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## ESL Podcast 544 – Working from a Home Office

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### GLOSSARY

**functional** – able to work properly; able to meet one's needs

\* The kitchen is beautiful, but it isn't very functional, because the sink is really far from the stove.

**overhead** – the amount of money a company has to spend to stay in business, regardless of how many products or services it sells; money spent on things like rent, electricity, telephone, and salaries

\* The company decided to close its third office to reduce its overhead.

**to decentralize** – to spread things out so that they are not concentrated or centered in one place or with one person

\* Terrence used to make all the decisions at work, but now the managers are trying to decentralize the decision-making power.

**to think twice** – to hesitate in making a decision, because one is considering another option

\* If I had an opportunity to work overseas, I wouldn't think twice about it. It would be a dream come true!

**(someone) would kill to** – for someone to want to have or do something very much

\* Jacques and his wife would kill to buy a house in that neighborhood.

**dedicated** – used for only one thing; with only one purpose

\* This is a dedicated computer for office work. That means no personal email or web browsing.

**to set (one's) own schedule** – to decide when one will do certain things; to be in control of one's own schedule

\* As a business owner, Mariah gets to set her own schedule and take time off when she needs to do personal things.

**to concentrate on** – to focus on something; to put one's attention on a particular thing

\* How can you concentrate on what you're reading if you're listening to music and watching TV at the same time?

**distracted** – not able to pay attention to something because one is looking at, listening to, or thinking about something else

\* Why are you so distracted today? What are you thinking about?



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**home office** – a room in a home where one works; study; den

\* The kids know that when their mother closes the door to the home office, she's working and shouldn't be interrupted.

**to block (something) out** – to ignore something; to not pay attention to something

\* I know you're scared of heights, but try to block out your fear and just enjoy the view from up here.

**drawback** – a disadvantage; a negative aspect of doing or having something

\* The job offers interesting work and great pay. The only drawback is that there isn't very much vacation time.

**productive** – able to do a lot of work in a short period of time; producing a lot of good results; efficient

\* Kelvin is most productive early in the morning, when he feels wide awake.

**(something)-centered** – focused on something; with most of one's interest, attention, and activities related to a particular thing

\* They have a family-centered lifestyle and spend most of their evenings at home with their children.

**to take (something) over (something)** – to prefer something over something else; to want to do or have one thing more than another thing; to choose one thing instead of something else

\* Francesca is a vegetarian, so she'll always take a vegetable dish over a steak.

**conducive to** – helpful; useful; helping something else to happen

\* They bought desks for their children to try to make their home more conducive to studying and learning.

**to double as** – to serve more than one purpose; to be used for more than one thing

\* During the winter storms, the shopping center doubled as a warming center for the homeless.



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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Adrina mean when she says, “Lots of people would kill to work from home”?
    - a) Many people who work from home commit suicide.
    - b) Many people would like to be able to work from home.
    - c) Working from home can make people lose their job.
  2. According to Victor, what’s one of the problems of working from home?
    - a) He’s always thinking about work.
    - b) He’s always thinking about the house.
    - c) He isn’t able to communicate with his co-workers.
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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **overhead**

The word “overhead,” in this podcast, means the amount of money a company has to spend to stay in business, regardless of how many products or services it sells, on things like rent, electricity, telephone, and salaries: “Our office in New York has a much higher overhead than any of our other offices, because the rent is so expensive.” The word “overhead” can also be used to describe the position of anything that is in the sky or above oneself: “Those are some dark clouds overhead. You’d better take an umbrella.” Finally, an “overhead” is a clear, thin piece of plastic that one can write on and then place on a machine called an “overhead projector” so that the text or image appears on a wall or screen: “The teacher prefers to use overheads instead of the chalkboard.”

#### **to double as**

In this podcast, the phrase “to double as” means to serve more than one purpose, or to be used for more than one thing: “A warm blanket can double as a beautiful wall hanging.” The phrase “to double over” means to bend at the waist, almost folding one’s body, usually because one is in a lot of pain or because one is laughing a lot: “It was such a funny joke that we all doubled over with laughter.” The phrase “to double up with (someone)” means to share something with someone, and especially to share a room with someone else: “To save money, the company is asking its employees to double up with each other when they travel on business.”



