



Working from home

Boundaries, discipline and space

A25 Articles series: Leadership

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Most clergy and many other church staff are home-workers. Their base is their family home, whether provided for them as a tied-house or privately owned.

But the boundaries between work and home easily become blurred. Examples include physical spaces used, times when at or not at work, and attitudes to whatever is happening.

Such people are likely to have come out of a communal workplace: office, factory, school or hospital, which they travelled to from their home. The boundaries between the two were clear. There was a journey which separated them.

So what training or other help is offered to enable people to make this transition?

I can find very little to prepare for what will be a major change for most once ordained or employed by a church. Most have a working base in the home, surrounded by distractions, without colleagues and lacking the discipline of a normal working environment.

There are of course exceptions. Administrators usually work from a church office, larger churches tend to have a central work-station for everyone, and some clergy have moved from home study to a base in a church hall or centre. But home-working remains the norm for many.

This article, and I write as a home-worker myself, investigates three aspects of this issue. First, ways to understand the boundaries between work and private life. Secondly, the need for a special kind of discipline to work well from home. Thirdly, the use of the study or home office as the work base.

In the 2020-22 Covid pandemic many people had to work from home for several weeks. This article is designed more for staff for whom this is a permanent feature of their work, but the principles are the same whether at home for a week or all the time.

A: Work/home boundaries

First, it is important to understand what is happening when you work from home. Here are four models along a spectrum using the terminology employed by researchers in the field of home-working.

1 Contained work model

The key feature of this model is that boundaries are defined almost as clearly as if you went out to work. This requires considerable discipline of a somewhat rigid kind.

You have a dedicated work space in your house with few compromises. So there is a study and there are recognised rules in the household for its use: the children are only allowed in at a few, agreed times; work papers stay in the study; the door remains shut when you work; or similar examples.

Coupled with this spacial divide goes a similar clarity for timing. You have a strict daily routine: you allow yourself 25 minutes for lunch if working at home; you don't open the post until a time that suits your work pattern that day and then leave personal mail to one side; you use voicemail and never check emails on a day off. When on holiday your mobile is switched off.

Not only space and time have boundaries, you will have a clear work-mode attitude which contrasts with what you are like when off-duty. You may wear different clothes, dressing smartly when at work even though at home. You may speak more formally to your family than when away from the study, you will sit in an upright office chair rather than on a sofa, and so on. But at children's bedtime (if that applies) you are the parent and leave the worries of ministry back in the study. Your study computer is for business, your laptop is for your DVDs and personal finances.

This sounds tidy, but the model only suits certain people. These are more likely to be the administrative kind who enjoy deskwork, rather than those who are energised by meeting people.

In Christian ministry the model does not fit easily with the random demands from people in need (a caller about a sudden death may well come at a 'home' time of day). Those who adopt this model can come across as cold or lacking creativity.

2 Permeable work model

At the next point along the line, the boundaries are still in place but can be crossed. They have become permeable without breaking down. You do not find it stressful to switch from one to the

other and are more relaxed than your 'contained' colleague.

You still have dedicated areas and times but children can come into the study and interrupt you when they arrive home from school, the cat may enjoy sleeping on your filing cabinet next to the radiator, and you will sometimes hold church meetings in your sitting-room or counsel people in your kitchen.

You will not divide your day up too precisely and will be happy with a certain amount of variety in your daily pattern. You will walk the dog in the hope of bumping into people you need to talk to (for 'work'). If you work longer than usual one day, you may well take some extra time off the next.

You can assess interruptions and change plans without hassle. You are probably good at multi-tasking but may still thrive under pressure.

This sounds ideal but it is not easy to stay at this point unless you have others to help you do so. If you live alone, it is particularly difficult to succeed in this way.

For example, you are likely to move towards 'overflowing' (see below) when work pressure increases and there is little help available from those you report to. And although the model would seem to suit laid-back personalities, it also demands a high level of discipline to work effectively at times when you are not so over-stretched. Examples include when a meeting is cancelled or when you need downtime such as after significant public ministry or a difficult counselling session. It is easy to misuse time without the discipline of the 'contained' model.

