

Balancing home and work life during lockdown

Getting the balance between home life and work life is hard enough in general for freelancers. But, with most of the self-employed community now working from home as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, achieving the ideal work/life balance is even more challenging.

Steve Ash, freelance content consultant at CommsBreakdown and author of *Going Freelance: Building Work Around Your Life* gives his take on the day-by-day self-isolation adventure that many of us have been forced into experiencing, with top tips for enhancing that work/life balance.

A CHALLENGING TIME FOR ALL FREELANCERS

There's no sugarcoating the fact that this is a serious time for freelancers. If you're working in one of the most affected sectors, there's a huge amount of uncertainty around what the **long-term impact of the coronavirus pandemic will be**. But even in these testing times, it's important for us all to rise to the challenge of home-working in isolation.

At the time of writing I'm on my third week of self-isolation at home with my family, and it's certainly been a strange experience so far. However, as someone who worked from home on a fairly regular basis anyway, the concept of remote working is something I'm already very familiar with.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WORK ROUTINE AND STRUCTURE

The temptation once you're stuck at home for the foreseeable future is to take the slacker option: stay in your pyjamas all day, watch daytime TV and generally not do too much. However, if you're lucky enough to have client work still on the go, you're going to need some structure!

Routine is vital when in lockdown. As British astronaut **Tim Peake pointed out in a recent interview**, habits and routine are critical if you're going to get through a period of isolation.

To bring some structure to your working day:

- **Give yourself a 'clocking on' time** – try to start working at roughly the same time each day. Having a start and end time means you complete a 'working day' and feel like you've done your usual day's work, even though you're confined to the house.
- **Write a to-do list** – creating a list of tasks keeps you motivated and productive. It could be a handwritten list, reminders in your online diary or notes in a project management tool like **Trello** or **Asana**. Be realistic, tick off your tasks and feel that achievement!
- **Take regular breaks to relax** – **humans can only focus on a task for around 90 minutes**, so taking frequent breaks during





the day is essential. Have a cuppa, go for a walk, or do some yoga – anything to take yourself out of that work headspace for five minutes.

- **Exercise if you can** – a sedentary lifestyle, sitting at a laptop, **is not good for your health**. Factor in time for one form of exercise in the open air, or try following one of the many **YouTube fitness channels** to keep yourself trim and your mind feeling energised.

- **Make sure you stop work at a given time** – yes, your home is now your workplace, but you need a clear dividing line between work time and your own leisure time. Set a time to finish and stick to it: working into the night will just tire you out for tomorrow.

FAMILY TIME AND STAYING IN TOUCH WITH CLIENTS

One the biggest challenges of being ‘confined to barracks’ during periods like the lockdown is the lack of social contact and interaction. But there are ways and means to stay in touch.

You may be self-isolating with family, your partner, on your own or working miles away from home. Whatever your situation, it’s important to factor your home and social life into the mix when you can’t see people face to face.

Video conferencing platforms such as **Google Hangouts**, **Zoom**, **Skype** and **Microsoft Teams** have come into their own during this crisis. With a video call, you can keep in touch with your extended family and set up online parties with your friends. Video conferencing is also a

great way to maintain contact with your clients, have work meetings and open up your social interactions to those outside of your lockdown bubble

Even birthday parties and other family celebrations can be moved to the digital space – allowing these important life events to carry on, even whilst the world deals with the ongoing emergency.

For freelancers with children, getting involved in home-schooling is a new task you probably hadn’t expected. But see this as a way to get more involved with your kids, dive into some education and not swear (too much) at the maths homework.

CREATE YOUR OWN UNIQUE WORK/LIFE BALANCE

There’s no single solution for getting your home and work life balance right. Everyone’s situation is different, and there are no hard and fast rules to follow. Families may be cramped together in a small space (noise-cancelling headphones are great at helping you focus), or you may be on your own, fighting the urge to binge-watch the latest Netflix series.

In essence, the balance you achieve will be unique to you – and that’s part of the appeal of freelancing for many of us. The ability to manage your time, work when it’s convenient and spend more time with your loved ones is a huge part of the value of being self-employed.

So, my advice is to take the challenge of the coronavirus crisis one day at a time – and make the most of this bonus time to slow down, relax and enjoy the company of those you love.

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