



Home Alone

*When Your Home
Office Doubles As
Your Guest Room*

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All By Myself

You wanted professional freedom.

You told Corporate America and The Man (the one that lured you into becoming a drone, not the one you are committed to) to kiss your behind.

You took your Teeny Beanie Baby Frog home, along with all your other office decorations.

Your business plan is done. The licenses have been filed for. Your business cards are on the way.

You are officially self-employed.

And now you are scared shitless.

This is uncharted territory for you. You know how to work for someone else. Working for your self is a different game all together.

OK, so this is really how things went down for me. I took the leap, hoping that the net would appear.

I thought the transition would be an easy one. Surely working for myself can't be that hard. I like me. I like my leadership style, and the fair and impartial way that I handle my employees. I am the type of boss I always wanted to have.

I'm a big picture person who left the details to my employees.

But now, I don't have employees.

Oh, wait. I **am** my employee.

That was definitely an adjustment period. I had a lot to learn.

And some of those lessons are laid out here for you.

To learn from.

To avoid.

To laugh at.

Whatever.

Professional Space

Once you take that big step into self-employment, you are going to have to set up space in your home for an office.

Designing your home office is not a big deal. Clean out your guest room, pick a corner for your desk, and set things up.

Easy, right?

Amateur.

You have to go shopping.

Warning: If you think that Office Max does not provide a shopping high, then you are sadly mistaken. And it has nothing to do with sniffing markers for the dry erase board and everything to do with the hundreds of different pens at your disposal.

I can't even remember what happened on my first trip for furniture and supplies. It was like I was in a fog.

My head didn't start to clear until I was home unloading my loot from the back of the Jeep. That's when I came to.

I had a car full of stuff and no idea how it all got there. I also had a mind-blowing receipt with the last four digits of my bank card and my signature on it. I hauled it all into the house. What else was there to do?

You'll be pleased with yourself, until you remember something you didn't think about until you need it, which will require a return to the office supply store.

Rinse and repeat.

Several times.

It will get expensive.

Once you've loaded up on office goodies, you'll spend at least three days trying to get your items perfectly situated. Let's face it, until the Teeny Beanie Baby Frog from McDonald's has a new resting place you won't feel settled.

Pictures of family aren't necessary anymore, as your loved ones will be in and out of the office on a regular basis.

Then there is the question of your “I Love Me” wall. When you worked for The Man (the one that tried to convince you that going it alone would be a bad idea, not the one you are committed to), this was your way of displaying your “street creds”, professionally speaking, of course. Sheepskin is the white collar equivalent of gang dog-rag.

You are showing your superiors, peers, and subordinates whatcha working wit’.

At home, however, there is no need. Send them to your mom- she’ll put them in the den with everyone else’s diploma and graduation pictures. Or is that just my family? I digress.

What you don’t need in your office is a television. Seriously. Do I even need to explain why this is such a bad idea, you news junkie?

White boards and calendars will help you keep your projects organized, as well as assist you with that whole time/space continuum thing- ‘cause for some reason, time speeds up when there’s a party of one responsible for a project.

Don’t forget your “Badass At Work” and “Gettin’ It Done” signs to keep the family informed.

Not that they will pay any attention to them.

Your workspace has just become the family meeting spot.

Thieves In The Temple

Your office is set up. You are rocking and rolling. It's all groovy.

Until you start to notice that things are missing.

The space formerly known as your office, has become the family version of Target.

Pens, markers, erasers, and paper will be considered the contraband to have. Even though they have their own.

My daughter steals my pens with such regularity that it's become a game. I leave crappy ones lying around in hopes that she will take those instead. No dice. They remain on the desk until I move them. But, let me slip up and pull out one of my favorite gel pens, and it's gone in a matter of seconds. She's like the wind, that girl.

My family takes my stuff because it is **mine!** My stuff is just better than theirs. Maybe it's because I'm always saying that to them.

Yes. I have a lot in common with three year olds.

But, the lure is in the actual taking. That means that there are things that I simply cannot give away to my child. If I tell her not to touch something, it is as good as gone.

I eat Happy Meals because I like the toys (don't judge me). I used to manage a therapeutic program for children under the age of six. The Happy Meal toys were a good thing to have. When I moved home to work, I brought all of my office thingys with me, including my collection of Happy Meal toys. I instructed The Girl not to mess with them. What she heard was "take what you want and clip them all to your backpack for decoration."

Yes, she raided them all.

