

# **Aims & Objectives – Tips and Tricks**



## ***Managing Your Self as a Freelancer – Working From Home***

**By Alison Reeves**

So, you have decided to work as a freelancer from home. After 14 years I can't imagine working any other way. For those of you about to embark on working from home, here are a few tips.

### **Your Workspace**

Firstly, get your workspace sorted. If you are lucky, you have a spare room you can use to devote to your work. Otherwise designate a specific area in a room that you can use. Make sure you have a suitable desk and chair, remember you can often pick up second hand office furniture. As an author you need some hardware - a computer, a printer, a telephone, a fax and an internet connection. You also need suitable software for your area of expertise.

Communication is very important if you work from home – so unless you are home alone all day, have a separate phone line for work (it will save loads of arguments with partners – trust me!). A broadband internet connection is also a bonus for the huge attachments customers seem keen to send via email.

My worst decision in the early days was to organising my work room so well that I could write, collect pages from the printer, and even have drinks on tap from my office chair. I was very impressed with my organisation skills. The trouble was that I could go a whole day hardly moving! It's bad enough having to spend most of the day sat in front of a computer, make sure you get off that seat at regular intervals.

### **Interruptions**

Make it clear that while you are in your 'work area' you are at work. Personal telephone calls and people ringing the doorbell can be very distracting. You need to be firm to get the 'sorry I'm working' message across.

If a friend or relative rings up for a chat when I'm working, I say it's lovely to hear from them, but I have a deadline to meet, and arrange a time to call them back in the evening.

If the doorbell rings unexpectedly I answer it with the phone at my ear, (even if I don't have a call). I say I am in the middle of an important telephone call, which makes it easy to conclude the doorstep business.

### **Managing Your Time**

To manage home working you have to manage yourself. A huge benefit of home working is that you can work when it suits you, even in the evenings or weekends if you want and take time off at other times. However be warned – most customers you will be working for will be working normal office hours and generally they expect to get hold of you then.

I was lucky to have 25 years in office jobs before working from home, so I didn't find it difficult to discipline myself into sitting at my desk by 9 or 9:30 every morning.

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However I still find it hard taking time out for lunch, and saying ‘that’s enough’ at the end of the afternoon.

You need to find a balance between work and play and devise a timetable of work and play hours and stick to it as best you can. There will be times when you want to work a weekend to complete a project and maybe take a day or two off in the week, but at the end of the day you have to compensate for any extra time you take off – either in extra hours worked later on or a reduced income.

Also don’t forget you need holiday time so book some stick to it.

## **Paperwork**

As a freelancer you are also your own secretary, filing clerk, bookkeeper, invoice clerk, bill payer, office junior and general dog’s body. You will spend time posting letters, sending e-mails and faxes, ordering stationery and keeping the printer, fax and stapler loaded. Allocate quiet time in the week to do these tasks. I find Friday afternoon to be a good time as most of my customers are either demob happy or have gone home.

## **Presenting Yourself**

Another benefit of working from home is that you can work in your dressing gown if you want to (unless you get caught out by the post man of course!). While it is a bonus to dress casually, remember that you should still dress appropriately when visiting customers.

## **Finally**

On a more personal note, try to develop a network of others to support you when times get tough, or when you just need some help and advice. I am a strong supporter of the ISTC and have benefited greatly from the support groups there. Joining the Institute has gone a long way to relieving the sense of isolation you can get sometimes – especially when the phone is not ringing.

Any forum that concentrates on areas of interest can be valuable – however the biggest danger can be how time can slip through your fingers when ‘surfing’ the ‘net’ or other forums. If necessary, use a kitchen timer to tell you when you need to get back to work!