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Do You Have What It Takes to Work From Home?

By Rosalind Resnick

Before you launch your homebased biz, make sure you're suited to the work-from-home life. Five things to consider.

If you're already having doubts, then working from home may not be for you. While running a homebased business offers tremendous freedom and flexibility, it also requires a high degree of motivation, self-discipline and organization. Especially if you're used to working for a big corporation where you have a well-defined job description, employees who report to you or a manager who closely supervises your work, you may find it difficult to make the transition to being your own homebased boss. If, on the other hand, your job gives you a fair degree of independence and you're chafing at the bit for more, working from home could be exactly what you're looking for.

Ask yourself the following five questions to find out if you're really ready to work from home:

1. Am I a jack-of-all-trades? Unlike working at a big corporation that has resources and specialists to send bills, fix computer problems and deal with problem employees, homebased business owners typically have to figure things out on their own. This means mastering the skills necessary to do your own bookkeeping, tech support and hiring/firing--or finding a competent bookkeeper, computer technician or HR service to help you. Even though there are now many outsourced services for small and homebased business owners, a solid grasp of QuickBooks, Microsoft Office and the Internet will make you more self-sufficient and cut down on professional services fees.

2. Am I comfortable setting my own schedule? If you're used to showing up at an office every morning, operating in an environment without set hours or an employer-imposed schedule can be a difficult adjustment. While everybody claims to want freedom, the truth is that most people are creatures of habit and routine. That's why it's a good idea to create some sort of schedule--even if it's artificial--to break up your day. For example, if you start your day at 9 a.m., you could spend the first hour checking your e-mail messages and making cold calls, then tackle two hours of work before lunch. After lunch, you could make another round of calls, then put in

another four hours of work before signing off for the day. Generally, it's a good idea to work the same hours that your clients do.

3. Am I good at setting goals? Just like creating a schedule can help structure your time, setting goals can give you milestones to shoot for and tangible rewards for achieving them. For example, when I was a homebased freelance writer, my first goal was to make as much as I'd been making at my old newspaper job. (Fortunately, that wasn't too difficult.) Then I started raising the bar by \$1,000 per month. Before long, I had eight newspaper and magazine clients paying me a total of \$8,000 per month. As a reward for my hard work and self-discipline, I would sometimes sneak off to see a movie in the middle of the day--the ultimate writer's holiday!

4. Am I easily distracted? Some of the biggest challenges of working from home are the constant distractions. While there may be fewer meetings and less workplace gossip, there will be plenty of other things that compete for your attention, from kids and pets to housework, television and, of course, the refrigerator. It's a good idea to set up your home office in a room with a door to keep intrusions to a minimum.

5. Am I able to call it quits at the end of the day? No matter how much work still needs to get done, it's important to be able to call an end to your day. Even if you go back to the computer after dinner to check your e-mail or do some writing, it's important to set aside some time for your family and yourself. Unfortunately, many people who start working from home discover an inner workaholic they never knew was there. While you may need to put in extra hours initially to get your business off the ground, it's also important to strike a balance between your work and family responsibilities.

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