Do you ever feel lonely running your own business?
35 quick and easy ways to stay motivated

By
Jane Heaton

If you know anyone who may also benefit from this report, please feel free to pass it on.
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Jane Heaton
ASSOCIATES

So, you decided to set up your own business. Maybe you were fed up with corporate life or wanted to follow your passion. You did all the preparation, including those self-discovery quizzes to find out if you "have what it takes" to go it alone. You knew life was going to be different. You would need to adapt. But, hey, you're the self-reliant type, right? You're confident and optimistic. Nothing gets you down.

When I started out on my own, it was with total conviction that this was the right thing for me – freedom, flexibility, and my destiny in my hands. And indeed, the reality has been exciting, challenging and very rewarding. And sometimes daunting and a bit of a struggle. And, yes I admit it, sometimes the thought of a regular paid job seemed almost attractive again. Almost. Looking back, the moments of doubt, frustration and feelings of helplessness had a common theme. They were times when I felt very much on my own – when there was only me to fix the problem or work out where to go next.

The following ideas are gathered from my own personal experiences and those of other freelancers, self employed professionals, small business owners and all round "portfolio people" who no longer have (and indeed sometimes never had) the security of a regular pay cheque, the safety net of 24/7 support teams, nor the comfort of being a valued part of someone else's team.

Is there anybody out there?

Many people taking the first step into self-employment, work from home. It makes sense. No major overheads, no daily commuting. Depending on what you do however, you can spend long periods in the house on your own. When you take a coffee break, there's no one there with whom to catch up on last night's TV or have a moan about the boss's latest memo. You can also feel a bit lost and lacking direction. You're the one in charge of your day, so how come you sometimes get to the end of it feeling you haven't achieved very much?

1. Put a framework into your day, week, month, and even year. Work out what time you are going to allocate to actually doing business and then schedule time for doing your admin, marketing, business planning and all the other things that don't bring you into direct contact with customers or clients.
2. Be disciplined about arranging to meet other people - customers or clients, suppliers, associates, and networking contacts. It's up to you make things happen.
3. Don't neglect social activities – put dates with friends and family in the diary. It may seem a little formal, but it'll help ensure you do it and give you something to look forward to.
4. Look ahead and make sure you've got a balanced mix of activities in your schedule. If you're going to spend two days at home writing or doing research, make sure those are days you've got some antidote in the diary – whether dinner out or a visit to the library.
5. Get out and about. Cabin fever can affect us all, so take a walk to the local shop, a turn around the park, or even take a trip to Tesco or B&Q.
6. Schedule breaks in your day – get out and about, or make a date with the lunchtime news or Working Lunch.
7. Keep up to date with what's going on in the world. Tune into the media – radio, TV, local and national press, and keep up with your trade magazines. As well as current affairs, keep an eye on what is happening in your industry or profession.

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8. Make the most of technology. If you are "office" based for the day, stay in touch by email, online and by telephone. Email is great for sending short catch up notes, a line to say "thank you" or pass on a piece of information or a referral. You can make the difference to someone else's day, and someone will do the same for you. Check out one or two online forums that are relevant to you. It's good for networking, and you can post questions, or help out someone else. And on the telephone, as well as just calling one person, you can also bring someone else into the discussion by using BT 3-way calling.

So much to do, so little time

The one thing that becomes clear very early on is just how much other stuff you have to know about and do besides your own particular skill or profession. Cash flow, invoicing, VAT, IT, purchasing, employing people, legal issues, quality control, and all manner of admin. - to name just a few. When there's a problem, you have to fix it. Ever used up precious hours and endless phone calls trying to get your email back up and running, or working out why your printer has suddenly stopped printing?

9. Work out what you're hopeless at and what you're good at but would rather just not do yourself.
10. Work out what you need to know in order to run your business effectively. For example, some people will need to know a lot more about health and safety regulations than others, and some businesses are more heavily reliant on IT than others.
11. Make a list of the critical things you must do yourself – now and in the longer term.
12. From these three exercises, draw up a support framework – people and places you can go to for help. This will be a mixture of professionals who you will have to pay and expert contacts who will help out or just answer questions on a more informal basis. Identify any training you may personally need and add this to your plan.
13. Use your local networking to uncover likely contacts and people who other people recommend.
14. You can't be an expert at everything, so save your energy for the things you are good at and for your core business activity – like being a consultant or being a plumber.
15. Don't waste your time doing things that don't actually have a positive impact on your business. We can get into the habit of doing things just because we have always done them. Take a long hard look at what you do to actually run your business and be ruthless. Cut out things that don't actually make or save you time and money – unless of course they're things that you have to do to avoid being fined or thrown in prison.

It's lonely at the top

Having started off with a vision and a plan, the one thing you quickly realise is that "the only thing constant in life is change". Coping with this change and continuing to work on your business and develop new ideas can be a bit of a slog when you're trying to do it all on your own. And it's not long before you start waking up at three in the morning, worrying about the fact that it's your sole responsibility to make this business a success. Even if you've no staff at this point, your immediate family and a whole menagerie of household pets may be relying on you.