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**CULTURE NOTE**

Many Americans think that working from home sounds like a great idea, but the “reality” (what actually happens) is often “far from” (very different than) the “dream” (what one thinks and hopes will happen). There are many problems with home offices that make it difficult, “inconvenient” (not easy or nice), or “uncomfortable” (physically awkward) to work from home.

Many home offices are simply too small. Most large areas in people’s homes are used for “living areas” (places for the family to spend time together) and bedrooms. Few homes have an empty room that is waiting to be used as a home office, so “telecommuters” (people who work from home) often have to “cram” (fit something into a small space) their desk into the corner of a room that is used for one or more other things.

Even when people do have enough space for a home office, the room is often “inadequate” (not good enough) in some other way. For example, the home office probably isn’t “sound-proof” (not allowing sound to cross the walls, ceiling, and floor), so the telecommuter hears the sounds of other people in the home, and the home telephone. This can be a major distraction when telecommuters need to concentrate on their work.

Finally, many home offices don’t have enough “outlets” (the small holes in the wall used to get electricity to devices) for all the computers and “peripherals” (computer accessories) that people need to do their work. The “wiring” (long, thin pieces of metal that electricity moves along) is often “outdated” (old; not modern), making it dangerous to have too many pieces of electrical equipment.

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – a



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### COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 544: Working from a Home Office.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 544. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at [eslpod.com](http://eslpod.com), you'll be glad you did. There you can download a Learning Guide for this episode that will help you improve your English much faster. You can also take a look at our ESL Podcast Store, which has additional courses in business and daily English.

This episode is called "Working from a Home Office." It's a dialogue between Adrina and Victor, using vocabulary associated with having an office at home. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Adrina: So this is your new home office. It's nice.

Victor: It's functional, and I like it. When my company decided to lower its overhead by decentralizing, it gave employees the option to work from home. When I heard that, I didn't think twice about making the change.

Adrina: I'm not surprised. Lots of people would kill to work from home. Did you have to get dedicated phone and fax lines?

Victor: No, I already have a company cell phone, and I mainly use email to communicate with the office.

Adrina: I assume you get to set your own schedule. Do you find it hard to concentrate on your work? I know I'd be distracted all the time if I had a home office.

Victor: It's true that there are a lot more distractions at home, but I try to block them out. For me, it's not getting down to work that's a problem, it's getting myself to stop thinking about work all the time! That's one of the drawbacks of working where you live. I'm more productive, but I'm also more work-centered.



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Adrina: I can see that, though I'd still take working from home over working at the office any day.

Victor: I thought you had a home office for your real estate business.

Adrina: I do, but it's not very conducive to getting any work done.

Victor: Why's that?

Adrina: My home office doubles as the guestroom and the kids' playroom!

[end of dialogue]

Our conversation begins with Adrina saying to Victor, "So this is your new home office. It's nice." Victor says, "It's functional, and I like it." "To be functional" means to work properly; something that meets your needs, something that does what it's supposed to do. It's usually used to describe something that works well but isn't necessarily beautiful. Victor says, "When my company decided to lower its overhead by decentralizing, it gave employees the option to work from home." "Overhead" (one word) is the amount of money a company has to spend no matter how many products or services it sells. It's money that you have to spend, even if you only sell a little bit. That would be things like the rent for an office, the price of all of the equipment and materials in an office; these are part of a company's overhead. "Overhead" has a couple of different meanings however. To find out more about those you have to go to the Learning Guide.

So Victor says that his company decided to lower its overhead. It wanted to reduce, or cut, its costs so it decided to decentralize. "To decentralize" means to spread things out so they're not all concentrated, or centered, in one place. We often add the suffix "ize" after a word to make it into a verb: centralize; decentralize. "To centralize," of course, is the opposite, to bring everything into one place. Well, the company is decentralizing; it's telling the employees they can work at home. Victor says, "When I heard that, I didn't think twice about making the change." "To think twice" means to hesitate in making a decision; you're thinking about it a lot. But Victor didn't think about it at all; he knew this was a good choice for him – he didn't think twice: "When I saw the woman who later became my wife, as soon as I saw her I didn't think twice. I said, 'You will be my love.'" Well, I didn't say that to her of course, she would have never come close to me if I had!

Adrina says, "I'm not surprised. Lots of people would kill to work from home." When we say someone "would kill to do (something)" we mean the person really



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wants to do that thing or have that thing: “I would kill to have tickets to the World Series next year.” I would do a lot, because I really want it. So if you have tickets to the World Series next year, please send me an email. Of course, I won’t actually kill anyone to get my tickets!