During her raid, she missed the little green Teeny Beanie Baby frog that I adore. I knew that once she spotted him, he was a goner, so I casually offered him up one evening in a look-what-I-found kind of way. She gave me the smelly frown and said "no thanks". Mr. Froggy was saved. He sits on my desk unharmed to this day.

If you love something, offer it to a teenager, and they'll never touch it.

Put Some Clothes On

Just because you can work in your pajamas all day doesn't mean that you should. There, I said it. You will end up blurring the lines between work and relaxation.

Elastic bands are the bomb. I get that.

But people will be able to tell that you are in your Victoria's Secret Pink collection PJs when you are Skyping a meeting.

So not cute.

I'm not saying that you should be "buttoned up" all day long. One of the freedoms of working from home is that you get to define your work environment, and clothing is part of that.

I wear Yoga pants and long-sleeved Ts during the winter. It's shorts and short-sleeved Ts during the rest of the year.

Getting dressed is a way to signal your brain that it's time to work. And it will know that because you are no longer in your pajamas.

Put some clothes on damn it. You'll feel better during the day.

Besides, you don't want the UPS and FedEx guys to think that you are suffering from depression. They don't flirt with the women they think are "headcases".

And your family won't look at you funny when they get home and see you haven't washed or changed since yesterday.

I'm just saying.

Diet, Exercise, and Music

Prepare for issues with food. Balanced meals may not always be in the cards for you during the work day. You will get so busy you forget to eat or so busy that you munch on junk food all day just to keep going. Either way- not good. Not eating during the day will only cause you to pig out in the evening. Eating junk all day will only contribute to the spread of your ass. I'm here to tell you the truth.

Don't drink caffeine **all** day.

Don't eat sweets **all** day.

Don't eat carbs **all** day.

Do them a couple of times a day.

What?!

Anyway, sitting in a chair in front of the computer all day is my idea of heaven. Until I have to get up. Then I am either stuck in the chair because my ass magically spread and I can't get it over the arm rests, or I have to be pried out of the chair because I now feel like the Tin Man and need my joints oiled before I can move.

Either way, not much fun.

It is just as easy to destroy your exercise habits as your eating one.

Exercise is a good thing. I am a lot less grumpy when I've had a good run. Read that as: helps reduce the symptoms of my PMS, stress, and general moodiness disorder. I'm more likely to let the teenager live and The Man (the one that I'm committed to, not the generic one trying to hold all us free thinkers down) to keep his head- both of them.

It also keeps your friends from declaring that you've "put on a few pounds" when they see you. You know they do.

And if you actually lose a few noticeable pounds, well that's just a bonus.

For the record, walking up the stairs to get to the office once during the day does not count as exercise.

Build some time in your day to get things moving. Find a dance groove with a heavy base, pump up the volume, and shake that ass.

Really.

Music makes you lose control.

And when you are done booty-shaking, it can motivate you to get back to work.

Email me if you need rump-shaking music recommendations.

Office Away From Home

As much as I love working from home, there can often be a few too many distractions. The dogs get all pissy and moany because I won't let them upstairs. The laundry usually needs doing, the dishwasher is full and could benefit from someone pushing the "start" button, and of course, there is vacuuming to be done.

On the days when I just can't resist the call of the domestic sirens (it's a joke people- I hate housework), I high-tail it to one of the local coffee shops for a latte and some productivity.

Timing is everything, however.

Get there too early and you've got the business folks stopping in on the way to their 9-5 or the stay-at-home moms who have dropped kids off at school and are now meeting up with their other SAHM friends before heading off to Yoga class.

Get there too late and you have to deal with the high school bunch getting together for after school study dates. (Translation: they are taking up all the tables with their backpacks and laptops while texting and talking on their cell phones.)

The best time to work at a coffee shop is between the hours of 10 am and 3pm. Of course, you'll see some other self-employed folks here and there, but other than the universal head nod- I see you, I acknowledge your presence, but I am not in the mood to talk- you won't get much out of them.

Which is exactly how I like it.

The routine remains the same for me whether I am in Starbucks, Biggby, or one of our local joints: pick a spot, claim it by spreading all my shit out on the table so that it looks like more than one of me, then get in line to order my latte and some super-fattening brownie, cake, or cookie.

I mean really, if I'm going to be sitting for hours, I can't let the saturated fats in my body drop below a certain level. Wouldn't want to go into some type of shock.

Once I'm armed with a sweet drink and a sweet treat, I settle in to get work done. Which means that I have to tweet to my adoring public that I am enjoying my vanilla latte and lemon pound cake at Starbucks on Coleman Blvd. Inquiring minds want to know.

