



*Drawing the line
between
work & play.*



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How to set **PERSONAL BOUNDARIES** when you work from home

by Laura Spencer

Do you crave a balance between your work and your personal life? Most freelancers do, but the challenges of working from home can sometimes make that life/work balance seem unattainable.

You may feel like you are constantly being pulled towards both family and work commitments—a bit like being in the middle of a tug-of-war.

One answer that can help you achieve better balance between your work and personal life is boundaries. In this article, I'll explain how boundaries help freelancers. I'll also list some of the areas where you should consider establishing boundaries in your own freelancing business.

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Laura Spencer is a freelance writer from North Central Texas with over 20 years of professional business writing experience. If you liked this article, then you may also enjoy Laura's blog about her freelance writing experiences, WritingThoughts.com. Laura is also on Google+.

WHY BOUNDARIES HELP

All of us have personal and professional responsibilities. While sometimes the two can be handled simultaneously, often they cannot.

For most freelancers, boundaries can help maintain a semblance of order in their lives. When you set up a boundary, you are creating a separation between your work and personal life. Or, you are limiting the scope of your professional life so that it doesn't affect your personal life. While some freelancers may not wish for such a division, most find it helpful.

Setting boundaries also helps protect freelancers from burnout. Without boundaries, it can be just too tempting to work all of the time. Overwork is a sure path to stress and ultimate burnout.

7 AREAS WHERE BOUNDARIES CAN HELP

Where should you set your boundaries? Every freelancer will have a different answer. Some may wish for a quiet environment, while others can happily work in the midst of a commotion. You will have to decide which boundaries will help you the most.

Here are some common boundaries that many freelancers set. You may find that some of these also work for you:

1 SPACE BOUNDARIES

Many freelancers benefit from having a specific space dedicated to work in their home. This can be an actual home office with a door (think: spare bedroom) or an unused corner of a much larger room. Designating a particular space for work tells others in your home that the space is off-limits for other uses. Be sure to enforce your boundaries. If another family member wants to use your space, tell them that it is not available.



"Without boundaries, it can be just too tempting to work all of the time."

2 PRIVACY BOUNDARIES

Often freelancers seek to keep personal information (such as their home phone number or the names of family members) separate from professional information. This can be accomplished with a dedicated business line. This keeps clients (and others) from calling you on your home phone at all hours of the night and day. Many freelancers also dedicate one social media platform to sharing with friends and family only.

3 LIMITING INTERRUPTIONS

Interruptions can really throw a freelancer off. That's why many freelancers develop a boundary that helps limit those interruptions. For physical interruptions, an office with a door helps. For telephone interruptions, requiring an appointment for calls (and otherwise using voice mail) can keep interruptions to a minimum. Some freelancers designate certain hours during the day as the "office hours" and only answer calls during those times.

4 MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

It's important to have happy clients. Surprisingly, one of the best ways get happy clients is by not promising too much initially and then exceeding expectations. If you fail to set a boundary of reasonable expectations with your client and promise too much, your clients will expect you to live up to your promises. Worse yet, they will have unreasonable expectations in future dealings with you as well.

5 LIMITING DISTRACTIONS

Distractions are everywhere. If they're not managed carefully, distractions can really cut into a freelancer's time. Who hasn't lost track of time while surfing the Web? Fortunately, there are now many online tools to help you eliminate distractions. A good schedule can also help. If you plan how you are going to spend your day, you are less likely to fritter time away.



6 PROTECTING YOUR DAILY SCHEDULE

Limiting distractions and interruptions is just one way of protecting your time, but it is important to have boundaries in place to make sure that you get the most out of your day. Unfortunately, freelancers who work from home are often perceived as being "available." Friends and family members come out of the woodwork to ask for favors. Make it clear that you work too. Refuse time-consuming tasks by stating unapologetically, "I'm sorry, I have to work."

7 PROTECTING PERSONAL TIME

As a freelancer, I've been tempted to work right through weekends and holidays, haven't you? However, it's important to take time off if you're freelancing for the long haul. That means you have to set aside personal time. When a client asks you to work on a day that you already have scheduled as a day off, try negotiating with that client. Usually they will understand.



WORKING FROM HOME – 5 TIPS TO AVOID THAT DREADED LONELINESS

Man is a social animal. Working from home, it's never easy to just stay glued to your computer for the entire day without talking to or hanging out with anyone outside your family.

So how to avoid this loneliness? Two solutions:

1. Go back to your full time job
2. Try some of the following tips and see if they work for you:

• SKYPE

Skype could be your best friend when it comes to avoiding that solitude. It always feel nice to hear a human voice rather than just chatting on IM. Everyday, a 15-20 mins conversation with your buddy could charge you up and help you work better.

• TOUCH BASE WITH FRIENDS OFTEN

You should not ignore those friends who are not a part of your virtual world. Instead you should call them often and also try and meet them whenever possible. This will ensure that you stay in touch with them and have a life outside your home office too.

• NETWORK WITH FREELANCERS IN YOUR CITY

One of the things which differentiates a full time job from a work-at-home job is the work environment. In a full time job, you interact with your colleagues everyday about professional and personal things, verbally and face-to-face. If you miss such interactions in your daily life after taking the plunge to full-time freelancing, then its always good to network with other people in your city, who are also working from home. You can also meet them and have a similar interaction with them.

• PRACTICE YOUR HOBBY

Everyone of us has a hobby and most of us have almost forgotten it due to lack of time. Now is the time to rediscover it and practice it everyday. Like our very own Jon, who is a rockstar by night and also a guitar teacher. He is also the lead guitarist in a heavy alternative band. I am sure this started as a hobby for him and now, apart from working from home as a web designer and blogger, he enjoys being a rockstar too!

• GET A PART-TIME JOB

If you are really missing your full time job and the corresponding work environment, then its better to hunt for a part time job and invest 4-5 hours there everyday. Then after some time you can always assess if you are going along well with your freelancing and the part-time job or its time to quit the work-at-home thing or really go full-time.