3 Overflowing work model

This is where danger lights flicker on. Work has started to take over your whole life. You justify this spiritually since you are on Kingdom business. You may feel under pressure but equally you may love the adrenalin rush and get a kick out of people noticing that you seem to be so busy.

But it may not be busyness at all. It can just as easily be lack of tidiness and order in your life which makes you inefficient. The overflowing

model often applies to a home-worker who is not over-stretched, but who seems to be.

Boundaries are breaking down. Work spills over into several rooms in the house and there are work piles on the dining-room table and even files left in the bedroom. The study has paper strewn all over the floor. You keep checking emails after meals and at bedtime and rarely close the study door. You regularly let your partner go to bed while you try to catch up at your desk. You leave the phone on 24/7. You love to say 'yes' to everyone, so end up saying 'no' to family or friends and to yourself. You work intermittently on your day off.

You are often frustrated and even bad-tempered because you cannot find your mobile or your keys or your agenda for tonight's meeting: they might be in the study but they might equally be in the loo. Your spiritual life may be suffering and your daily times of prayer and study become erratic or non-existent. If you are a preacher, your sermon preparation doubles up as your private devotional time or even as family prayers. If you are married, your relationship is put under strain and rows become more frequent.

You may well be suffering from a job whose demands are simply too great for any one human being, such as when a rural Vicar gets another two parishes added to the six. But the real problem here is usually either one of discipline – in not saying 'no', in lack of diary planning, or in failing to make time for clearing up and administration – or one of lack of big picture so that detail swamps everything and there is little concept of what should be priority.

Boundaries need to be reintroduced with emails checked only at fixed times, tasks listed and scheduled, the answerphone on at meals, and time right away from base to assess priorities. When under pressure like this, one of the best things to do is to have a day right away and sort out direction (see Training Notes TN54 on this website). Martha needs to learn from Mary.

4 Imploding work model

Not only have borders disappeared, but the panic of each day's crises means that planning has now gone out the window. You are not sleeping well. You discuss work all through mealtimes or fail to take proper meals if you live alone. Housework has been left for some weeks.

You react to each crisis: the telephone call about a forgotten promised visit comes as you are trying to avoid having your electricity disconnected. A filling has come out of a tooth but there is no time to get a dentist's appointment. You are trying to get by without preparing your talks. Your work expenses claims

are four months behind and you have little idea what part of your bank overdraft is your own and what is caused by unpaid expenses.

You see your ministry negatively, unable to catch sight of God's blessings for you and his love for you as a person. You think only about achievement, and of your failure. You ignore days off. Your children avoid you. If you live alone you are frequently in tears. You become impossible to live with and clinically depressed.

You need love and help and a break before this destroys you. You need some very fixed times when you get right away and learn that some things just have to go. But this can only be done if someone comes alongside you to advise and support, and you are prepared to take the necessary journey out of this dangerous position. Most of all you need to admit that this is where you are as a first step in a cry for help.

It is easy to hide the real position from others when you work from home and without colleagues or a supervisor.

Suggestions for action

The first thing to do if you want to improve your quality of home-working is to acknowledge where you fit on this line, and where you would prefer to be if you are uneasy about your present location. Here are some quick ideas for action.

- 1 Decide where on this spectrum you fit naturally, based on the four marker points. If in reality you are forced somewhere else on the line, why is this?
- 2 Show this article to someone who knows you well (a spouse, if married and if you dare) and ask where they see you fitting on the spectrum. If they have a different point from your own analysis, talk it through with them and decide who is more correct. It is unlikely to be you, although you won't like to admit this!
- 3 If 'contained' fits you best, consider if you need to get out of the house more whether for solo activities such as walking and gardening or social activities such as meeting up with friends. Ensure you are meeting others for reasons other than your normal ministry. Aim to be less touchy when people interrupt you with reasonable requests (whether your family or those you seek to minister to).
- 4 If you want to be more in 'permeable' mode, you need to be disciplined about the big picture so you can relax, knowing where you are aiming to go and letting the detail fit into that. It is also essential to

