine and a range of other blogs and websites dedicated to pregnancy and parenting.

## **Jools Oliver**

Another mum known for her enviable social media presence is Jools Oliver, wife of celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and mother of five children – Daisy, Poppy, Petal, Buddy and River. Jools shares candid snapshots of her family, country home and, of course, mouth-watering food with her over 500,000 Instagram followers. Jools previously worked as a model and TV researcher before leaving to stay at home with her brood, splitting time between homes in London and Essex.

Jools has parlayed her social media success into a variety of

business ventures. She serves as co-designer of Little Bird by Jools, a line of clothing for children aged newborn to eight. Little Bird by Jools offers decidedly practical, yet beautiful, children's clothes, intended to be shared and passed down to the next generation. Jools designed this clothing line to encourage children to dress themselves and to express their own unique sense of style. Pieces are inspired by her own childhood memories from growing up during the seventies and feature a range of quirky prints, nostalgic motifs and vintage touches. Little Bird by Jools is available for purchase at [Mothercare](#).

In addition to her clothing line, Jools has also [written several books](#). The first, *Minus Nine to One, The Diary of an Honest Mum*, candidly and humorously chronicles Jools' journey as she discovers she is pregnant with her first child, Poppy. Jools describes how the book is "simply my story and I hope that you can relate to it in some way (and maybe even relax with it in the bath!)". Jools also wrote a children's book in 2008 called *The Adventures of Dotty and Bluebell: Four Delightful Stories of an Ever-so-naughty Little Girl and Her Big Sister*. This whimsical book tells the tales of two sisters and their adventures throughout the seasons.

Not only does Jools write books, but she has also written a celebrity guest blog featured exclusively on [Gurgle](#). Posts discuss family parties, holiday preparation and baking tips, as well as insight into her and her family's day-to-day life. Many readers love the glimpses she offers into daily life with her celebrity-chef husband and brood of adorable children. Whether it's through her Instagram, her books, her clothing line or her blog posts, Jools has made it big without sacrificing her duties as a mum.

## Ree Drummond

While Jools Oliver is married to a chef, other stay-at-home

mums have found success themselves in the kitchen. Ree Drummond is an American blogger, New York Times bestselling author, food writer, photographer and television personality. She lives on a working ranch outside of Pawhuska, Oklahoma with her husband, rancher Ladd Drummond (who she endearingly refers to as 'The Marlboro Man') and her four children.

Ree created her blog, "[The Pioneer Woman](#)", in May of 2006. Her posts discussed her family's life on the ranch, home-schooling her children and food recipes. Ree posted her first food recipe and a tutorial on "How to Cook a Steak", which included step-by-step instructions with over twenty photos illustrating the steps. Readers loved how detailed and easy to follow Ree's recipes were, and soon, Ree made photographic, step-by-step food tutorials a feature of her blog. Just three years after its creation, The Pioneer Woman was receiving more than 13 million page views per month. The blog has received numerous awards for its writing and design.

By 2009, Ree realised that she could expand both her blog and her brand by focusing more specifically on food. She started TastyKitchen.com, a website allowing readers to share their favourite home recipes with one another. She also redesigned The Pioneer Woman to better allow readers to search, print and share Ree's recipes.

Based on the success of her food blogging, Ree was invited to appear on a 2010 episode of the Food Network's Throwdown! In April of 2011, Ree began hosting her own Food Network show called The Pioneer Woman, which features Ree cooking her own recipes at home on her family's ranch.

In addition to her blogging and television success, Ree has also penned numerous books, some of which have even gone on to become best sellers. In 2007, she released Black Heels to Tractor Reels, which tells the story of how Ree met and married her husband. The film rights to the book were later purchased by Columbia Pictures, with rumours of Reese

Witherspoon in talks to play Ree herself. Ree has also written three cookbooks: *The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Recipes from an Accidental Country Girl*; *The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Food from My Frontier*, and *The Pioneer Woman Cooks: A Year of Holidays: 140 Step-by-Step Recipes for Simple, Scrumptious Celebrations*. Her second cookbook, *The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Food from My Frontier*, became a Number 1 New York Times Bestseller.

Ree has also written several children's books which tell stories of ranch life from the perspective of her family's Basset Hound, Charlie. Her series of children's books include: *Charlie the Ranch Dog*, *Charlie and the Christmas Kitty*, and *Charlie and the New Baby*. The books have received praise for their humour, as well as their ability to appeal to both adult and child readers.

The Pioneer Woman has been named one of the "25 Best Blogs" in the world by TIME Magazine, and Ree is estimated to earn more than a million dollars annually in advertisement revenue from her blog. Her blog, television show and books continue to attract and enchant readers and viewers. It's undeniable that in the past decade, Ree has truly built an empire from the comfort of her home (and her kitchen!)

## **Stacey Brown**

Stacey Brown is another stay-at-home mum who has built a successful business from her kitchen. In 2007, Brown was busy raising her four children in Alabama, then between the ages of two and seven. To help supplement her family's income, she began making homemade chicken salad and selling it door to door. Soon, neighbours developed a taste for Stacey's cooking and Stacey was getting regular business from her door-to-door sales. However, she was soon contacted by the Health Department, who informed her that her fledgling business was illegal as she was not cooking the chicken salad in a commercial kitchen. She was forced to halt sales of her

chicken salad immediately.