Adrina says that a lot of people would kill to work from home. “Did you have to get dedicated phone and fax lines?” she asks. “Dedicated,” here, means used for only one thing, for one purpose. To have a dedicated phone line means that it’s a phone you have just for your business uses, you don’t share your personal phone for that reason. Adrina is asking if Victor had to get dedicated phone and fax lines – telephone lines. Victor says, “No, I already have a company cell phone, and I mainly use email to communicate with the office.” So he uses his cell phone as his company phone.

Adrina says, “I assume you get to set your own schedule.” “To set your own schedule” means to decide when you are going to do certain things; you are in control of your schedule. You can decide you’re going to start work at 9:00 this morning, or at 10:00, or at 6:00 – you set your own schedule. Adrina says, “Do you find it hard to concentrate on your work?” “To concentrate on (something)” means to focus on something, to put your attention on a particular thing. Adrina says, “I know I’d be distracted all the time if I had a home office.” “To be distracted” means not to be able to pay attention to something, because you’re looking at something else or you’re listening to something else. If you’re talking to someone else and they’re distracted, they might be looking out the window, they might be looking at their cell phone; they’re not really listening to you.

Adrina says, “I know I’d be distracted all the time if I had a home office,” a place where you can work in your home. Victor says, “It’s true that there are a lot more distractions at home, but I try to block them out.” “To block (something) out” is a phrasal verb meaning to ignore something, not to pay attention to something, especially noise – things you can hear. When I go to Starbucks and there is somebody talking next to me and I’m trying to read, I block them out by listening to music. So, Victor tries to block out the distractions. “For me, it’s not getting down to work that’s a problem (meaning it’s not getting started and actually working), it’s getting myself to stop thinking about work all the time!” This is a problem with working at home, you always feel like you’re at work. “That’s one of the drawbacks,” he says, “of working where you live.” A “drawback” (one word) is a disadvantage, a negative aspect of doing something. One drawback of living in Los Angeles is that there’s always traffic on the freeways. Another drawback is the pollution. Another drawback could be the people here; other than that, it’s a great place to live!





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Victor says, “I’m more productive, but I’m also more work-centered.” “To be productive” means to be able to get a lot of work done in a short period of time, to produce a lot of good results. Victor says, “I’m more productive, but I’m also more work-centered.” “Work-centered” means focused on your work. We can use this construction – this form with many different kinds of nouns. You could say that she’s very “family-centered,” she’s focused on her family. That’s what’s most important to her, that’s where she spends most of her time. You could be “language learning-centered,” you always spend your time trying to improve your language skills, and so forth.

Adrina says, “I can see that (I can understand that), though I’d still take working from home over working at the office any day.” When we say we “can take (something) over (something else)” we mean we would prefer that first thing over that second thing. So for example: “Francesca is a vegetarian, so she’ll always take a vegetable dish over a steak.” She’ll prefer vegetables instead of the steak.

Victor says, “I thought you had a home office for your real estate business.” “Real estate” is selling homes or buildings. Adrina says, “I do, but it’s not very conducive to getting any work done.” Something that is “conducive to (something)” is helpful, useful, something that helps you do something else. A lot of noise is not conducive to studying or to reading, at least for me. So, Victor asks Adrina why her home office is not very conducive to getting any work done. She says, “My home office doubles as the guestroom and the kids’ playroom!” When we say something “doubles as” something else, we mean that it is used for more than one thing. The word “double” actually has several meanings in English. You know where you can find those, in the Learning Guide.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

Adrina: So this is your new home office. It’s nice.

Victor: It’s functional, and I like it. When my company decided to lower its overhead by decentralizing, it gave employees the option to work from home. When I heard that, I didn’t think twice about making the change.

Adrina: I’m not surprised. Lots of people would kill to work from home. Did you have to get dedicated phone and fax lines?





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Victor: It's true that there are a lot more distractions at home, but I try to block them out. For me, it's not getting down to work that's a problem, it's getting myself to stop thinking about work all the time! That's one of the drawbacks of working where you live. I'm more productive, but I'm also more work-centered.

Adrina: I can see that, though I'd still take working from home over working at the office any day.

Victor: I thought you had a home office for your real estate business.

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Victor: Why's that?

Adrina: My home office doubles as the guestroom and the kids' playroom!

[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by the always productive, never distracted, Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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