- have friends who will ask awkward questions on a regular basis, or a family who will hold you to the pattern you seek to follow.
- 5 If you are moving into an 'overflowing' position, take action now before it is too late. In the office your manager or supervisor should help you tackle this, but you are home alone. Perhaps you might employ a work consultant (the writer seeks to help a number of clergy and Christian workers in this way).
- 6 If your life is 'imploding', tell whoever needs to know that you are in trouble and ask for immediate help. Honesty is essential. Then get professional help to start reintroducing some boundaries and priorities, together with practical help if necessary for debt-management or wherever you are in trouble.

- 7 Wherever you fit, take time to list the boundaries you can have between work and home lives. Are they sufficient? Are they solid enough or permeable enough? What one or two ideas could you take from this analysis and action right now?

Note that many lay Christian workers and ordained people in sector ministries have an added dimension to this simple analysis. You may have to consider the boundaries between all three of 'life', 'day job / Christian ministry' and 'church membership/service'. Of course, you are little different in this respect from most church members. Others will need to interpret what I have written into part-time employment, or into a dual role.

The point is to identify the boundaries and firm them up, or even relax them, as necessary. But to succeed in doing this requires a measure of personal discipline, so to that topic I turn next.

B: Personal discipline

The normal employment environment provides a disciplined framework in which to work. An office, especially if open-plan, means others are watching you. In a factory you will usually be part of a chain of people relying on each other's achievements. In a hospital you will be part of a team. In a school the timetable dictates a rigid pattern.

You are also likely to have a clear system of supervision. You may be reporting regularly to a manager or someone may be measuring your output.

Many reading this will spend a good proportion of the week outside the house: visiting, in meetings or at church events. If this describes you, your position will not be as extreme as that for a self-employed writer, say.

But much of the normal supervision and team-working will be absent, the diary is in your hands to book and there is still plenty of work to be done alone at the desk.

Here are four specific, but different, examples affecting home-workers where personal discipline is required if the ideal model in Part A is to be adopted.

This will come more easily to some than to others, but it is no excuse to say that this does not fit your personality. Self-control is, after all, one element of the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22,23.

1: Daily schedule

If the shape of each day is under control, everything else will follow. This is 'life', not just 'work'.

Most people benefit from a structure created by a day that has fixed points: specific actions carried out at fixed times. Monastic life might be seen as one particularly stylised form of this.

The points might include getting up, meals, times for meeting with God, family hour (if appropriate) and bedtime. How many you choose to have and how rigid you are at keeping them on time will depend on the kind of person you are and the model you are working to (see Part A). What most home-workers do not have is the need to catch the 7.23 train each morning – which has a powerful effect on the whole day.

But some clergy will have Morning Prayer in church at 9.00 am. which can act in the same way. For others the time of the school bus or the departure of your spouse for work can be the same.

Without such fixtures in the day it is easy to waste time, even if the in-tray is full and the pressure relentless (see point 4 below). For some half-an-hour may elapse between the alarm going off and getting out of bed – even if the time is spent worrying about the over-busy day to come! Such things both waste precious time and lower morale, creating even more worry.

Going to bed on time is where the getting-up battle is won. For many church workers, out almost every evening, you get home at 10 pm. and need time to unwind before bed. You watch TV, pick up a (questionable?) programme you had not meant to see, and stumble into bed later than you intended.

Pointers to improve discipline

- 1 Appoint someone to help you keep to whatever system you fix on. A well-organised spouse is ideal, but if such does not exist – either spouse or a well-organised one – try a friend or family member who knows it is their job to ask awkward questions. You rarely win this on your own.
- 2 Select fixed points which are audible or visible. For example, 'by the time the clock strikes 11.00 pm. I shall be in bed'. A watch that is alarmed at fixed times can also be useful.
- 3 Write out a daily programme and stick it up on a board. In particular, aim to have a standard sleep pattern so your body gets used to a rhythm.