However, Stacey didn't let that setback stop her. In 2008, she and her husband, Kevin Brown, opened their first restaurant, [Chicken Salad Chick](#), selling Stacey's homemade chicken salad. The restaurant was an instant success and soon they were approached with franchise offers. As of May 2017, Stacey had successfully opened sixty-two locations, with plans to open between thirty to forty new restaurants annually over the next several years. Chicken Salad Chick has a recorded growth rate of more than 6,000% and earns more than \$9.8 million in revenue annually. However, throughout the process of growing her business, Stacey remained committed to her role as a mum. She told Forbes Magazine in 2017 that, "Sure, it would have been easy to stay at work longer or open on Sundays to bring in more money, but our commitment was to our family. As difficult as it was at times, our family became stronger because we remained faithful to that decision". Stacey manages to effortlessly balance her roles as both a mum and entrepreneur.

## Natalie Lee

Natalie Lee is another busy mum who has managed to build her brand and her business while juggling motherhood. Natalie lives in East London with her husband, Matt, and two daughters, who she affectionately refers to as the 'the ratbags'. After falling pregnant with her second daughter in 2012, she left her career as a midwife and lactation consultant to become a full-time mum. However, she realised that she still needed a space in which she could express herself, voice her opinions and let her creativity loose. To create that space, she started her blog, '[Style Me Sunday](#)', and her Instagram account, 'stylemesunday'.

Her blog and Instagram account were met with immediate success. Readers loved Natalie's quirky-yet-chic sense of

style, as well as her affinity for bold lipsticks. She also celebrates the unique beauty of all mums, as well as the inevitable messiness of motherhood. Writing on her blog, Natalie describes her brand as “We love curves, wrinkles, realness, anything that doesn’t pretend to fit into a cookie cutter mould. You’ll never see any photo shopping here”. Many mums find Natalie inspiring in her ability to keep it real about the realities of motherhood, presenting a welcome contrast to the often high-gloss, photo shopped, idealised depictions of motherhood.

Readers are also able to easily purchase items they see Natalie wearing. By going to the ‘Shop My Look’ tab, they can browse online items that Natalie has worn on her blog or Instagram account, as well as items she personally endorses. For busy mums, this is an easy way to freshen up their wardrobe.

In addition to inspiring with her sense of style, Natalie is also an advocate and role model for mums raising a seriously ill child. Natalie’s oldest daughter has a rare genetic condition called Brittle Cornea Syndrome, which causes her to slowly lose her sense of sight. Natalie confronts the realities of this disease on her blog. She shares the struggles she feels as a parent, her desire to work through a bucket list with her daughter before she fully loses her sense of sight, and her commitment to raising a daughter who is not held back by any illness or disability. Readers will find strength in Natalie’s determination and positivity.

Through her blog and Instagram, Natalie also leads her Warrior Woman Project. The Warrior Woman Project involves sporadic challenges, which motivates her readers to feel confident and be the best woman (and mum) they can be. Readers can interact directly with Natalie through Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Many stay-at-home mums have managed to not only nurture their families, but also nurture a brand and business. Such mums

include “Not Another Mummy Blogger” Alison Perry; midwife, author and blogger Clemmie Hooper; entrepreneur, blogger and author Jools Oliver; blogger, television personality and author Ree Drummond; restaurant-owner Stacey Brown; and blogger Natalie Lee. Despite the challenges and demands of being a stay-at-home mum, these women have found the time to create and cultivate successful businesses, often from the comfort of their own homes. These six stay-at-home mums have truly managed to make it big.

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## **How Good is Your Grammar? Can You Answer These 8 Questions?**

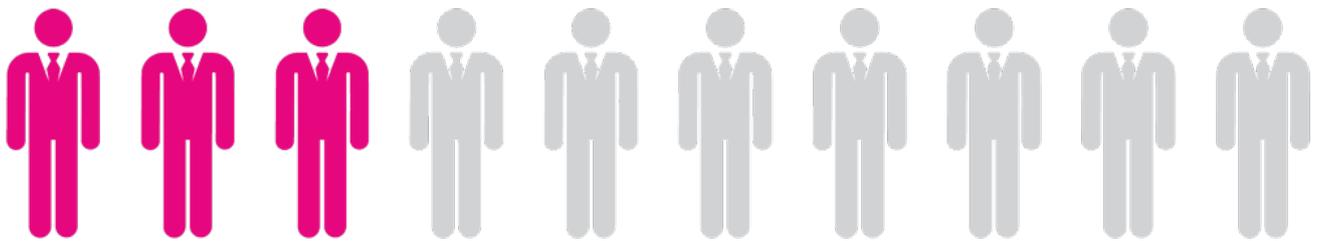
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## **7 Effective Productivity Apps that can help keep you Organised**

It is no easy task to plan a busy day, schedule meetings, communicate with team members and organise files. Businesses are slowly moving away from expensive and dedicated servers and moving to apps instead. Productivity apps are designed to allow usage of multiple organisational and planning tools in one place. Just as de-cluttering your physical workspace can help you work better, reducing the number of open applications

can help you stay focused and minimise stress.

