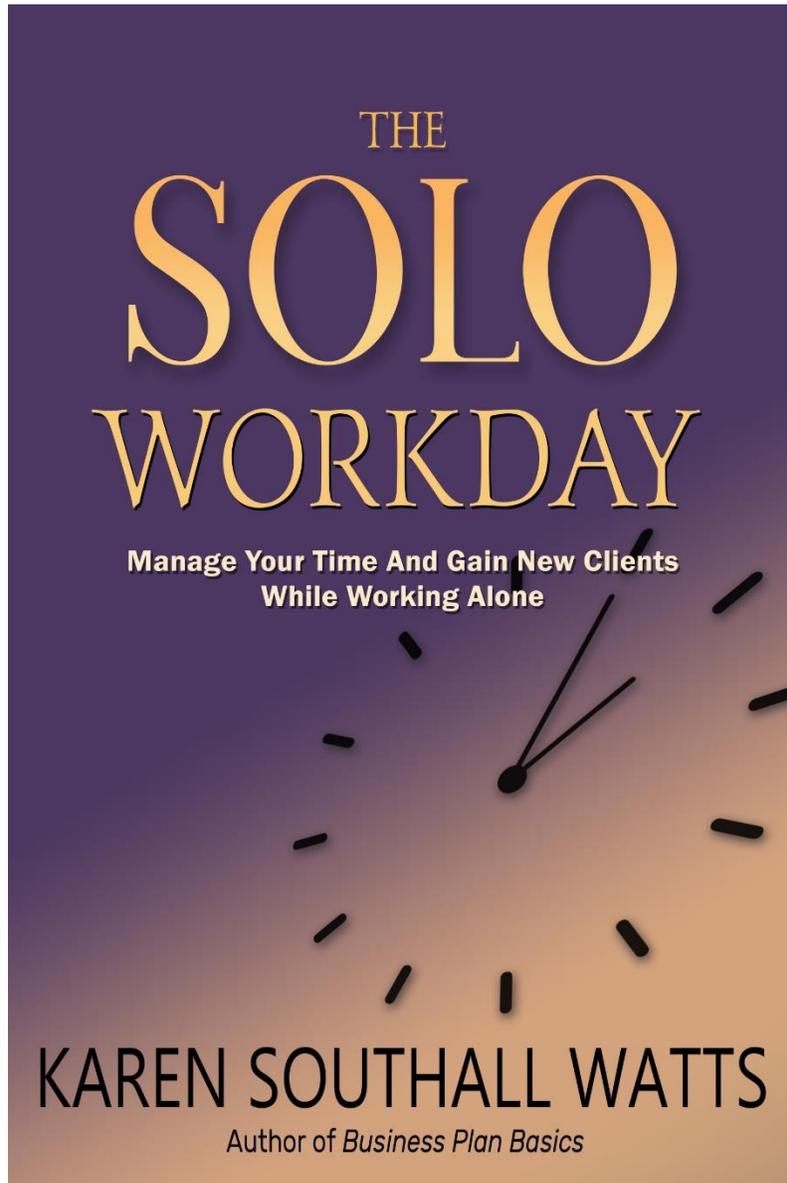


The Solo Workday

Manage Your Time and Gain New Clients While Working Alone

[Companion Workbook]

Karen Southall Watts



Introduction

I remember years ago reading somewhere that the average person only reads the first two chapters of a self-help book. Furthermore, there's lots of evidence that even when we read a whole "how to" or self-improvement type of book that we fail to use the advice or strategies inside. These realities are part of the reason I keep my writing concise and actionable.

If you read *The Solo Workday: Manage Your Time and Gain New Clients While Working Alone*, I hope you made it through to the end, and picked up some good tips along the way. This workbook is a tool you can use to further explore the ideas in the book.

If you haven't read the book yet, that's okay. You can still utilize many of the exercises in these pages.

