

How
to
stay
sane
working
from
home



25 common sense
tips for freelancers

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Introduction

Plenty of people try freelance life but soon give up, frustrated by the lack of human contact.

I've worked freelance for almost ten years in total. So I've learned a lot about keeping up to date, staying sharp, inspired, focused, businesslike and motivated.

Here are my top 25 tips for keeping yourself sane working from home. I hope they bring you closer to freelance heaven or - if you're just thinking about freelancing - give you an insight into the pitfalls, pros and cons of being at home alone!

Kate Naylor, Freelance Copywriter

www.blancminge.com



Tip number 1

Look deeply into your own soul...

First of all, it's time for some serious self analysis.

Be honest. If you're the chatty type who loves lots of interaction with people, you're probably best off avoiding working at home.

Unless you have a steely core of self reliance and independence and you enjoy your own company, you'll probably get bored and lonely within a week. Give it a month and you'll be in bits.

If you're happy in solitude and find it relatively easy to motivate yourself, you'll probably *love* it!

Tip number 2

Get into a routine

Get into a routine and you'll find the whole thing easier.

Tip number 3

Get dressed!

It's hard to feel professional slopping around in your trackie bottoms and an eggy t-shirt.

Make the effort to dress smart or at least smart/casual every day to help you look and *feel* the part.

Tip number 4

Avoid daytime TV

Just don't go there. It's a *very* slippery slope!



Tip number 5

Have breakfast

It's a huge cliché but your brain really does work better after some breakfast.



Tip number 6

Stop for lunch

It's also good to give yourself a break and have a bite of lunch and a brisk walk to set you up for the afternoon and refresh your spirit.

Tip number 7

Keep regular office hours

Most people go freelance because they want a better quality of life and a more reasonable work / life balance.

So start as you mean to go on. We work better when we're fresh so quit your office at half past five at the latest every day. There's no virtue in being knackered.



Tip number 8

Feel free to turn stuff down

Just because you're freelance you don't have to say 'yes' to every single piece of work that comes your way.

If you really don't like the sound of a project, you can say no. In the nicest possible way.



Tip number 9

Don't devalue your services

Don't sell yourself short. You'll only kick yourself later and you won't enjoy the work if you feel undervalued.

Tip number 10

Take proper holidays...

Give yourself time off. Diary at least four weeks off, the same or more as you get when working for someone else, in advance and stick to your guns.



Tip number 11

...and leave your technology at home!

Don't take work calls on holiday.

Warn customers in advance, mention your holiday dates prominently on your website, forget about work and have a proper holiday.

Tip number 12

Insist on prompt payment

Don't let customers slip into bad payment habits.

Invoice as regular as clockwork, follow up late payments politely and firmly by email and telephone, and refuse to work with chronic bad payers unless they mend their wicked ways.

Tip number 13

Treat yourself to a view

If possible give yourself a view by putting your desk in front of a window. Even if you're looking at bricks walls it'll give your eyes a well earned rest and you'll feel a sense of connection with the outside world.

Tip number 14

Stretch

Get up and stretch now and again. It'll keep your bum from siezing up!

Tip number 15

Keep efficient filing systems

Keep your filing in order. It really doesn't help if you're drowning in paperwork and can't find anything.



Tip number 16

Calculate your tax in good time

Work out your tax at the earliest opportunity and see your accountant as soon as the new tax year begins. That way you'll find out what you owe in good time and won't get into a panic.



Tip number 17

Save a third of your income

If you save a third of everything you earn you won't have to worry about tax. The cash will be there when you need it.

Tip number 18

Pay your tax on time...

Get it over with and you stand less chance of running into arrears.

Tip number 19

Do an hour's marketing every day

Get into the habit of promoting your business every day so you eventually get a constant stream of new business coming in. In an hour you should be able to:

- write an interesting blog post
- write a press release or article and post it online
- make amends to your website to keep it fresh
- clear out old products and old content
- submit your site to a handful of tightly-targeted online niche directories
- dream up a new special offer
- check your webstats to make sure your visitor numbers are healthy
- dream up an email marketing offer
- work on your monthly newsletter
- clean up your customer / prospect database
- add fresh images
- pay more attention to key words and key phrases
- make a few sales or networking calls
- do a spot of Tweeting

Tip number 20

Delegate the boring stuff

Just because you're a freelancer doesn't mean you have to tackle every aspect of your business yourself.

If you're crap at something, or you hate doing it, delegate it to someone who enjoys it or is really good at it!

Tip number 21

Get your ergonomics straight

Unless you have a decent office chair, you'll soon cripple yourself. I should know - I'm a terrible sloucher.

Use proper office furniture and search Google for sensible advice about the best sitting posture.



Tip number 22

Keep it clean and tidy

It sounds basic and it is. Keep your working area clean and tidy and it'll help you stay organised, fresh and professional.

Tip number 23

Put aside time for emails and callbacks

If you're spending all day answering the phone and tackling emails, you'll never get anything done.

- reply to emails at the same time every day, first thing, after lunch and before you pack up for the day, so they don't take over your life
- think about taking on a good call answering service, and tackle your callbacks at the same time every day

Tip number 24

Get a cat!

Cats keep you company without demanding too much from you while you're busy.

They're not very good at filing, though.



Tip number 25

Be happy

Remember you're freelance because you want all the pleasure and joy that independence from the rat race brings.

If you put your own happiness first, it's much harder to go wrong!