Before choosing the app that appeals to you, make sure that you try the full trial period in order to evaluate the features and user-friendliness. A smart productivity app can help you organise files and information, plan your calendar and schedule events, track time and hold discussions and much more.



Productivity is key in the workplace, **with 32% of business managers in the U.K stating that their businesses are productive**, which is a shockingly low number considering the statistics

There are several reliable productivity apps available and you have to consider your own unique requirements before selecting one. Spending time on what you really want, clarifying your objectives and learning how to use a digital tool to its maximum can help save valuable money and time. Studying the features of each app, its ability to integrate with other platforms and flexibility level can help you decide on the most suitable productivity app.

In general, the following criteria will help you decide on the best app for your requirement:

- Flexibility (the app should be able to support different approaches to organisation)
- User-friendliness (you don't want an app that is full of technical jargon)
- Scalability (the app should be able to perform at the same efficiency regardless of the workload)

- Specialised features (although most apps offer a set of features, some may offer special features that correspond to what you want)
- Integration with other apps and platforms (you want to be able to use on multiple devices)
- Consistency and strong offline functionality

Overall, you should ideally look for an app that guarantees longevity. Your search for a product will be successful when you hone in on an app that you are likely to use for a long time. The app will ideally offer ongoing value, meet your daily requirements and introduce improvements from time to time. These add-ons should be designed to help you work more efficiently than before. This article will describe the features and benefits of 7 popular apps that can help boost productivity.

## Trello

Trello is one of the leading productivity apps in the market and one of the most popular. It utilises the concept of boards which consist of different cards. Each card is designed to track progress or for the purpose of categorisation. It's a reasonably priced app that offers the free version, Business Class version and the Enterprise version. The Business and Enterprise versions are priced at roughly £7.60 and £15.90 per month respectively.

Trello is known for its flexible and scalable project management and collaborative features. For example, members of a project can discuss the project or tasks in real-time. In addition, everyone involved in a project can be kept updated with the help of task lists, email notifications and activity log. The card system is easy and efficient to use. The interface allows inline editing and the website is accessible from any browser regardless of whether it is web-based, mobile-based, Tablet or Smartphone. Trello also adapts to any

screen size. The app is also compatible with iPhone as well as Android. The task lists are fully customisable and members are updated regarding changes in real time.

You can invite any number of people on board for free and the cards can be used to add comments, create checklists, upload file attachments, add in due dates and labels and much more. The user can add as many boards, cards or teams as he or she wishes to. Moreover, you can declare any number of teams or boards as public or private. Search features are powerful and fast with several operators that help you narrow down your search. You can also create cards and comments using email. When you do this, you can simply respond to the email without having to open Trello. Moreover, all data is transmitted over an SSL connection (SSL stands for Secure Sockets Layer) which is the same connection used by banks and other sensitive agencies where security is a topmost priority.



Compared to the other G7 countries, the **United Kingdom is slacking on productivity** with studies showing by as much as 16%

## Newton

This is an ideal app designed to help those who have to handle a barrage of emails on a regular basis.

Newton is a flexible app designed to help you gain control over emails and works on any platform including computers, Tablets and Smartphones. It's not cluttered with multiple

screens to confuse the user. You are able to see a list of messages or the current email that you happen to be reading or composing. The app is designed with a lot of keyboard shortcuts to perform functions such as deleting or archiving your emails. As a result, you are able to navigate your way, even without the aid of a mouse. Priced at about £38 per year (the free trial lasts for 14 days, but you can also use the free version) for the premium version, the app offers general features such as conversation view style, deleting, archiving and filing away emails.

Although the app appears simple and uncomplicated, it also packs a punch when it comes to offering add-on features when you click on the settings option. For example, you can snooze messages (this means that you can save the messages to read at a later time without missing them by mistake), read receipts (this will tell you if the message has been read and by whom) and schedule email messages to be sent at a later date. Newton interfaces with Android as well as iPhone platforms. In addition, it's also compatible with an impressive array of other email providers such as Yahoo Mail, Gmail, Outlook and Google Apps among others. Newton also allows you to clip any work related tasks to Trello using a simple plug-in.

## **RescueTime**

This is an extremely user-friendly and efficient app that helps you manage your time wisely. Whether you choose to work at a regular job or work on a freelance basis, the app helps re-evaluate your choices in order to help you focus on priorities. This app is especially ideal for those who are struggling to manage their time and use multiple devices to handle tasks. RescueTime is one of the most popular time-management apps. RescueTime provides a detailed as well as a general overview of your time in minutes and hours. This is an app that helps track time and your progress on tasks as well as allowing you access on multiple devices.

