10 Top Tips for dealing with the stress of creative self-employment

Being self-employed is often a strange combination of the most exciting things and the most terrifying things you’re ever likely to experience. It’s not uncommon for both of these states to exist simultaneously in any working week.

So – what can you do to mitigate the anxieties, enjoy the buzz, and get a good night’s sleep into the bargain?

Here’s a few suggestions:

1. **Talk** – don’t bottle it up. It’s good to pop now and again and let the pressure go. Friends, partners and confidantes are good – but don’t rely on them for all your support. You could end up exhausting them or freaking them out. Some level of professional level support is wise – whether that’s in a group of like minds, or working with a coach or mentor.

2. **Learn a relaxation technique.** To be honest, classic meditation – visualisation and steady breathing – works best for most people. You can teach yourself, or you can find any number of relaxation apps. If you don’t have a smartphone, get a CD or download something onto your iPod.

   Simply learning breathing techniques can work wonders – because you can then apply them at work, at home, and in the middle of the night if you wake up feeling panicky.

3. **Find something absorbing to do.** I find writing helps me focus on positive stuff. Others do sport, some knit. It’s the focus on the displacement activity that’s important.

4. **Organise your thoughts.** When you are stressed out, your thinking can end up all over the place. I’m not normally a fan of lists, as they can lead to procrastination, but in time of stress a well thought out list can be really helpful. Think through what you need to do the following day, list it, run though it in your mind. Then put it on your desk and settle down for the evening. This alone can help you get some mental peace and rest.

5. **Train yourself out of catastrophising** – the fear of catastrophic failure is really common, and yet it’s very rare for things to go catastrophically out of control. Ask yourself, on a regular basis - what’s the worst thing that could possibly happen? On a scale of 1-10 how likely is that?
6. Avoid trying to be perfect. Sports trainers discovered ages ago that the pressure of seeking perfection often resulted in athletes failing. They are now trained differently. The point is to be just good enough to get what you want.

7. Don’t try to do everything yourself. A lot of self-employed people think they should be able to do everything in the business well. Give yourself a break. It’s not possible. Accept offers of help.

8. Try to balance excess with exercise – even if it’s just getting up out of your chair and walking up and down the stairs, getting a breath of fresh air, posting letter. Don’t seize up.

9. Plan your route ahead. Take some time to make some plans, think things through, set some bite-size, achievable goals.

10. Don’t forget your creativity – take some time to dream about stuff and create new things. It’s what you’re on the planet for!

Best wishes

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evaluate where I am with my business and the way to move forward. It is truly inspiring and working this alongside personal mentoring from you is invaluable. Thank you for putting this together, I wish it had been around when I started.’ Lizzie Brown – Ceramicist

‘I have just signed up for the Creative Business Explorer and am finding it very good indeed! Some of the questions are hard to answer - but that is good because they are cutting through my fog and ambiguity and really making me think about what I'm doing, what I'm offering, who is going to want it and how they are going to find it. I love the question and answer format and the pie charty diagram of business (because it's visual) and being able to work at my own pace. Already (day one!) I can feel my focus shifting up a gear. Great work Pete!’ Nicky Perryman - Maker

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