2: Tracking expenses

This is a hassle for some clergy, which is why I take it here. If this is not a problem for you, might there be something different but equally basic that is?

Expense claims are a good indicator of any home-worker's self-discipline. Do you keep records of your expenses each month and claim within a couple of days of the month-end? Much will depend on the system your Treasurer wants you to follow (and whether you agree with this!), but here are the basics of a simple but disciplined approach (adapt to fit as necessary).

The key is never to get behind with this. If you are currently six months behind, do not wait until you catch up. Start the system as from today, then get the arrears sorted out as a separate exercise. Get this right and your personal finances improve, you feel so much better, and your Treasurer stops glowering at you.

A possible system to follow

- 1 Have an A4 expenses sheet sitting in a plastic wallet on a shelf or in a tray beside your desk (never buried on the desk itself). A simple four column analysis sheet will be fine, available from any office stationer.

Then you have columns for date, item description and cash columns for things like 'travel', 'post and telephone', 'office', 'other'. If you do it all electronically and it works, fine. If not, do it on paper – it is more tangible and you are more likely to succeed.

- 2 Each time you spend something that is claimable, you enter it on the sheet that day. You may prefer to do this as it happens or make it a 'last thing to do at night' task. At the same time you clip the voucher (receipt, bill, ticket) to the back of the sheet. The key is to make this an immediate task, not something to try to recreate at the end of a month.
- 3 If you are paid a mileage rate, you keep a simple notebook in the car and record each work journey and its mileage as they happen (or record non-work journeys and subtract from the total mileage if that works better). Clip this to the sheet by your desk at the end of each week or month and enter the totals.
- 4 At the end of each month you total up the columns, file a copy of the form, and place the top copy (with vouchers stapled to it now) ready to give or send to the Treasurer. Then start a new form.

3: Taking time off

Home-workers lack the basic separation that most employed people experience: the physical movement from home to workplace and back again at, usually, fixed points in the day. This offers a clear break between the two main environments of home and work.

There are obvious advantages for home-workers such as significant savings in time and, often, cost. But the more subtle disadvantages of the fuzzy separation of work from home time, and the lack of change of company kept in each of these, may be more significant than most people appreciate.

It is not difficult to enforce a separation. Designate certain hours of the day work time and other time as 'off', closing the study door with voicemail on at agreed times of the day, and so

on. This would be moving towards the 'contained work model' introduced in Part A.

But there are difficulties with this approach. Part of the benefit of home-working is the flexibility it offers to those who appreciate this: the chance to go shopping mid-morning and to work after supper, for example. And, for most clergy and church workers, this is not a 9 to 5 job at all, and most evenings are work time anyway.

But, as a home-worker myself, I suspect there is something rather more sinister than all this that plays havoc with neat plans: pride.

Most of us like to be seen, by both our family and others, to be busy. Most of us like to be looked up to because we work hard. Some of us may be using work as an excuse to escape from pressures in our home relationships. Some of us may rate our spiritual health on our busyness. In all this something is not quite right. If you come across the essay by Eugene Peterson called 'The unbusy pastor' it is well worth pondering, even if your situation is not the same as the one he describes.

What is needed is proper time for yourself if you are intended to be in ministry for the long haul rather than becoming a wreck at 55, and time for friends and family as a role model as a Christian. By the way, I've learnt this lesson by getting it all wrong through much of my life.

Possible tools to utilise

So the day off and another full evening off too are not signs of weakness but of sanity and spirituality. And time for 'retreat' is an additional essential so that the Christian worker maintains a healthy big-picture view and active discipleship. If these are slipping and you have done all you can to sort the 'pride' issue, you might like to consider the following.