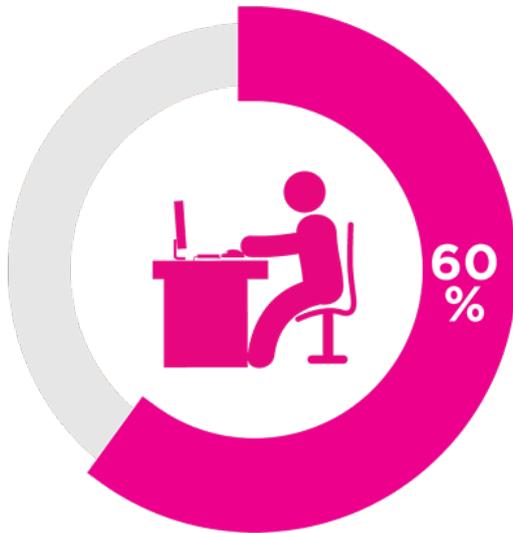
The app runs in the background and automatically records, classifies and tracks our activities. For example, RescueTime keeps a watch on the windows that have activity on, records the name and measures the time we spend on the window. So if you spend too much time moping around Facebook when you should be completing your reports, RescueTime will remind you of it. Similarly, the 'Get Focused' feature stops distracting apps and sites from popping up once you've selected the ones that you want blocked off while you work. Other pluses include the fact that it's well-funded and more likely to have a longer lifespan and the interface is not cluttered with useless adverts and banners. The free model is available for use for a long period.

The premium version costs roughly £55 per year and offers some special features. These include detailed reports that tell you about your most productive times as well as your most distracted ones. You can also click to check on your time reports for a year back; this is extremely useful to track time management efficiency. You can also opt to view your time management in the form of pie charts and bar graphs. Another great positive is that RescueTime does not intrude on your contacts, emails, etc. and ask for ridiculous permissions to access personal information. It's lightweight (in that it does not take up loads of memory space and use up your battery) and efficient. The different filters and overlays help you understand exactly how you are spending your time (this can be quite eye-opening). RescueTime also integrates seamlessly with several other software applications.

## **Google Calendar**

In professional life, there are very few tasks that prove to be as mind-numbing as scheduling meetings. You have to find a time that works for everyone that invariably results in a string of email responses and accidental double-bookings that throw your schedule off kilter. Keep in mind that the calendar

on your computer or mobile is still confined to the device in question and it offers excellent flexibility if it is synced to an online functionality. This is exactly what Google Calendar does.



U.K study shows that less than **60% of the workday is actually spent on productive matters**

Google calendar is an erstwhile tool that helps you organise, share and manage meetings in an easy and user-friendly manner. Google calendar is well-integrated with Gmail as well as Google tasks and you can schedule your day personally or for a team. Features include organising events as separate calendars and inviting people to those calendars. The app is extremely useful because it helps synchronise all the appointments that you accepted or set up through your email. Google tasks help you keep track of events that you need to attend in each calendar. All you need to do is to type in the date and time and Google Calendar automatically converts the text into an event.

For those who use Google apps for work, the calendar will help you schedule meetings quickly and efficiently because it shows you other people's schedules too; this way you can pick a time and day that works well for the whole team. While it's a great app to use on its own, it works even better when you use it with Gmail. It automatically picks up dates and automatically integrates this information into your calendar.

# FocusList

FocusList is a simple, uncluttered app that helps you improve an extremely important attribute; it helps you focus on your tasks. The app is driven by your preferences and content and it displays your tasks, provides an estimated completion time and also furnishes a timer when you want. Along with your task list, there are a couple of handy features including the Pomodoro timer and estimation of project duration. Simply start your day by listing out tasks and the time that you'd like to dedicate to the task. We often underestimate or overestimate the time required for specific tasks. As a result, we accomplish less than we are able to.

For every task that you wish to complete, you can assign an estimated time and can adjust the time by half an hour by swiping to the right or left. The app follows the Pomodoro technique which involves 25 minutes of intense work followed by a five minute break. The timer will be displayed above the task list and you review your performance by clicking on the stats view. This will show you how well you worked and how close you were to the time estimates that you had entered at the beginning. FocusList works with Mac and iPhones.

# Evernote

One of the most important prerequisites for improved productivity is to be able to record your thoughts, ideas and inspirations as they strike you. We can very rarely (if at all) hold thoughts in our heads and many times, good ideas slip out of our memories and we lose them forever. Evernote is a versatile app where you can simply sync in your thoughts, notes and ideas as they arise. A seamless interface with Android, iPhone and other operating systems, the Evernote offers the free version as well as the paid one for premium features. However, with the free version, you can use it across two devices at most.

Plus and premium accounts come at a price of £26 and £53 per year respectively (which is reasonable). The plus and premium versions offer higher storage up to 200 MB. One of the strongest features of Evernote is its search functionality which is designed to be extremely intuitive and speedy. Moreover, Evernote is able to search text inside images as well and when you search for a particular word, the app highlights all the instances where the word is found. Evernote is also compatible with several other apps and software services, making it a versatile application for recording notes.

The biggest plus point is that Evernote helps transform a random thought that popped up in your head to a well-fleshed out thought that may get published. Evernote is also compatible with Trello which means you can workflow to your notes and notes to cards on Trello. This gives you the flexibility to use Trello for collaboration along with your important notes from Evernote.

## **Strides**

While apps can help improve our productivity, what we really need is to work on habits that are holding us back from giving our best. The Strides app does just that; it is designed to help us track our goals and habits and is one of the most popular apps in the app store. What the app really does is remind you to report on your progress and then it refines the information and presents it to you on your dashboard. The dashboard helps you review your progress and make decisions. The app helps you make habit choices between better and worse and this helps you improve upon professional as well as personal habits that contribute to productivity.

At its core, Strides is a habit and goal tracking app that works well with iPhone, iPad and the web. It not only motivates you but also holds you accountable for your goals.