As always, I'd love to hear from you. You can find me on Twitter @askkaren or at www.askkarencoaching.com OR www.karensouthallwatts.com

You can buy *The Solo Workday* in paperback <https://www.amazon.com/Solo-Workday-Manage-clients-working/dp/1073714446/> or for your Kindle <https://www.amazon.com/Solo-Workday-Manage-clients-working-ebook/dp/B07SYD4HCX/>

About me

Like many freelancers, gig workers, and solopreneurs, I didn't realize a large part of my professional life would be spent working alone out of a home office. My first jobs were in social service and health care agencies where daily structure and procedures came from the employer. As my career changed to more independent and solo work, new challenges emerged. I loved working alone most of the time; it's an introvert's dream. However, I found that there was precious little guidance on freelancer success or information on managing my business and my work days. Since those early years I've tried to fill this gap by writing books and designing materials on business planning, personal motivation, and now time management.

I've earned degrees in Humanities and Organization and Management. I've also gained valuable informal education in the schools of parenthood, marriage and divorce, life transition including relocation and immigration, and working with diverse and sometimes challenging groups of people. Since 1999, I've been helping entrepreneurs plan startups and coaching professionals in every stage of their careers from college student to mid-life evolution.

Chapter 1 – How did you get here?

Our effective use of time can be tangled up in our emotions. That’s why it’s important for you to examine your feelings about being a solo worker and make peace with them. Two ways to do this are:

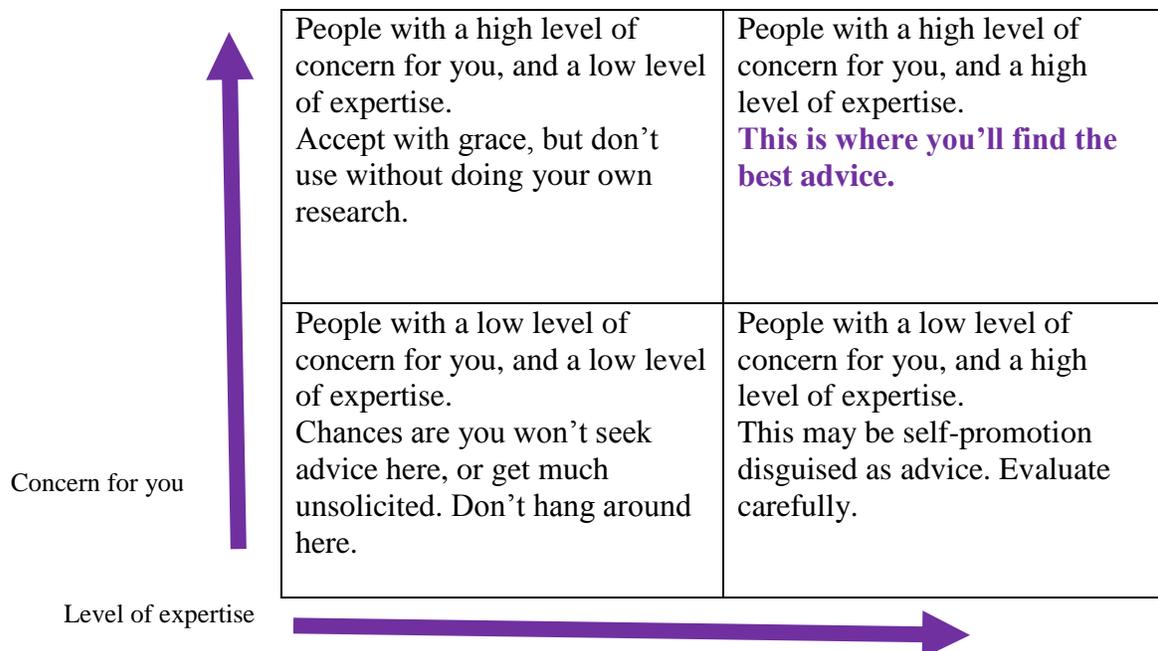
1. Decide on your title. Are you a freelancer? Independent consultant? Solopreneur? Declaring your expertise and naming your business are good ways to boost confidence in your solo workday career.
2. Craft a personal branding statement. This is not a book about marketing and branding. However, taking the time to create a one or two sentence summary of what you offer and its value can save you time later when you build your marketing and branding strategies. A personal branding statement should address the total experience of working with you. I write about this in more depth in my book, *Messenger: The Entrepreneur’s Guide to Communication*.