I then check my email and surf the news websites in case something huge is happening in the world, and no one bothered to send a text to my Blackberry in the

fifteen minutes it took me to drive to Starbucks. I then finally settle down and get to work.

If I'm lucky, I can work for two to four hours and not notice. That's when my muse has taken over and is guiding me through the process.

Other times, when that bitch is out and about and not thinking about me, I stare at the artwork, listen to the nearby television, or listen to my iTunes with my headphones on and try not to draw the ire of my fellow patrons by intermittently singing words or phrases from my favorite songs. (Don't act like you haven't done that a time or two.)

On those days, I stay until my required time is up, and then I haul ass to Target, where I can walk off my excess energy while picking up things I really don't need.

By the time I get home, The Man (the one I am committed to, not the one with his boot on the neck of average Americans) has arrived and asks about my day. He can pretty much judge for himself by counting the number of Target bags I'm holding. If none, it was a really good work day.

I could save money by making a pot of tea and dragging everything out to the porch, but then I'd have the mating squirrels and squawking birds to contend with.

It's always something.

What Do You Do All Day?

I used to think that people who worked from home had an air of mystery about them. I wondered how they found a job that would allow that in the first place. I also thought they must have had some super power that the rest of us mere mortals did not possess.

I realized that I felt this way because I had no idea what their workday was like. I assumed that they started at 8 and ended at 5, just like the folks leaving home to make the dollars.

There are times when I'm up and at 'em and beginning my grind as early as 6:00 am, and there are times when I start later in the day and work until midnight. I tend to get more done in the wee hours than during the regular business day because it's quiet, and no one is getting on my nerves.

I am now a micro-version of The Man (not the one I'm committed to, but the one that focuses on profit margins and the bottom line) in order to take care of my family and keep my bills paid.

I work harder than I ever have in my adult life::*snort*:::

My average day goes a little something like this:

- 1 hr of email/Twitter/Facebook/news websites to get the day started
- 3hrs of work = writing or consulting
- 1.5 hrs for lunch- especially if I meet The Divas
- 3hrs of work
- 3hrs for dinner/news/TV watching with my peeps
- 1hr reading
- 1.5 hrs creative writing

Or like this:

- Quickly checking email from last night and the day's horoscope on the Blackberry
- 12 hrs work
- No lunch
- A couple of hours with the family- eating whatever is placed in front of me
- Falling asleep in the chair

Things change from day to day.

And that's how I like it.

But beware. Your family and friends may not understand. At some point some one is going to ask you (maybe even repeatedly) "what do you do all day?" Now you are the one shrouded in an air of mystery. Folks are guessing about your super powers.

Don't bother telling them. They won't believe you any way.

Lunch Goes On Without You

There are some perks that go along with being someone's employee. For some, it's a large salary, the yearly bonuses, even interesting work that you love. One of my perks was lunch with The Divas.

Our days started with a round of emails, phone calls, or office visits to see what everyone's schedule looked like and who wanted to be counted in for lunch. Locations would be hammered out and the meeting time would be selected. Then the work day could begin.

As a consultant and writer, although I am in control of my schedule, I am not always in town. This means that I can't always do lunch.

The first time I couldn't attend lunch with The Divas, it was no big deal to me.

Until I found out that lunch went on without me. I was aghast and appalled.

OK, I was really pissed off. I mean, come on, I really thought lunch revolved around me.

My first thought was: I can't believe those heifers had lunch without me. That was quickly replaced by: What the hell did I expect from those heifers?

So I got over it. But I can't say I wasn't a little sad and disappointed that I was missing out.

Japanese bistro trumps peanut butter & jelly (PB&J) any day of the week.

Once you fall out of the lunch loop, you will eventually fall out of the office gossip loop.

It will happen faster than you expect. One minute you are sitting and laughing at the same old drama; six months later, there is so much that has happened since you left that you are totally clueless about it all. But this will be a good thing. It means that you have moved on. Deal with it.

After a year of being on your own, lunch with friends will be less about hearing news from your old workplace and more about spending quality time with good friends.

Sappy, but true.

The Internet Is Like Crack

While I was debating whether or not to take the leap into self-employment, I decided to peruse the Internet to see what others had to say about the lifestyle. There was plenty. Lots and lots of websites that extolled the virtues of being your own boss. There was a lot of advice on how to get started, time management, marketing yourself, and even how to set up your home office.

There wasn't anything out there to prepare me for the time suck that is the Internet.

I can't tell you the number of hours that I have lost to surfing (referred to as "research" on Facebook and Twitter).