For example, you may wish to inculcate a habit of waking earlier than you do. All you need to do is to click on the '+' icon located at the top right of the screen. Then enter your goal and choose between a set of different categories including health and fitness, education, finance and so on. By simply scrolling through the list, you can get plenty of ideas on how you can achieve your goal and, in addition, you can set specific targets and milestones. The app offers a clutter-free and friendly interface that helps you achieve your goals without too much complication. The helpful charts help you incorporate changes where needed. While Strides is free, Strides Plus incorporates special features and costs approximately £31 a year. Overall, an excellent app that helps you monitor professional and personal goals that help upgrade productivity.

It's easy to feel overwhelmed with endless to-do tasks during a typical work day. You may forget where you saved an important file and you may have to search through your laptop, tablet or even mobile phone. An app helps you perform multiple functions that would normally use different software applications. A productivity app helps you navigate tasks and multi-task efficiently and is a handy tool that boosts organisation and planning. They help you conquer impossibly lengthy to-do lists and manage new projects, etc. and help you manage your time in the most effective manner. Efficient apps help you become your most productive self by allowing you insights into your day in every aspect.

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## **How Networking Can Help your**

# Small Business

When you run a small business, networking is one of the most important means of ensuring your continued success. As a business owner, one of the most important ways to help your business continue growing is to always keep your options and avenues open for increasing sales. If you are always trying new strategies, you are learning all of the different ways that many businesses will use to gain success. Once you become fluent in the world of business, it is easy to find the best way for your small business to thrive.

One of the best strategies for increasing sales in both the short and long-term is networking. To put it plainly, networking is a process in which you meet and talk with people to get information that is helpful. When it comes to the business world, meeting other people who work in your individual professional niche is always extremely helpful. Especially if you are new to the industry. Here are 11 ways networking can help your small business.

## 1. Sharing Industry Knowledge

When you meet people who work in the same field as you do, odds are high that they know a thing or two that you don't about your professional niche. It is accordingly likely that you have some knowledge that you can share with them. This mutually beneficial relationship is one that anybody who is serious about their professional life will experience one day.

This mutual exchange of information is one of the most important ways that small businesses who work within the same niche can share ideas and collectively become better as a result. Sharing ideas is how humans can think about what each other has come up with from their own personal experience and then compare it with your own conclusions to learn from each other.

Nobody has all of the answers that you are looking for in how to become more successful with your business. However, one of the best ways to continually become better is to keep your mind open to new ideas and business strategies. When you are meeting people within your professional niche and simply having a cup of coffee, for example, and discussing what you do for work, you are both discussing information that is important towards your success.

## **2. Helps Generate the Best Market Prices**

One common practice for businesses is to compare the price that your competitors are charging and either meet their price or even beat it. This sometimes-never-ending battle can lead to lower prices for consumers in the end. However, businesses that collaborate with each other during these periods instead of cutting each other off are more likely to reach conclusions that can benefit themselves.

For example, imagine that you sell lemonade for £1 a cup and after a week of moderate success you learn that another person down the street is selling lemonade for £0.10 a cup. You go down and ask the other lemonade stand how many customers they generate and immediately learn that they receive 10x more customers than you do. However, since you charge 10x more per cup you are cutting back on production costs more and, accordingly, making more money.

If the other lemonade stand is business-savvy, they will soon realise that the rules of supply and demand are illustrating that they should raise their price to around £1 if they want to start making more money. Sure, they may be getting more customer at £0.10 a cup, but their prices are halting them from making as much money as you are. This is just one of the many examples of how networking can help businesses learn how much they should charge for their products and services.



# 70%

of jobs available aren't even listed that they are for hire, this further more should encourage the use of networking within social circles

## 3. Spread Your Brand Name

When your brand name is well known and established, it is much easier to receive new clients who already respect you before starting business negotiations. The more consistent clients you get, the more you can kick back and relax from your business' success. However, many small businesses aren't at a consistent level of comfort if they don't have a brand name that is widely known.

Building a name for your brand can take years of hard work, passion and commitment. During your initial years as a small business, the more ways you can spread the word that you exist in the first place is just as important as your sales. After all, the more people that know who you are, the more likely they will even consider coming to you in the first place.

You shouldn't expect your brand name to be as big as BT, Tesco, or any of the other massive corporations, to be happy with your success. In most cases, you will be let down with brutal misery if you expect your name to be a multinational industry giant. However, a healthy level of visibility is an important way to help you reach a comfortable level of sales. For example, when other businesses are aware of your brand,

they are more likely to give referrals to your business (more on this below).

## **4. More Referral Leads**

Referral leads are one of the easiest ways of receiving clients once you have established a network with other businesses in your niche. If you establish yourself with businesses with great character and integrity, they are more likely to be honest with their clients when their supplies are limited or when they are simply incapable of providing service to them at the current time. When these times come, one common practice for businesses is to refer these clients over to another person in their network.

There are also times when a client wants to receive a product or service that isn't offered by a particular company. These scenarios are another example of when a business might refer a client over to another business. Accordingly, these are other scenarios where it is good to have your name heard so that you can receive more referral leads.