Prompt to start you:

I call myself a _____ because I _____ in my business. Working with me customers can expect _____ because I _____.

When you make the move to work as a freelancer or take up the challenge of entrepreneurship, you will find no shortage of people lining up to give you advice. Because of this I’ve crafted an

Advice Evaluation Tool



Whenever someone tells you how you should be running your business (or life) consider how much they really care about what happens to you, and how much they know about the topic.

Chapter 2 – Time Management Basics

There's a reason almost every coach, consultant, or teacher who works with people on time management problems starts with a time tracking or time diary exercise. It works. Without understanding where your time is slipping away, you cannot craft new or better strategies for productivity. You can use anything from a fancy leather-bound journal to a stack of notebook paper to do this exercise. I've provided you a starter sheet here in the workbook.

In addition to honestly recording how much time you spend on an activity, it can be useful to also note how you feel at the time or if anything catches your attention. Here's a pretend example.

7:30 a.m. *Breakfast meeting with my accountability partner (super encouraging)*

8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. *Social media updates (Wow. 2 hours...I almost missed a conference call)*

10:00 a.m. to 10:40 a.m. *Call with client (Yay! They referred a friend for business)*

10:40 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. *Working on open projects*

1:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. *Lunch (so hungry... might need a coffee break in the mornings)*

Here's a sheet to get you started

6:00 a.m. to 7:00 a.m.	
7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.	
8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.	
9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.	
10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	
11:00 a.m. to 12 noon	
12 noon to 1:00 p.m.	
1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m.	
2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.	
3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	
4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	
5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	
6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	
7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	
8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	
9:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.	
10:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.	
11:00 p.m. to 12 midnight	

Building Your Attention Muscles

One way to convey respect for someone is to give them your undivided attention. Intense focus also helps us to turn out higher quality work and reduce mistakes and missteps caused when we try to spread our attention across too many tasks. However, years of society proclaiming

multitasking to be a laudable skill has made single-minded focus and total attention challenging for many of us. Here are some exercises and ideas to help you regain this essential skill.

Tell me what you think.

Listening is an all-important skill we are not usually taught or encouraged to practice. Becoming a better listener will save you time. You won't have to double back to clarify information, and you won't risk losing good clients because they feel ignored. Though *The Solo Workday* is not a book about communications, here is an exercise to start you on the road to becoming a better listener.

This exercise requires you find a partner. Once you do, then you can discuss some topical questions and explore each other's point of view. The key is this: after you read the question, you must give your partner at least one minute to express their thoughts without interrupting. Spend this time really listening, and not just thinking about what you will say when it's your turn. Switch back and forth a few times, and then select a new question. Notice whether you have trouble really listening, not interrupting, or planning your response and missing key points your partner is trying to make. You can certainly expand beyond this list, but here are some topics to start off the exercise.

- Many people seem to think you must be a “born leader” or a “born entrepreneur” to be successful. What do you think?
- Making sales calls is really hard for lots of people. One idea to get past this is to think of solving problems instead of closing deals. How effective do you think this is?
- Balancing work and home life used to be considered a “women's issue” but younger professionals of all genders seem to want a balanced life. What time management ideas seem universal to you?
- There's an old saying that goes, “When you say you're too busy to do something, what you really mean is that it's not important to you.” Do you think this is what people are really thinking? Why or why not?
- What do you think of the idea that getting up at 5 a.m. leads to success? Have you tried it, or would you recommend it?
- How would you use an extra hour of time during the day? What if the hour couldn't be used for work?
- If you had a business partner who was always late or missing deadlines, what would you do?

Shape your space.

