

How to deal with the motivational challenges that come with self-employment?

For those people who love their job and get on well with their colleagues the question of "self-motivation" rarely occurs. However, when working for yourself maintaining motivation levels isn't always so easy !

In this article, Michelle Lucas, Executive Coach of greenfields highlights some of the challenges to motivation when working for ourselves. Importantly our personality influences our ability to manage these threats. Although we can't change our personality, recognising our inherent tendencies puts us in a better place to develop some coping strategies.

Most modern day offices are sociable and dynamic environments – open plan desking, coffee areas for informal chats and if you are lucky a restaurant where you can take time out and lunch with colleagues. However, when working for yourself, you usually work from home and so there may be few or no natural social aspects to your day. The result can be a sense of isolation. This will be felt most strongly by extroverts" who get their energy from their external environment. Although they are likely to seek out the company of others, on a practical level this is simply more time consuming when you are home based. Introverts are energised by the internal world and so will generally enjoy the opportunity to work undisturbed. However, even introverts will miss the supportive ear of their boss and the chance to take a break from a difficult piece of work by talking to a colleague.

Michelle has found that all her clients would recommend seeking out a business mentor and developing peer support to help manage motivation levels. Finding a networking group that works for you is really key – for extroverts they discover an immediate "virtual team" and for introverts it gives them a structured opportunity to find a "like minded" peer to liaise with. And whatever your personality type, simply giving a "one minute" pitch requires you to say something positive and re-connects you with your reason for being in business!

Another difference when working for yourself is that you only answer to yourself. So what happens when something needs to be done and you really can't be bothered? In organisations, compelling reasons come with the territory - the prospect of an angry boss, a deduction in your bonus or simply letting down a colleague. However, when working for yourself – none of these forces are at work. Clearly something customer or fee related may well give you the spur you need, but what if it's something less tempting like your book-keeping, making a tricky call or even updating your web-site ? This is where the personality facet of "self-discipline" comes into play. People who are highly self-disciplined will want to complete the work because it's the right thing to do. However, those with low "self-discipline" are much more likely to adopt the 'manyana principle' and say tomorrow will do. Yet as we all know – tomorrow, becomes the next day and the next day becomes next week and before you realise a month has disappeared! Those high on self-discipline realise that success doesn't happen by chance – you have to make it happen. Ironically, often a "dreaded" job, when finally tackled takes less time than anticipated and so the best motto for those low on self-discipline is ... "Just do it !"

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Finally whether you are working as an employee or working for yourself – we have yet to discover the 26 hour day ! In the shift from working in an organisation to working for yourself there are two key differences to take into account. Firstly, unless you create a support system – there is no-one to delegate to! Secondly, when all of your work is for one organisation, prioritisation of tasks can usually be clarified because there is an overall direction and ultimately one person who will decide. Time pressure is therefore much more pronounced when running your own business. You will have multiple customers all of whom genuinely will think their work is the most important – and the only one who can prioritise is you. This requires the ability to manage multiple and changing priorities – the kind of buzz that a “pressure prompted” individual will love! Fire fighting and working under pressure is actually when these people perform at their best. However, if you are “pressure-avoidant” or a more planned individual you will hate this kind of pressure and work hard to control the work so that you can apply yourself when you have quality time available.

Most of us want to do good work for our customers so knowing how your personality affects your work style is key. If you are pressure prompted and lacking motivation – you will need to find ways of increasing your sense of time pressure. If you are a more planned individual and feeling overwhelmed perhaps you need to relinquish some personal control and bring in some assistance until the plan is more manageable.

If some of these traits “ring bells” for you, then read this article on line and link through to Michelle’s “top tips” for managing your motivation. Do you have a great tip for getting motivated that you’d like to share ? the first 10 people to e-mail Michelle@coachU4success.co.uk will get a free “to do” booklet designed by greenfields. Perhaps you would like a more detailed personality profile? Why not call Michelle on 07717 122950 to find out more about the psychometrics she uses.

Sometimes motivation is lacking because self employment doesn't live up to our expectations and in the next two months Michelle's articles will dispel some of the myths associated with business ownership.

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