Within a certain means, the more business you receive the better. When you have healthy relationships with the other professionals who work both within your exact niche and immediate surroundings, it increases the likelihood that they will send clients your way when they are unable to provide them with the service they want.

## **5. Make Friends in the Industry**

When you engage with others in a professional manner, they are likely to return the same to you. Although it is important to keep things professional, it is also ok to cross the professional boundary sometimes to connect personally with others. Many people will put others into a certain "box" of their life where they only open it whenever the need arises.

This is a common practice for people who are in solely-professional relationships.

However, in order to really gain someone's trust and know more about who they are, it is best to treat them as the person that they are behind their professional trade. Ask about their family and what they enjoy doing in their spare time, etc. Small talk is often the gateway to learning whether or not you want to engage with someone as a personal friend instead of simply another business network colleague.

There are days when you have it all figured out and those in which you need help. On the days where you need to ask for a helping hand, and for your collective benefit in general, friends are something that are necessary to live a happy and prosperous life. When you make personal friends with somebody who works in the same industry as you, they will be among the first to offer a helping hand or give advice at crucial periods of time.

## **6. Learn the Best Industry Practices**

Have you ever noticed that another business within your niche is able to do things at two or three times the speed of your own? Odds are high that this business has been around long enough to learn a thing or two about how to cost the production costs, how to manage their employees, what products to invest in, and a list of other things directly related to your industry.

One of the best ways networking is beneficial to your small business is that it helps you learn about the best ways to make it in your industry. Most business owners are rather intelligent, which is what makes them open-minded enough to consider learning from other businesses in the first place. If you are convinced of *only one* strategy to be the recipe for

your success, you might be shattered later on down the road realising that you were wrong all along.

As you become established within your professional niche, you might start to ease back on networking for the purpose of learning the trade secrets of your industry. However, if you are a small business trying to find the key to success in your industry, networking with established companies will help you learn how to succeed.

## **7. Stay on Top of Business Trends**

With technology literally progressing by the minute, it is important that you stay up-to-date on all of the commercial developments surrounding your industry. Perhaps you think it would be more competitive in the long run to 3D print your products, for example, instead of investing in the labour required for making goods by hand. Perhaps you might propose the alternative and ensure that you always produce goods by hand, comfortable with charging a higher price in return for the quality and demand for handmade goods.

In any case, there are certain to be opportunities where there will be some sort of commercial and technological trend that you will need to keep up with. For example, since many potential customers have online Facebook profiles, you can easily learn how to advertise your new business on Facebook and start reaching out to clients that may have otherwise been outside of your business' influence. These are just a couple of the many different business trends that might occur with the circumstance presented by your own personal small business.

## **8. New Opportunities for Your**

# Business

There are countless new opportunities for your business that can come along with a healthy amount of business networking. You never know if that random person you meet at the coffee shop who works in your niche will give you his/her contact information and then help you come up with new ideas for success. Each person in your network represents a new potential friend, business colleague, etc.

Some professionals who are looking for people to network with will also have the intention of looking for a business partner, which may sometimes be very beneficial towards your mutual success. There are many opportunities that are conceivable when you network with other people in your professional industry.

Outside of the opportunities already stated, networking will also help you open new doors that you didn't already know were available. Perhaps you really wanted to purchase new speakers for your mobile DJ company and you meet another local DJ who will let you use theirs. Since each industry has their own set of trade secrets, the best way to access the hidden realm of opportunities is to ask other industry professionals.

## 9. Builds Your Confidence in the Industry

There is no price tag that comes along with peace of mind. When you are new to a particular niche, it is easy to become uncomfortable with your decisions. During these periods, it is important that you keep yourself educated on all of the ins and outs of your industry so that you can receive the confidence that you need as a professional in your industry.

When you are confident in your industry, it usually means that you put in the work to network with your competitors to

realise that you have a product which is just as suitable. This confidence can be built from years of trial and error before it finally blooms.

However, if you are a small business owner you realise how humbling it is to receive modest incomes which allow you to scrape by. These experiences should be the heaviest motivator in convincing you to take your professional life seriously and become fluent in the language of your professional niche. Confidence that you are always making good decisions and are aware of all of the latest developments and competition in your industry will help ensure that you are successful.

## **10. Make Better Business Decisions**

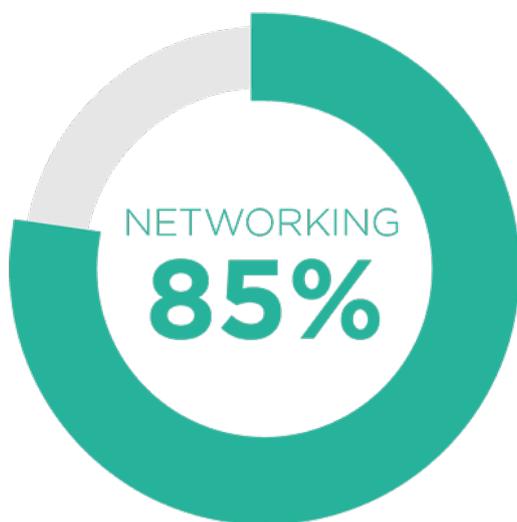
The decisions you make in your daily business affairs help determine whether or not your business will succeed. For small businesses who are relatively new to a particular industry, it may be difficult to figure out what the best business decisions are since you are either convinced on a bad one or simply not networking and learning from others who have been in the industry much longer than you have. Having a flawless business model which runs on educated business decisions is a priceless asset.