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16. Make sure you're not spending so much time working in your business that you've no time or energy left for working on it.
17. Set aside a time each year to stand back and review your business plan and marketing plan.
18. Use someone you trust to help you take the longer view and ask you challenging questions. This could be your business or marketing advisor, or you could consider finding yourself a mentor to help with this and more regular advice and support.
19. If you work with other people, like associates, to deliver your services, make them part of your team and organise regular sessions so that they can contribute and help you develop new ideas.
20. If you employ staff, then carry out similar exercises with them – even with trusted customers or suppliers.
21. Surround yourself with others who are successful in your field or who have qualities that you admire or aspire to. Find out what they know, how they do what they do. Success inspires success.
22. Develop your own small network of non-competing, enterprising business people – see what advantages there are to meeting up, maybe once a quarter, to discuss common issues or opportunities.
23. Seek inspiration in everything you do, wherever you are. Keep your eyes open. When you see something that impresses you and that you think could work for you, make a note of it, take a copy, or draw a picture and keep these ideas in a specific box or file for use in your review sessions.
24. Don't be afraid to ask for help. There's no such thing as a stupid question. Ask and you shall receive.

Don't worry, it's quite normal to feel like that

If you're forging ahead on the ideas and development front, then keeping motivated is going to be a whole lot easier. Still, you need to be making sure you are taking care of your emotional self and happily getting through the day-to-day stuff. Having the big vision is great, but you can get frustrated or depressed if you get lost trying to make it happen. You also have to learn to manage a whole raft of difficult feelings you probably didn't experience in quite the same way when you were an employee – anger, disappointment, rejection, fear, anxiety. Staying focused and in a positive frame of mind is not always easy.

25. As part of your planning, make sure you are setting stretching yet realistic goals. Find a goal setting formula that works for you and that is flexible enough to get you to where you want to go. SMART goals are not the only way.
26. Don't get hung up on what happens if you fail. Believe there is no such thing as failure – only things that didn't turn out quite the way you first planned. Look upon it as a gift and see what you have learned from the experience. What will you do differently next time?
27. Keep a positive outlook. You tend to get more of what you focus on. So if you focus on what you want and think of all the good things that will happen, then this is what you will get. If you're constantly worrying about what could go wrong and about all the bad things that could happen – guess what?
28. Keep a success or good luck diary. Each day, keep a written log of the things that have gone well for you, the things that have moved you further towards your goals.

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29. Create a quiet time for reflection and to let your mind unwind. This can be just a short time, ten minutes or so, but try to do it each day. You may want to practice yoga or meditation, or just sit or stand quietly and let your mind settle and relax. You may take a walk, visit a museum or art gallery, take in some breath taking scenery. Schedule a selection of things into your weekly timetable.
30. Try a short visualisation. This may feel a bit odd at first, but get into the habit of visualising yourself at a point in the future when you have achieved your goal or vision. What are you doing, who are you doing it with, where are you, what do you look like? What does it feel like?
31. Reward yourself. Celebrate your successes – with others and sometimes just with yourself. Treat yourself to an extra game of golf or a beauty treatment.
32. Take some regular exercise. Letting off steam away from the job is good for your mental and physical well-being. If you work from home or at something not terribly physically demanding, you can easily get lethargic and the pounds seem to start piling on – especially after a "certain age".
33. Keep up with friends and family. It's easy to think we are too busy. Make time for the important things not just the urgent ones.
34. Get off to a good start each day. Now, I don't just mean have a healthy breakfast, although this will undoubtedly help. Here are a couple of ideas. If you are travelling, plan your journey, allow a little extra time than you think you'll need, don't rush. Maybe even plan to treat yourself to a coffee in that little Italian bar around the corner before going on to your appointment. If you have a day at home, get outside, whatever the weather, and take a brisk walk around the block. Let yourself back in the house and go off to your desk as if you'd just arrived at the office.
35. Put time aside for just pottering. Give yourself permission to spend a day (or half a day) in the office each month with no end in mind. Just let yourself wander from one task to the next, doing whatever the spirit moves you to do. You'll be amazed at how much you achieve, how many long put off phone calls you make, and how those piles of paper sitting at strategic points around the room get dealt with. You'll end up feeling refreshed and de-cluttered. That's the "power of pottering".

Whatever the personal joy and pain of running your own business, you can be sure it'll be a bit of a roller coaster ride. I hope these tips help make sense of some of the things you might be experiencing, or have experienced in the past. Choose just one area you'd like to improve over the next couple of months, and pick just a few things from this list to start doing straightaway and see what difference you can make. The most important thing is to find out what works for you. And remember, you are not alone!

What do I do? How do I do it?

I help people who run their own business get the results they want from their marketing. When I started on my journey into self-employment, I soon realised that there was a lot more to it than just being an expert and getting the marketing right. Great, I was my own boss – and also responsible for a whole load of stuff I'd never had to deal with in quite the same way before. That's why my approach to your marketing focuses on keeping both you and your business in good shape.

Want to know more?
Call me on 01386 701944 or email me at
Jane.heaton@janeheatonassociates.com

You may also like to sign up for my free monthly marketing e-newsletter at
www.janeheatonassociates.com

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