- 1 Being accountable to someone who will regularly ask you to tell them exactly what time you have had for yourself and your family. 'Time 'off' is not quite the right phrase.
- 2 The regular use of voicemail: at meal-times, at children's bed-time, when you need time for uninterrupted preparation or prayer. Switch the mobile off too.
- 3 The shut door to the study is still helpful, as is the discipline to open emails only at fixed times of the day rather than every five minutes.
- 4 Putting 'time off' in the diary first and planning everything else to fit round it. When real emergencies arise and you

forego such time, you immediately book extra time off within a month or so to make it up.

4: Not wasting time

But home-workers experience an opposite problem too: wasted time. My guess is that many of us could fit more into a day with less stress if we did not fritter time away. Away from the discipline of the communal work environment, this is all too easy. Take the following examples.

- You rush into your study to get hold of ... (*take your pick from:* the notes for the sermon you want to work further on now, the minutes of the working group you are already late for, the book that contains the youth group ice-breaker you thought you might use.....) and start scooping up the heaps of paper everywhere feeling sure you last saw it well, you get the picture.
- You always react to the latest crisis so work on the most urgent item you have for that day and delay yet again the important stuff, until that has reached the top of the urgency pile. You end up doing things in the wrong order and duplicating tasks (as well as wasting other people's time).
- You have set aside a whole morning to prepare a difficult talk. You remember you left the patio furniture out last night so go down to sort that out. Then you check the on-line weather forecast. Ten minutes later you reckon it's time for another cup of coffee ... and a biscuit, but the tin is empty so down to the corner-shop to buy more. You then check your emails just in case anything has come in (and it has! – so you deal with it). Ninety minutes later you've got nowhere.
- The computer printer goes on the blink. When you worked in an office, this is where you phoned the IT department, but at home you *are* the IT department! You take everything to pieces and put it back together again. Then you hit it with a hammer. Neither of these proven methods works (other than cracking the plastic printer cover).

Some of us have too much to do because we have not looked at the big picture and decided on priorities. But many of us could do so much more in the time God has given us if only we were better organised, or had enough grit to get down to those hard tasks or knew when we were out of our depth.

Ideas to consider

- 1 Keeping a simple time log for a week to see where your time goes and how much is wasted. There is a simple idea for this at Training Notes TN11 on this website.
- 2 Asking your denomination or whoever to lay on a desk management course for church home-workers (I can oblige!).
- 3 Defining your priorities through a well-crafted job description for yourself.
- 4 Appointing people to do things you are not skilled to do or have no time for, such as equipment maintenance.

- 5 Dressing up rather than down when 'at work' at home.
- 6 Rewarding yourself with 15 minutes off whenever you complete a difficult task.

But at the end of the day, for all four of these examples, it has to come down to personal discipline, or self-control if you want the Bible term. And for that we need to pray, and then we need to get serious about overcoming our weaknesses.

All this assumes some kind of dedicated work base in the home. So, for the final part of this article, I now peer into your study.

C: The working space

A work-base at home may be called a 'study' or a 'home office' (and it is worth pondering the different messages these two terms give). But what does it look like behind that closed door? And what if your work area is only a corner of a living room? What, for example, would an estate agent make of what you have?

Consider a scale of possibilities between the two points I identify in each of six cases below. The first each time is the end of the scale to be preferred, but it may not be possible given your own situation.

Score your study or home office as follows.

4: As good as it can get / it's no problem for me

3: Pretty reasonable in the circumstances

2: Just getting by but I need to improve this

1: Specific/urgent action definitely required

The aim of this article is to raise the issues. Solutions will depend so much on you and how you view your present position.

1: Sole occupancy or multi-user?

In estate agents' terms, consider the detached residence with its private garden compared with the block of flats with communal facilities.

The ideal for most will be the dedicated space within the home, designated 'study'. Its user will have owner's rights over how it is laid out, what belongs where and how he or she works when based there. The door can be closed, either to keep the owner in and others at bay – the castle drawbridge mentality – or to indicate that the

owner is now away from base, even if still in the house, and no longer at 'work'. This ideal works well for those in a 'contained' model of working (see Part A).