A home office or work studio that is filled with distractions or clutter is going to make it harder to focus and give your undivided attention to a task or a client. Though the debate about whether or not a messy desk or office is a mark of genius or laziness, there are some elements about your work environment that directly impact your attention and use of time.

Run the “can I find it?” test. Make a list of items you might need to quickly locate on a typical day. Can you find all of them? How long does it take? Some suggestions for this test include:

- Your car keys, bus pass, or walking shoes
- Your business cards
- A piece of paper and pen/pencil to make a quick note
- The most recent statement or bill for all your important financial/client accounts
- The last message from your best client
- Your first aid kit, vitamins, or a headache remedy

Consider setting aside a chunk of time to rework the following areas of your home/office.

A staging area: This is a spot where you put all the items you need when you walk out the door. The key is to return them to this spot after each trip out.

The main workspace: Whether it’s a desk with a computer or a worktable covered in acrylic paints, your workspace needs to be organized in a way that gets you focused and working quickly.

A filing system (paper or digital): Record keeping is important for freelancers and solo workers. Decide what you are going to keep and where, as well as settle on a system for when you’ll purge your records.

Chapter Three – Time Management Tools

Prioritization Screen – One of the difficulties with a to-do list is knowing which items must be done first, which ones are most important, and what can be left for your spare time. For solo workers this problem can be even tougher as there is no boss to order the tasks for us. Another issue that comes up, at least for those of us with knowledge based businesses, is being asked to work for free. Below is the screening tool I use to decide what goes on the top of the to-do list.

Does it generate revenue? This includes doing work, delivering work, answering urgent client communication, and invoicing for work. These items are **TOP/HIGHEST** priority.

Does it keep the business running? This includes paying bills, checking the progress of ongoing projects, making backup copies of essential information. These items are **HIGH** priority.

Does it build the business? This includes marketing efforts, networking events, and research. These items are **IMPORTANT/MIDDLE** priority.

Is it routine or non-urgent? This includes inbox management, filing, cleaning your space and answering routine communications. These items are **LOW** priority, even though needed. It is okay if they get pushed back a day or so in favor of higher priority work.

When you get requests to work for free:

Ask yourself if this is a person, organization, or cause you believe in deeply and that you want to knowingly donate time and energy to, and how much of that time you've got to give.

Ask yourself if your schedule is already full of pro bono (freebie) work. Can you afford to do more non-paying work at this time?

Ask yourself if this is someone who knows they should be paying for your time and is trying to get something of value for free. Also ask, do you have a reputation for doing free work? Do you need to address this in your branding?

Finding an Accountability Partner

Simon Sinek gave one of the simplest and best explanations of why accountability partners work that I've ever heard. He explained that we are social creatures and we don't want to let others down. This is why accountability works (for most of us). Yet knowing this doesn't mean you will instantly find the right person to be your accountability partner. Below are some guidelines so you can make notes before reaching out to someone about taking this role in your life and business.

Do you share the same values? Your accountability partner doesn't have to be exactly like you. In fact, providing a slightly different view of things is one of the great things accountability partners do for us. However, someone who is going to be supporting you as well as challenging you needs to understand and share your views of core issues. Topics to discuss with a potential accountability partner:

- What does work/life balance look like to you?
- How important is it to earn a lot of money, own luxury goods, or donate to charity?
- Define "on time"

Is this person successful or a good role model? No, it's not necessary to find someone who is perfect to be your accountability partner. It's even okay to work with someone who might have their own struggles. However, your accountability partner should have some qualities you admire and some achievements and experience to draw upon as they help you.

Starting the accountability partner conversation checklist

- Use the preferred communication method, if you know it, of your potential accountability partner. Don't text a phone call person or email a face-to-face person if you can avoid it.
- Clearly state that you are looking for an accountability partner.
- Briefly describe your major challenge and share your goals
- Spell out what you need in terms of time (a few weeks for a project up to about six months is a good starting place)

- Once they say yes, then clearly outline the logistics (texts, emails, calls, meetings, and how much time per communication)

Always thank your accountability partner for their time. Never lie to them.