I sit down at the computer to begin work at 8:00 am, and when I regain consciousness it is 4:00 in the afternoon, and I can't remember a thing that I've done.

You know, like all of those alien abductions, except it's daylight, and I'm wide awake.

And there are no words written.

No work completed.

I can, however, tell you what's hot on all of the fiction bestseller lists in the U.K. or describe what Michelle Obama wore in her last public outing or what the funniest video going viral is all about.

Yes, very useful information, indeed.

What makes things so bad is that I actually NEED the Internet to get work done. Sometimes I have real research to do (and not the stuff my friends call me and get me to look up for them because they are WORKING). Seventy percent of my communication is by email, so I have to log onto my web-based accounts a few times during the day.

And yes, I occasionally have something useful to Tweet or Facebook for work.

Which means that I had to deal with the Internet addiction in a very real way.

First of all, I had to admit that I could get carried away. I don't need to read every Tweet as they come in. Nor do I need to respond to the Facebook status of every person on my friend list. Actually, I don't need to do any of that during the course of my work day.

Besides, it's better if you wait until after 6:00 in the evening because folks are just getting home from their long days, and that's when the cool stuff happens.

I realize that I can be easily led across the digital galaxy for hours on end, so I use it when I “need” to and put a time limit on the “checking in”. I find it useful to download PDFs and screenshots so that I can read the material offline.

After 6:00, it’s a free-for-all. Except that The Man (the one I am committed to, not the one that blocks social media sites at the office) actually likes to converse while we eat dinner.

And I have to have some meaningful dialogue with The Girl about all of her teenage angst.

For some reason, they think all the clicking from my laptop keys is rude and that I’m not paying them any attention. Whatever. Everyone in the house goes to bed before I do, so I can always surf later.

See what I mean? The Internet is like crack.

You are always chasing the moment when you stumble across some cool or obscure piece of information, video, or blog. You can’t wait to tell all of your friends. And when you do, you find out that you are so last week and they are off to the next big thing.

Forget about it. Besides, you won’t miss out on anything as long as you have all of your readers and RSS feeds pushed to your Blackberry.

What?!

Desperately Seeking Solopreneurs

At some point, probably when your friends at your old job are busy with budget season and aren't available for the next two months, you may decide to seek out other folks who work from home.

Because really, who else understands what you deal with on a daily basis?

Fortunately (or unfortunately), Twitter and Facebook are great places to find like-minded and work-from-home buddies. But beware of that time suck. I warned you about the Internet a few minutes ago.

You'll spend hours getting to know your new friends. You'll read their blogs and maybe even Tweet Up, but soon, you'll find that these buddies will become fickle.

They'll pop in less and less because they are busy or overwhelmed.

And you will read their updates with smugness because unlike them, you can do it all.

Until you can't.

And then you are the one tweeting about being busy and overwhelmed and how you hope to catch up with everyone on the weekend.

But at least they will understand.

No More Safety Net

I can't talk about self-employment and working from home without being honest about the flip side of things. You are taking a leap. The securities that come with working for someone else don't exist for the self-employed.

There is no more direct deposit.

Sometimes you are going to have to wait, and wait, and wait on a check.

This is going to cause fear, anxiety, and anger. Especially if you've been waiting for weeks and the bills are stacking up and you have to keep contacting folks about your money. It's part of the package, and I can't think of anything that will make it easy. Apparently there are laws against cutting people.

There is no more company insurance plan. You are going to pay out of pocket and through the nose. Did someone say healthcare reform NOW!?

There are no more 401K matches. Unless you get a birthday gift of cash and put it in your savings account.

There are no more sick or annual leave days. You don't work, you don't get paid. It's the way of the jungle.

There are no more staff members to blame screw ups on. It's all you buddy. Own it, and then fix it. Your reputation is on the line. No excuses.

You are The Decider. (Seriously, at some point, I must thank George W for this classic line).

You are the Admin Assistant.

You are the Operations Officer.

You are the IT guy.

You are the asshole who didn't put more paper in the printer.

And you are the one that gets the pat on the back for a job well done.

The trade off for being your own boss is the loss of your safety net. With all of the pitfalls ahead, there will be triumphs, and hopefully, financial rewards for your hard work and dedication.

And yet...

You have a job you are passionate about.

You are living your dream.

You don't have to fill out a leave slip to take Friday off and head to your third cousin's wedding early, even though you don't like that side of the family very much.

Basically, you'll never want to work for The Man (the one who puts profit before people, not the one I'm committed to) again.

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