

Slipper Shock: How to Avoid Isolation as an Independent Professional

by Melanie O'Kane

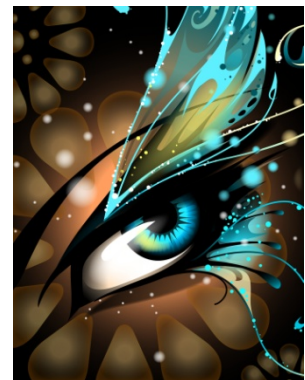
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Let me tell you a story ...

After a few years of working as a virtual assistant, Susan began to feel like her dreams were going to finally come true. She worked from home. If the mood struck, Susan could sip tea and take phone calls in her garden. Working in pajamas and slippers was not a problem, and the joy of realizing a truly flexible schedule filled her spirit with endless hope. That is, until something strange happened.

One night, as she slept, an evil fairy named Isolation visited Susan's peaceful reverie. The malevolent pixie preyed upon hopeful entrepreneurs like Susan, bringing fear—fear of being alone and out of touch with the world. Isolation fluttered above Susan's face and sprinkled magical dust onto her softly closed eyelids. Instantly, Susan's dreams became desolate and her heart filled with great loneliness.

Susan awoke with the morning dawn, her spirit heavy with fear of seclusion. Isolation had been waiting all night in the shadows to see first-hand the results of her dark magic. When Susan sadly relinquished her dreams and returned to her old job, clinging to the glass ceiling of the corporate world she had so much wanted to leave, Isolation softly chortled with glee and moved on to find her next victim.



Sadly, Susan never realized her full potential as a business owner because she did not know about a few successful techniques she could have used to ward off the loneliness caused by Isolation...

Utilizing steps that outline best practices in avoiding isolation can build confidence and self-esteem. Put these five great tips for avoiding isolation into your isolation-fighting kit and don't be afraid to use them.

Many virtual assistants are sole proprietors who work from home. They don't commute to an office full of people. They don't grab lunch with the gang. They don't go out into the real world to drive their cars, associate with the public, or even absorb sunshine.

Working from home is not for the faint of heart; one must go the extra mile to keep Isolation and her nasty dust at bay. Here are five terrific tips for avoiding isolation as an independent professional

Network

There are many local and national organizations that offer opportunities for independent professionals to meet face-to-face for human contact and professional growth:

- Business Network International (BNI): “Business Network International is a business and professional networking organization that offers members the opportunity to share ideas, contacts and most importantly, referrals.”
- Virtual Assistant Connections: “A VAC (Virtual Assistant Connection) is an opportunity to meet face-to-face with other VAs in your area. Veteran, new, emerging and those considering a career in virtual assistance meet to break bread and discuss the virtual assistant life.”
- Local Chambers of Commerce: Many local Chambers of Commerce offer networking events, similar to BNI, where local business members get together and learn about each other.
- Small Business Administration Business Matchmaking: “Its purpose is to match small businesses with government agencies, large business prime contractors and major corporations that have contract opportunities for products and services offered by small, growing companies and creating relationships for future contracts.”

Volunteer

Help yourself by helping others. To follow are some benefits of volunteering as outlined by the Mayo Clinic :

- Meet people and make new friends
- Gain satisfaction from accomplishment
- Offer your skills and caring spirit
- Make an impact
- Feel needed and appreciated
- Have fun
- Add to your resume
- Be of service to others
- Give of yourself and get back in return
- Feel a part of the community
- Share personal good fortune
- Explore possible career opportunities
- Learn new skills
- Serve in a leadership role

Go Outside and Play

Exercise has been proven to reduce the chances of becoming depressed, which is a side effect of isolation. Most experts agree that getting 20 to 30 minutes of exercise 2 to 3 times a week has physical and psychological advantages. Further, studies show that sunlight provides our bodies with Vitamin D, which strengthens bones, muscles and the immune system. Sunshine also helps alleviate what is known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), caused by a decrease in serotonin due to sunlight deprivation during the dreary winter months. , .

Take a Break

When we worked in the “outside world,” the law dictated that we take a lunch break and 2, 10-15 minute breaks during an 8-hour workday. But many independent professionals don’t adhere to this regimen and continue to work countless hours without downtime or human contact. This is not healthy.

Be sure to faithfully take a lunch break and actually eat during this period of time. Then, throughout the day, walk away from your office to stretch, grab a snack, call a friend or breathe some fresh air.

Continue Your Education

Whether you want to learn a new skill or hear a local expert speak about working from home, continuing your education is one of the most valuable missions you can accomplish. Not only are you sure to meet new people, but you will expand your professional skills and outlook through your endless quest for information.

There are so many ways to battle isolation and socialize. Choose something you enjoy and then just go for it.

Melanie O'Kane is the Owner of MAD Typing and Consulting (MADTC), a professional virtual assistance (administrative support) firm headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, serving clients throughout the United States and Canada. MADTC specializes in executive administrative support; proofreading, editing and formatting; transcription; PDF conversion and form creation; event registration assistance; and e-mail newsletters. To learn more about Melanie and MADTC, visit her online at <http://www.madtyping.com>.