Chapter Four – Social Media, Multitasking and Divided Attention

The middle of *The Solo Workday* is all about awareness. How much time do you spend on social media? Is it doing you any good? Is this time harming you or your business? What's your personal brand and how can it be helped or hurt by the way you spend your time?

Most of us don't magically know the answers to these questions, so here are some exercises to aid in your discovery process.

1. Google your name (make sure to include variations – a friend found some key information about me by just moving a single letter)
2. Check out the analytics section of your social media accounts (sometimes this is under “notifications”) to see what posts are being read, liked, and commented on
3. Review your time tracking journal. Does the amount of time spent online seem to match the results you're getting?

Do a social media “gut check” by asking the following questions:

1. How do I feel when I scroll through my Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc. feed?
2. When I take a social media break, does my physical or mental health improve dramatically?
3. How many customers or clients can I trace directly back to social media?

Phones and your time and attention

Want to really stand out in business meetings? Don't check your phone. Want to inspire trust in people? Leave your phone in your purse or pocket. When you are focused on your phone while interacting with others you're sending a message: “The images on my phone screen are more important to me than you.” Every time you have to *come back* to the conversation after checking your phone is time wasted and trust lost. I suggest crafting some phone use rules based on your business and work habits. Some you might try:

- Turning off the phone during creative blocks
- Keeping the phone stored away during client meetings (especially face-to-face meetings)
- Having phone free meals

An additional word about smartphones

Recently, I taught another business seminar for young adults. Many of them had plans to move into the world of business, and I wonder how they will compete. Why? No matter what was happening around them, they seem to be unable to put down their phones for even a few minutes. I was saddened to find out it was NOT my imagination, many teens and young adults are **addicted** to phone use. You can see a meta-analysis of research in this area here:

<https://bmcp psychiatry.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12888-019-2350-x>

Chapter Five – Backups and Comebacks

In *The Solo Workday* I help readers examine how the typical snags and pitfalls of life can go from minor annoyances to serious time-related (and success-killing) problems. I also include a special section for perfectionists, who often face unique challenges in getting things done. Here's a quick self-test to see if perfectionism might be derailing your workday.

How long does it take you to make decisions? [Perfectionists often analyze and second guess for extended periods of time.]

How often do you say things like, "it's just not good enough"?

Do you hear criticism of your work and think, "I'm a terrible person," or "I have no talent"?

Can the demands you place on yourself pass the best friend test? [Page 51 of *The Solo Workday*]

It's not glamorous, but sometimes a checklist can be a life saver.

Here's the Emergency, Back Up, and Bounce Back Checklist

- Safety equipment for your home office (fire extinguisher, first aid kit)
- Back up methods for your important data (cloud storage, memory drives, paper files)
- A sick day plan (auto-responder for email, friend you can call for support, a virtual assistant for critical work related tasks)
- List of tasks you could delegate or delay during an illness or emergency
- Names and contact information of those clients you'd have to call first in case of a technology failure or other breakdown in your business
- Stash of comfort items to get you through a tough day (healthy snacks, recreational outlets like books or video games, the phone number of a close friend)

What now?

Struggles with time management never really end, and this doesn't necessarily mean you are doing anything wrong. As soon as you find a system that works for you, life will throw you a curve. You could be offered a new and complex project, or find yourself relocating to a new city in a different time zone. Changing family responsibilities can upset the most perfect time management systems, as human problems seldom fit neatly into our apps and spreadsheets. Aging can change your body's natural rhythms. The overall economy can mean you need to ramp up your business, or perhaps change focus. Best methods are not carved in stone, but change and grow with you.

Good time management includes elements of effectiveness and efficiency and is grounded in your core values. Working alone all day can be a challenge, but for many of us it's the new normal. I hope this workbook and *The Solo Workday* will help readers to build structure in the day that makes work more pleasurable and productive.

How to contact me

I would love to hear from you. How do you handle the day working alone?

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