One of the first steps to creating an effective business model is to make the right decisions on which investments you should make, how you should find new clients, the fastest way to increase sales, and many other potential questions you will likely ask yourself. There is never any shame in learning from others who are more experienced than you are in a particular field. If you want to start making the best business decisions, you should network with some of the various experts in your field and share ideas.

# 11. Future Job Opportunities

Not every business is destined to last until the end of time. Hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it is normal for your business to fail. If you are concerned with this possibility, it is time to start finding other people in your industry that might consider being your employer in the future. Perhaps the opposite will happen and you will soon find them to be a trustworthy employee. In either case, people who work in the same industry should be empathetic enough to look out for each other when help is needed.

Sometimes people who start their own business will one day choose to close their business doors and work for somebody who is already established in the industry niche. If you spent plenty of time networking your business, you will find these periods to be a smoother transition than if you didn't.



Networking could be the most valuable tool in gaining employment, with statistics showing that **up to 85% of jobs are filled by this method**

Intelligent people will often think of many different possible outcomes to a particular scenario so that they can be prepared for any of them at any given point. If it is even a remote possibility that you will be looking for employment in the future, it is important to network with other working professionals who might be willing to help you.

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# Brush Up On Your Excel Skills

Whether you are thinking about re-entering the workforce or just looking to better organise your home, Excel is an invaluable tool. This program, originally created in 1987, allows you to create and manipulate data spreadsheets. Excel is useful for keeping track of information, creating reports and exporting graphs. Typically, an excel spreadsheet is made up of individual cells arranged in horizontal rows and vertical columns. Within each cell, you will include a piece of data. That data can then be viewed and analysed within the larger dataset based on the row and column it is in.

Excel offers a wide variety of functions, the ability to perform calculations and enable the easy tracking and storage of data. Many working and stay-at-home mums rely on Excel to keep their personal, family and professional lives in order. Whether you want to streamline how your home runs from day-to-day or seek out formal or informal employment, brushing up on your Excel skills is a sure-fire way to get ahead.

There are many ways in which you can use Excel. For many stay-at-home mums, Excel makes organising the day-to-day tasks of life significantly easier. Excel can be helpful for keeping track of daily expenses, such as bill payments, shopping expenditures or income. It can also help sort daily tasks – for example, by creating a chore chart for the children (or the partner!). It can even help with planning for an upcoming holiday or school field trip, as you can easily budget and plan within the program. Excel can also be a useful tool for storing and searching information, such as recipes, books or shopping lists. Regardless of your specific needs, Excel's adaptability and multiple functions will ensure it fits you and your family's needs.

Outside the home, Excel can be a useful tool for stay-at-home mums thinking about re-entering the workforce, whether formally or informally. Nowadays, many employers expect employees to be proficient in computer programs, such as Excel. Regardless of the specific industry, knowledge of Excel will always be helpful. For stay-at-home mums considering re-entering the workforce informally, Excel can be a valuable tool to help grow a home business or personal brand. Many mummy bloggers use Excel to track viewers, blog posts or advertising expenditures. Excel is also helpful for keeping track of sales of products, whether that is a homemade product or something like Tupperware or makeup.

For any mum, Excel is a useful and necessary skill. While it may seem daunting at first, there are numerous ways you can strengthen your existing Excel skills and develop new ones. This article outlines some of the key features of Excel all mums should be familiar with, as well as how to get the most from using them.

## **Excel Basics**

Even if you're familiar with Excel, it can still be helpful to review the basics. Although you may be comfortable creating an Excel spreadsheet, make sure that you are creating your Excel spreadsheet with the right formatting for your needs. Tips for formatting are to pick one font and stick to it. This will help your spreadsheet to look neater and more uniform. Also, consider using italicised or bolded fonts to identify column and row headings or subheadings. You may also manipulate the size of your font to identify a title, heading or subheading. Typically, the larger the font the more important the information is perceived to be and vice versa. For example, you wouldn't want the title of your spreadsheet to be smaller than the data. Ensuring your spreadsheet has proper formatting will make it easier to navigate and ensure that it looks polished once it is finished.

# Excel Shortcuts

Now that you are comfortable creating a spreadsheet, the next thing you should learn is the program's shortcuts. Learning shortcuts will allow you to navigate Excel easier and faster, saving time as you use the program. For busy stay-at-home mums, these shortcuts can help save critical time when using Excel. Many shortcuts can be used through the keyboard. For example, hold down the 'Control' and 'C' keys simultaneously to copy text, numbers or images. To paste text, numbers or images, hold down the 'Control' and 'V' keys simultaneously. If you've made a mistake – don't fret. You can easily undo your last action by simultaneously holding the 'Control' and 'Z' keys. To automatically insert the current date into a cell, hold down 'Control' and ':' to make it appear.

Shortcuts can also be used to navigate your Excel spreadsheet. For example, holding down 'Control' and '+' will select the current region; holding down 'Control' and 'Space' will select the current column; and holding down 'Shift' and 'Space' will select the current row. You can also use shortcuts to hide parts of your Excel spreadsheet. Use 'Control' and '0' to hide the current column and use 'Control' and '9' to hide the current row.

