

# Book Review: The Work At Home Balancing Act

By Ramona Creel

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Working at home offers both the best and worst of both worlds. You have the FREEDOM to get up whenever you want, wear pajamas in your office, have lunch with a friend on the spur of the moment, and put in a load of laundry between phone calls. But you can also suffer from multiple DISTRACTIONS (family, friends, personal responsibilities), a sense of isolation from the rest of the world, the lack of STRUCTURE, and a shortage of SUPPORT STAFF. It's nice to be able to work on a proposal at 3 AM when you feel inspired -- but it's not so nice when you find yourself working until 3AM nearly every night because you can't pull yourself away from work. You walk a fine line, and you may feel at times as though you are being pulled in two directions at once. And if you aren't careful, you'll get pulled right off of your tightwire and go tumbling to the ground!

But along comes Sandy Anderson, with a practical and down-to-earth guide for the home-based business owner, sales person, or telecommuter. "The Work At Home Balancing Act" is part support group, part coach, part BUSINESS CONSULTANT, and part therapist. Sandy speaks from personal experience, and covers a broad range of topics that are important to people who work at home -- from making the decision to stay home to handling CHILD CARE and household responsibilities to creating BOUNDARIES around your space and time. She offers practical suggestions and anecdotes from others who have struggled with the same issues that you are facing. All in all, this is one of the most valuable guides on working at home that you will find anywhere.

## ARE YOU READY?

The first step in setting up a successful home-office environment is determining if you are cut out for working at home! As Sandy Anderson observes, many people are attracted to the "aura" surrounding working at home -- they like the idea of having CONTROL over their schedule, income, environment, job security, stress level, working relationships, and career destiny. And many stay-at-home workers do experience increased work PRODUCTIVITY and substantial FINANCIAL BENEFITS. But, as many home-based business owners will often tell you, flexibility can be a double-edged sword. You have so much FREEDOM that you often end up working too much or too little. You stop paying attention to your appearance, often forgo exercising to fit in "just a few more phone calls," and may gain weight. And it can get really lonely -- without the casual camaraderie of the typical office environment.

So before you take the leap, Sandy suggests that you consider your own personal strengths and limitations -- that you ask yourself honestly if you have the right kind of PERSONALITY for working at home. According to Sandy, successful home workers are self-motivated and DISCIPLINED, organized and committed -- and they thrive on control. They enjoy solitude -- or else are dedicated

to finding ways of warding off professional loneliness. They are self-confident RISK-TAKERS and knowledge-seekers, good communicators, brimming with creativity -- and they have no trouble seeking SUPPORT from others. That's a tall order! But even if you possess just a few of these characteristics, you're off to a good start.

## COPING STRATEGIES

Once you have made the decision to leave the 9 to 5 grind and work from home, you are suddenly faced with an entirely new set of challenges. You may have left office politics and bureaucracy behind, but you must now cope with much more intimate PERSONAL ISSUES. Who is going to watch your kids while you try and work? What if your significant other isn't particularly supportive of your decision? How do you let your family know that your time at home is for working, not for doing dishes and running personal errands? Sandy leads her readers through a discussion of CHILD CARE options, ways to keep HOUSEHOLD CHORES from encroaching on your day, and methods for involving your kids and your spouse in your new venture.

The key to dealing with any of these potential problems is setting BOUNDARIES that everyone can agree to. This deciding on a set SCHEDULE that carves out some quiet time in which you can work, but leaves enough free time for a personal life. It also involves deciding on some rules about how your WORK SPACE is to be used (or not used!) and by whom. And it even means evaluating your own personal work HABITS -- setting some guidelines for how you will use your day, in order to avoid unnecessary stress and make the most of your time.

## BUSINESS STRATEGIES

For some people, the most challenging part of deciding to work at home is making the transition out of the office. A great deal of the stress associated with striking out on your own will be alleviated if you can be sure that you aren't just jumping into the abyss. If you are planning to start a home-based business, this means developing a realistic BUSINESS PLAN that outlines exactly what you hope to do and how you will do it. Where will you find FUNDING? Do you need any specific TRAINING? What kind of business entity will you select? Where will you find customers? What are your LEGAL responsibilities and liabilities?

Potential TELECOMMUTERS face a similar, although somewhat less-involved process. Before approaching your boss with the idea that you work from home, you must consider the pros and cons -- for both parties. Set your ideas down on paper in a REALISTIC PLAN that addresses every possible contingency. How many days do you wish to spend at home each week? How will your duties can be performed away from the office? What are your EQUIPMENT and supply needs? Are you requesting a change in your salary? And how will your work will be MONITORED? Remember, working from home is only a pipe-dream if you keep it in your head. Once you work out the logistics, anything is possible!

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