But many will not be in this position. Here are other realities, probably more common with lay workers, 'part-time' Ministers and 'Assistants'.

- This 'study' space may be shared with other members of the family, often a spouse but it could be children. This may not be a problem unless there is conflict of use: meetings, counselling, even phone calls. Or there may be different ideas about the work environment (eg. one likes music playing, the other does not).
- The 'study' may be shared at times during the week with a co-worker such as a PA who needs to use the computer. I can think of Ministers who have to retreat elsewhere when their PA is at work – a situation that is far from ideal.
- The space may in effect be a church's office and open to all callers. When this is the case inside the home tensions are bound to arise, especially if the area's only access is through the private side of the house.

- There may be no private space at all, with the home-worker making do with a laptop on the kitchen table, files kept in a corner of the lounge and equipment scattered all over.

If you lack privacy, it may be possible to find space elsewhere (a watertight garden shed is not unknown) – see also Test 6. What kind of creative solutions might be possible for you given the restraints of the house?

SCORE

2: Single use or multi-purpose?

Consider the suburban residential area compared with the inner-city street where factories, work places and private homes sit side-by-side.

Even with sole occupancy there is a somewhat more subtle point to consider too. Different uses of a single space create problems which may go undetected. Here are possible ways that a Minister might be using one single space.

- Chapel – a space for devotional reading, praise and prayer.
- Library – an area for keeping and reading books, preparing talks and studying Scripture.
- Meeting Room – an area for church use: interviews with wedding couples, business meetings for small groups, even midweek church gatherings.
- Office – space for administrative and support tasks including filing/storage.
- Family Room – available to all.

It is unlikely that you will have distinct spaces within a home for each of these (or it is starting to feel like a game of *Cluedo* with sinister overtones...), but the more uses that one space is put to, the more frustration there will be.

Difficulties often involve distraction, as when trying to prepare a sermon when the email inbox is blinking at you to say you have mail waiting, or making time for early morning prayer when the room is littered with the dirty coffee cups from last night's Standing Committee meeting.

But there may be other issues, such as confidentiality and security when different users can see papers lying around on the desk (Test 5), or lack of sensitivity when someone being counselled is interrupted as the phone rings or children bounce in.

It is not that multi-purpose is wrong – single use can become clinical and cold – but that difficulties need to be identified and avoided. Where might your shared space be causing problems?

SCORE.....

3: Ideal location or compromised position?

Some houses are located in cul-de-sacs in just the right area for local shops and schools, while others are on busy main roads in areas where car transport is essential.

So where exactly is the 'study' or whatever space that approximates to it? You may have little choice over the room or space chosen, but how well does it match requirements such as the following?

- Location: a home right by the church itself might seem ideal for a Minister, but there are definite snags.
- Siting for purpose within the house: an upstairs room might be ideal for 'library' use, but hopeless for visitor access.
- Siting for suitability: next door to or immediately under a teenager's bedroom may pose difficulties involving noise!
- Visitors: if the space is to be used by visitors, is there storage for coats and are there toilet facilities that do not involve walking through private areas of the home?
- Size: is the space large enough for its intended use, the equipment and furniture required and the filing anticipated?
- Outlook: given the view outside, is this a pleasant place to work from or does it need to cover the front door for security and view of visitors?
- Connectivity: are there sufficient power and telephone points?

It will by now be apparent that all these tests inter-relate and the position is not straightforward. What is your scoring on this aspect? Are you stuck with it or can anything be done? Remember too that the ideal location for you may not have been the one chosen by your predecessor.

SCORE.....

4: Stylish design or estate norm?

Some houses are architect designed, whereas others replicate everything else in the street.

If you are going to spend significant time in the 'study' or 'home office' space, it makes sense to give some thought to the ambience. God has made us as human beings not microchips, so we need spaces designed for living. See Article A36 on this website for more detail on this point.

