

THREE KEYS TO ACHIEVING BALANCE BETWEEN YOUR HOME OFFICE AND YOUR FAMILY LIFE

By Robert Imbriale

You may think that working from your home is the ultimate freedom. You may get tingles down your spine at the mere thought of being able to work in your pajamas, be with your children, and never deal with the morning commute again. Yes, working from your home can be all of these things and a whole lot more too.

As with many of the people I coach, working from home, however, can be both a relief and a headache at the same time. Keeping a balance between your professional home life and your personal home life presents many challenges. One in particular that comes up in many of my coaching sessions is the unending desire to work every waking moment of everyday, including weekends! It's a real challenge having a lot of work just inches away from where you are supposed to be enjoying quality time with your family.

So what can you do? How can you make your home business work while keeping your personal life intact? There are three areas that I consider paramount to running a successful home based business.

First, remember that above all else, your business is your business, and your family is your family. Try never to mix the two because that can easily lead to a toxic potion. When you are in business mode, be focused on your business. Try to keep your children out of your work area at all times. If that means having to hire a babysitter to occupy your children while you work, do it.

It's much more important to have a professional appearance to your clients than having a few extra dollars you may save by not hiring a babysitter. Being close to your children can be a blessing, but they can also spell disaster as you try to close that key account over the phone just as one of them begins to cry or scream uncontrollably right next to you.

If a full time sitter is not an option, consider hiring a part-time sitter. When the sitter is in, that's when you make your calls. Work your calling schedule around your babysitter as best you can, and make sure you save the most important calls for that quiet time.

The more separation you create between your business mode and your personal life, the better. If your home office has a door, close it. Cut off any temptation to go and do the dishes, laundry or whatever during your work time. Avoid those frequent mini-raids of the refrigerator during work time. These types of distractions will only help keep you in your office much longer than necessary.

Second, make sure you have a business telephone line, a separate fax line, and a third modem line, if you use the Internet for long periods of time. Your business line should have

an answering machine, voice-mail system, or an answering service's live operator that answers your phone in a professional manner when you are not available. Remember that your goal is not to sound like a home office, so the more professional you can sound on the telephone, the better.

Third, keep yourself as organized as if you were working in a corporate office. Organization prevents contracts and other important documents from getting buried under piles of files, newspapers, or even last night's dinner! Just because you work from your home doesn't mean you are any less of a professional.... so act like one and treat important documents with respect.

As part of keeping organized, do everything you can to keep food and drinks away from your desk! Spills cost you many hours of work, and can even cost you thousands of dollars if they were to damage any of your delicate electronic equipment. My motto is simple: "Food stays in the kitchen, and paperwork stays in the office."

In all cases working from home, use common sense. Your business depends on you being organized and keeping your personal and business lives separate, even though they co-exist under the same roof. Get in the habit of turning off your computer at a reasonable hour and use that time to be with your family, relax and enjoy your life.... Although it may be tempting to get right back to work after dinner, remember that your work will be there for you in the morning, just as it would if you left it back at the corporate office. HBM

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