You can also use a shortcut to search your excel spreadsheet, which is useful to find specific information. For example, imagine you had an excel sheet of all your daily family expenses and you wanted to find out how much your family spent on a particular day. You can hold down simultaneously the 'Control' and 'F' buttons to open a search bar in the upper-right corner of your computer screen. In that bar, type the date you are looking for and click 'Enter'. You will automatically be taken to that date within your excel sheet. This function is also helpful to locate repeat information. For example, imagine you wanted to search the same Excel spreadsheet for any time your family made a purchase related

to the groceries. Hold down both 'Control' and 'F', then type into the search bar 'groceries' and click 'Enter'. Automatically, every use of the word 'groceries' will be highlighted in the spreadsheet. By clicking enter, your computer screen will automatically jump from one use of the word to the next. In that way, you can easily navigate to see any time that word is used within your spreadsheet.

## **Filtering Results**

Another way to easily search your Excel spreadsheet is to learn how to filter your results. Excel offers an Auto filter feature, which will quickly and easily filter information for you. To use this function, go to the top of your computer screen and click Data > Filter. You will then be presented with the option to click on options which will automatically filter your spreadsheet by the information you select.

## **AutoCorrect & AutoFill**

To save even more time while using Excel, you must also learn how to use the AutoCorrect and AutoFill functions. AutoCorrect is a feature which will automatically identify and correct misspelled words and grammar errors. Words that are flagged by AutoCorrect will appear on your computer screen as underlined in red. To fix a flagged word, right-click on it. You will then be presented with options of suggested words or a suggested grammatical fix. Simply click on the correct option and it will automatically be updated. AutoFill is another tool that will save you time while using Excel. To use AutoFill, highlight the cell with the data in and the cells next to or underneath it where you want the new data to appear, navigate to the Home tab and in the Editing section click on Fill, then Series. This will allow series, such as a numbered list or a list of dates, to fill-in automatically.

When creating an excel spreadsheet, you may want to include

information from a website. For example, if you are a mummy blogger, you may want to convert information about your blog's views into an Excel spreadsheet. To import data from a website, scroll to the top of your computer screen and click Data>From Web. This will open a New Web Query display window in which you can type or paste an online URL. Copy and paste the URL of the website from which you wish to import data into the display window, then click Import. This will automatically import the data from the website into an Excel spreadsheet.

## **Manipulating & Exporting**

Once you've created your Excel spreadsheet and understood the basic commands of Excel, there are many ways in which you can manipulate it or export the data within it. One way you can do this is by creating a chart. There are numerous types of charts you can make in Excel, including column charts, line graphs, pie charts, bar graphs, area graphs and surface graphs. The type of chart you use will depend on the type of data you are working with and how you want it to be displayed. To create a chart, you will first select the data you want included in your chart. To do this, click and drag across the cells you want until they appear shaded. Next, go to the top of your computer screen and click Insert, then go to the Charts section and choose your preferred chart. Automatically, the chart will be created and inserted into your Excel spreadsheet. From there, you can change the layout, style and location of the chart. If you'd like to change the chart's title, simply double-click the placeholder title and type in your new title.

Another helpful tool for analysing your Excel spreadsheet's data is the Subtotals command. Imagine once again that you had a spreadsheet of your family's expenses each day. Let's say you want to find out how much your family spent within one particular month. Rather than adding up each of those daily expenses, you can use the Subtotal command. To do so, select

the cells you wish to add, then go to the top of your computer screen and click Data>Outline section>Subtotal. This will automatically add up the sums within those selected cells.

In addition to using the pre-set Excel commands, you can also create your own formulas to search and format your data. These cells can help save time by completing addition, subtraction, multiplication or division for you automatically. To create a formula, begin typing in the cell in which you want the answer to your formula to appear. All formulas will begin with the equals sign (=). Then, type the mathematical formula you want Excel to calculate, making sure you are identifying the specific cells you want the formula to calculate with. For example, if you wanted to know the difference between cell A1 and cell C1, you would write =A1-C1. Once the formula is written, click enter. The answer will appear in the cell automatically. When writing a formula, the plus sign (+) represents addition, the minus sign (-) represents subtraction, the asterisk (\*) represents multiplication, the slash (/) represents division and the caret (^) represents an exponent.

Once you have created your Excel spreadsheet, you may want to save a copy for yourself or share it with someone else. If you would like your spreadsheet to look more polished and to not be available to change or edit, then you should export it as a PDF. Exporting an Excel spreadsheet as a PDF will also hide any formulas you may have used, instead showing only your data. To do this, go to the top of your computer screen and click File>Save As. Once the window opens to save, click 'File type' and select PDF. This will automatically export your excel spreadsheet as a PDF.

Brushing up on your Excel skills will allow you to take advantage of all the functions and tools Excel has to offer. Whether you are working or staying at home, Excel makes the tracking, storing and calculating of data easier and faster. This can help to track family expenses, a budget for an

upcoming holiday or schedule children's after school activities. Excel also is a valuable skill to add on to your CV, as well as an asset in any professional setting. By strengthening your Excel skills through the tips and tricks in this article, you can use Excel to organise and streamline your personal, family and professional life.