

Combating Isolation

One of the major challenges encountered by many freelancers comes from the fact that we spend most of our time working on our own.

This can lead to feelings of isolation that can have a significant impact on us, emotionally and psychologically and, if not attended to, can actually become a barrier to working effectively.

Tips to help overcome isolation

Know yourself

It is important to spend some time thinking about what level of contact with the outside world would be advantageous for your work and social life. Be honest: make a list of what matters most to you.

See people!

If you are gregarious and need to have contact every day (apart from the family or whoever you share your home with) then you will need to think of how best to do this. You may not be able to meet up with a friend every day but think of something else that can get you out. Even a trip down to the local library might be enough.

If you need less but regular contact, make a point of planning your week so that you can fit in meeting up with a friend or colleague – talk work or not; it's the getting out and talking that helps.

We freelancers know that we have to work hard and that every minute can be money but building this time into your week could pay its own dividends. You're investing in your wellbeing and that will make you work more productively.

Try a new location

If you work from home, there are tremendous upsides – familiar, comfortable environment, no commuting and tax breaks for the use of your home. But, again, there can be a downside: home/office can seem like a prison sometimes. Try these simple steps:

- Work elsewhere for a while (e.g., local library – it's a free space!)
- If you can afford the cost, settle yourself in a coffee shop/cafe for an hour or two
- Go to a friend's house (fresh surroundings can engender fresh creative thinking)
- If you can't get out, even working in another part of your home for a few hours and not just your 'office' helps.



Try networking

Networking can be whatever works best for you. In terms of combating isolation, it can mean going to industry events and talking to people. If you don't really like these things, don't put too much pressure on yourself to make several useful contacts – just go to talk to people, have fun and perhaps get a few ideas.

However, do remember that getting too isolated can mean losing touch with what's going on and missing new work opportunities, so even, if you don't like networking as such, it's important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages to your work and find ways of keeping in the loop.

Keep learning

As well as keeping up our knowledge, we need to know what we need to learn/train for. Depending on your field, attending learning events can make you more marketable as well as get you 'out there'. Training opportunities can offer very positive chances to network and chat over things with people in your professional world. (We see this at our FEU Training events regularly – as well as learn new skills, people connect and feel so much better for it.)

Find a work buddy

Some freelancers successfully set up hubs for co-working, where they share the same space and ideas. The creative group energy can be a buzz. If you have a work 'buddy' that you think you might like to share space with, then go for it, even if it's just for a day or two a month.

Volunteer

If you do any voluntary or unpaid work, you may want to offer your services a bit more if you are feeling particularly cut off – this can keep you feeling valued and avoid the isolation of not seeing enough people. If you haven't done any of this, why not think about trying it now, when you have the opportunity? It will keep you feeling connected to the outside world, even if you can offer only a few hours a month.

Extend your portfolio

Expanding the ways in which you can earn a living is not only good business sense but it keeps you busy, encouraging you to get out in the world, market your work and meet more people. Make time to assess your skills and experience and how to open up these new markets.

Make a plan

Consider all the above and make a detailed personal plan of how to put it all into action...then give it a go!

