

**CAREERS**

## 7 ways to boost your career while working from home

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What a difference a pandemic makes. A few months ago, the only thing standing between you and your career goals was how hard you were willing to hustle. But as you adapt to indefinite lockdown life, the hustle may now be feeling all too real.

Yes, many are leaning into the simple pleasures of spending more time at home – perhaps you’re enjoying skipping the morning commute or finally finding the time to make your own bread. But, there’s also likely some anxiety bubbling alongside your sourdough.

In addition to the challenges of adapting to remote working, there's also the worrying prediction that Australia's unemployment figures will double by June.



📷 There are ways to improve your career while you're working from home.

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So feeling stress in these uncertain times is normal, but you don't have to let the virus crisis derail your goals. In fact, doubling down on your professional development could be just the coping strategy you need.

"It's the difference between feeling like you're in the driver's seat and making choices about where you go, or feeling like you're the passenger with no control over where you're going," explains workplace expert Michelle Gibbings, author of *Career Leap: How to Reinvent and Liberate Your Career*.

“Planning, making decisions and taking positive steps to support your career helps you feel like you have more control. It also helps to keep you active and purpose-driven, which is good for your mental health.”

If there’s one thing isolation has taught us, it’s to think creatively — and the same applies to getting ahead while cooped up. Get your hustle back on track with these ideas ...

## **1. DO A CAREER STOCKTAKE**

Whether you’re out of work or just feeling uncertain about the future, now is the perfect time to do what Gibbings calls a ‘career stocktake’.

“It’s like strategic planning, but applied to your career,” she explains.

“You assess your current skills, competencies and experience against those required for your desired next step. Once you’ve identified any gaps, you can then plan what you need to do to close them.

“It may be further study, courses, voluntary experience or new connections you need to make.”

It’s the kind of task people tend to skip when life is busy, but if you’re feeling overwhelmed or unsettled, it can help you map out a clear path for the future.

## 2. MASTER DISTANT NETWORKING

Coffee catch-ups are cancelled for now, as are conferences, industry events and workshops. But networking isn't cancelled – it's evolved.

“There are a lot of things you can do, especially if you're working from home, to forge relationships and connections,” says Karen Gately, founder of HR consultancy Corporate Dojo.

“Everyone's at home. Give them a call! Often people can be too shy to say, 'Hey, would you mind giving me 10 minutes of your advice around how I could break into your industry?' Now is the time to be courageous and make those phone calls.”

You can also try this approach when reaching out to contacts over LinkedIn, she adds.



📷 Get in touch with people while in isolation to continue networking.

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**Bonus tip:** When you're seeking support, remember to offer it, too.

"Sustainable relationships require give and take," Gibbings says.

"Let your network know what you can offer as well as what you need."

### **3. BUILD YOUR PERSONAL BRAND**

If you've never Googled yourself, give it a whirl. Why?

"The world has suddenly leapfrogged online," Gately explains.

"So, your online presence, your footprint, is very relevant."

The info that comes up when you search your name is what potential employers or clients will also be looking at, so consider smartening up your personal brand by creating a dedicated website for your work (think of it as an online resume or portfolio), or fleshing out your LinkedIn profile.

"Update your LinkedIn content in as many sections as possible to increase your profile strength and visibility," tips career counsellor Katie Roberts, from Katie Roberts Career

Consulting.

"You could also think about sharing regular updates to build your reputation and credibility as a subject-matter expert."

### **4. IMPRESS YOUR BOSS**

If you're working from home, it can be tricky to demonstrate how hard you're actually working. Roberts says the most impressive thing you can do is deliver your work to a high standard and keep showing up, albeit virtually.

"Be present and engaged on every call or video conference — jump on early so you don't encounter technical glitches that make you late. Respond quickly to messages and schedule video meetings as often as you would face-to-face meetings."



📷 Take an active role in conference calls and engage with your superiors.

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Without travel time to account for, you may find you have space to put your hand up for new projects, or to research tools — such as online brainstorming app Stormboard, for example — that could help your team. The key is to show initiative.

“Are you speaking up on Zoom calls, are you contributing, are you being proactive? If you’re doing that, you’re showing engagement, optimism and teamwork. And every leader loves that,” says Gately.

## **5. UPSKILL OR LEARN SOMETHING NEW**

The world moves quickly — so why not embrace change? If you're feeling stagnant in your career, use the forced downtime to diversify your skills.

“This is the perfect time to upskill — particularly if you're feeling bored or demotivated,” says Roberts.

“It can provide an outlet and help you fill in the extra time you may now have.”

There are loads of online options, ranging from TAFE courses to university degrees, and everything in between.

There are myriad online resources, including watching YouTube videos to master technical skills and websites, like news-curating site Flipboard, to deepen your understanding in a certain areas.

To ensure you make the most of your studies, choose something you're passionate about, tips Roberts.

“Schedule specific study times, set goals so you know what you need to achieve in each session and reward yourself when you meet those goals,” she says.





📷 Learn some new skills while in isolation. Picture: iStock

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## **6. TRACK YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS**

Ever blanked in an interview when asked about your achievements? Never again. Spend some time thinking back on your career and jot down your wins so you're prepped for the next opportunity.

“When you're really clear on what your experience is, as well as your capabilities and your successes, you're more likely to have confidence in your own point of view and the solutions that you offer,” says Gately.

An easy way to keep track is to download the app *PepTalkHer* (free on iTunes or Google Play), which will give you a weekly nudge to bank your achievements.

Later, you can print out your highlights and take them with you to an interview or performance review.



## **7. BRING YOUR DREAM PROJECT TO LIFE**

If there's an upside to the pandemic, it's the free time some have been gifted.

You may not be able to brunch with your friends, but you could spend a weekend nutting out a business plan for that passion project you've always talked about, ready to launch when restrictions lift.

"I reckon loads of awesome businesses are going to come out of this space," says Gately.

"I think people are going to get super creative and step into their real spaces and do well."

### **LEVEL-UP ONLINE**

The digital tools that can help you get ahead from your couch:

#### **Get techy**

LinkedIn Learning offers practical courses in loads of areas, including coding, Photoshop and website building.

[linkedin.com/learning](https://www.linkedin.com/learning)

#### **Find your why**

Dig in to what drives you and better manage stress with psychology studio The Indigo Project's Get Your Sh\*t Together course.

[theindigoproject.com.au](https://theindigoproject.com.au)

## Listen and learn

With tips on co-working with your partner, bold leadership and workplace motivation, podcast This Working Life is the ideal home-office buddy.

Available on ABC Listen, Apple and Google podcasts.

## Think differently

The ability to devise innovative solutions is considered a key skill for the future. Flex your creativity muscle with the University of Minnesota's free Creative Problem Solving program.

[coursera.org](https://coursera.org)

## Sound: on

Missing the hum of your office or favourite cafe? Free app Coffitivity plays the ambient noise of a cafe to help keep you focused while you work.

[coffitivity.com](https://coffitivity.com)

## Learn to lead

If you've got your eye on a corner office, log in to The Open University's free Management and Leadership: Growing as a Manager course.

[futurelearn.com](https://futurelearn.com)



## **Don't sweat it**

The Resilience Project app (\$4.49 on iTunes and Google Play) uses gratitude, empathy and mindfulness techniques to prepare you for tough times.

[theresilienceproject.com.au](http://theresilienceproject.com.au)

Need a little help finding your true career calling? Take the quiz at

[bodyandsoul.com.au](http://bodyandsoul.com.au)