Look round your room. Is it the kind of place to lift your spirits or bury them underground? Is it an area where you can genuinely worship through your ministry? It certainly does not need to be expensively decked out, but it does require more than the feeling of a concrete bunker. Test it for:

- Size: if the space is smaller than you would like, you have to be disciplined.
- Light: is there a reasonable level of daylight and the sight of a world outside? Is your desk positioned so that you do not work in shadow? Is the level and tone of artificial light correct for your needs? Do you have adequate desk lamps that can direct light where needed?
- Heat: can you work without feeling it is too hot in summer or too cold in winter?
- Air: is there adequate ventilation for effective work consistent with passable noise levels?
- Comfort: there is no need for luxury, but is your working chair adequate to avoid back strain of any kind and enable you to work to peak efficiency?
- Décor: is this a space which you enjoy inhabiting? Would you work better if it was given a lick of paint, or a changed colour scheme?
- Storage: is there adequate room for storage *outside* this room so that you only have around you what you need? Is it a clutter-free zone?
- Layout: do you have the main items of furniture positioned in the best way to help work-flow?
- Personality: is this space 'you'? Consider pictures on the walls, photographs that mean much, mementoes, plants that are alive, a radio for quiet background music if that is your thing, and so on.
- Office furniture: have you chosen furniture and equipment that matches the kind of person you are, or is everything dull grey – so that you have become dull grey too?

SCORE

5: Security alarms or open house?

Some houses come with burglar alarms and locking windows and are set behind radio-controlled gates, whereas others rely on one Yale lock and some catches.

The dangers of identity theft and loss of personal data have come into our world along with computers and the internet. Professional work environments now undergo detailed risk assessments. Even then there are still horrific blunders.

Ministers and church workers are party to highly sensitive information. You might like to consider what is on your computer system or in your filing cabinets just now that would be Bad News if it appeared on the internet tomorrow.

So if an inspector arrives for a snap security audit on your study, how would it fare? You might like to test it against the following.

- Burglary: how secure is the whole house against break-in and what more could be done? What do you carry outside in a laptop or on CD/DVD?
- Opportunism: how easy would it be for a visitor to get hold of sensitive data if they knew where to look and had three minutes in your study while you were making them a cup of coffee?
- Safety: how safe is your home, given the location in which it is placed and the ministry you are involved in? Are you prepared for physical attack or unwelcome visitors at the door?
- IT security: are you thoroughly protected against hackers, internet nasties and other forms of electronic intrusion? Is everything backed-up elsewhere against loss or fire?
- Shredding: what are you throwing out from your home that might allow others to take over your identity? Are you shredding every item of material that might be used in this way?

SCORE

6: Home-worker or church commuter?

Some houses are designed with a home office, whereas most assume people go out to work.

The home-working revolution, confidently expected some years ago, has not materialised.

Most people work better in company with others for efficiency, team-working and social ease. In a number of churches now the Minister and staff are starting to work from a central location, where such exists, rather than from their homes, and most are finding significant advantages in this. The discussions round the water cooler have genuine value. See Training Notes TN66 on this website.

So in all this testing about the home environment for work, it would be a pity if we failed to ask the

question as to whether home-working was the right option in the first place. Just a thought.

SCORE (on whether you have considered this point)

So how do you score? Try it with someone else looking at your study too to avoid personal bias. Now have a look at any 1s or 2s and decide to take some action this month. Ask someone close to you to check up on such action.

Conclusion

So there are three key areas for any home-worker to consider: boundaries, discipline and working space. They are all part of the same one issue but it can be valuable to separate them out and take them singly. So, now you have read this, what action do you need to take, and how will you go about it?

By all means react to what is suggested here or give your own experience to help others. I would love to hear from you if you have something to contribute so that future editions of this article can be improved.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index> then A25. See also Articles A36, *Sorting out your study* and its sequel, A37, plus Training Notes TN11, *Keeping a time log*, TN54, *Creating space for a Planning Retreat*, TN62, *Know what distracts you*, TN66, *A daily office for church staff*, and TN106, *Talk about taking time off*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A25 under Leadership (with a link to Administration).

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