



how you doing?

**the Leapers.co
guide to
looking after
yourself when
working for
yourself.**



Matthew Knight

Edition 0.05

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Matthew Knight hereby asserts his right to be identified as the author of “How you doing? the Leapers.co guide to looking after yourself when working for yourself.”

www.leapers.co/howyoudoing

**for the people
who are figuring it
out for themselves.**

FOREWARD

Team of One.

When you're working for yourself or by yourself - we know the challenges you face are significant.

The UK has woken up to the importance of workplace wellbeing. Employers are doing more than ever to support their employees - yet over 15% of the UK workforce does not have an employer. That's over 5 million people, who have to support themselves.

If you're self-employed, you've taken on responsibility for not only doing the work, but also the accounts, the invoicing, the marketing, the sales, the admin, making the tea and buying the biscuits - and it's often easy to forget to add your own wellbeing to the to-do list.

45% of freelancers say they hadn't considered their mental health before taking the leap into self-employment, and over 60% say that poor mental health has had a negative impact on their ability to work.

We must take responsibility for our own emotional wellbeing, design how to work happy and healthy. Whilst there are lots of things outside of our control - there are many things which we can do to make sure we're working safely.

This guide offers some tangible ways to look after your mental health when you're self-employed, rooted in insights gathered from the Leapers community and our research with over 500 freelancers globally.

This is a living book, which means we'll update it regularly with new things we discover and learn as our community grows, so please share with us your own suggestions of things you've found helpful, and we'll include it in future editions.

Matthew Knight
Founder, Leapers



Need urgent help?

Samaritans has a free-to-call service 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, if you want to talk to someone in confidence. Call them on 116 123.

If you don't feel you can keep yourself safe right now, seek immediate help:

Go to any Accident & Emergency (A&E) department,

or call 999 and ask for an ambulance to take you to A&E.

To find a wide range of helpful services, guides and support - visit Mind online <https://www.mind.org.uk>

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B0.05

**This is a living book.
Do you have the latest version?
Comments? Suggestions?**

We are constantly updating this book, with new insights, techniques and content.

**Visit <https://leapers.co/howyoudoing/>
for the latest version of this publication.**

B0.05: published on June 29, 2019.
This version is an BETA release.

This means the content is almost ready for publication, but there still might be some mistakes - we're only human.

Thanks for testing.

Don't fake it until you make it.

There's no shame not knowing the answer, or admitting that things aren't always easy.

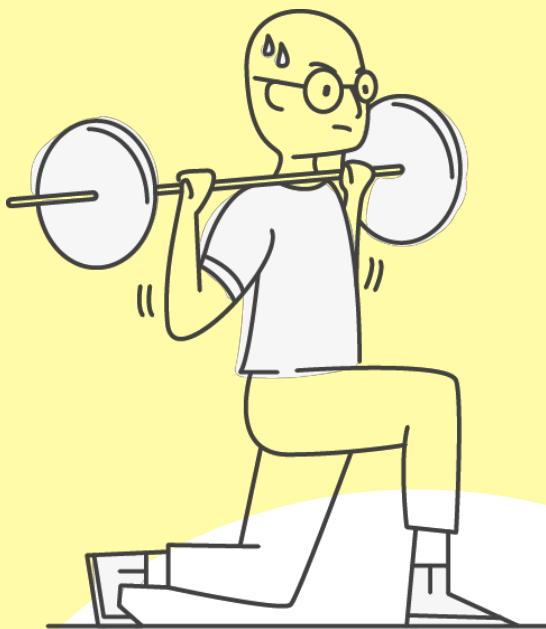
We all have great days, we all have dreadful days. This is reality, so don't feel you have to project an image of everything being awesome.

You may feel like you always have to be 'on it' in front of your clients, and present a professional front, but you're allowed to admit it's hard, and talk about it with others.

You're not alone - 64% of our community feel that not having someone to share their stresses with only adds to their stress, but 58% feel they'd benefit from connecting with others in similar situations.

You might not want to post it publicly, perhaps it's just about sharing the real experience with friends or a closer network, but open up.

There are millions of people who are experiencing the same ups and downs, and we can all support each other when we connect and talk.



Keep a journal.

Log how you're doing, what you're feeling, what you're enjoying, and what you're not.

When you're juggling lots of tasks, it can be easy to slip into feeling stressed, but not be aware what is really causing negative (or positive) feelings.

A daily reflection upon your highs and lows helps you not only process stress, but also helps to identify the things which are causing it.

Exercise:

Complete a daily journal, capturing what you felt good about, what you felt bad about, and thoughts for tomorrow.

You don't need to do much more than keep a notebook in your bag, or a file on your device - and just capture notes when you think about it, or set an alarm to periodically check-in with yourself.

And then reflect back on it at the end of the day, week or month. See what patterns arise, and consider what you can do to make changes where you need to.

Don't forget to capture the good things too - this becomes a book of awesome things you've done.



Add a little structure.

Don't swap the 9-5 for 24/7, give yourself boundaries.

One of the top reasons for people going freelance is control over the work they do, over when and where they work.

Yet, a majority of us are also working five or more days a week, we feel that the lack of structure in the day and working long hours, and almost 80% of us say that not having clear expectations from our clients adds to stress levels.

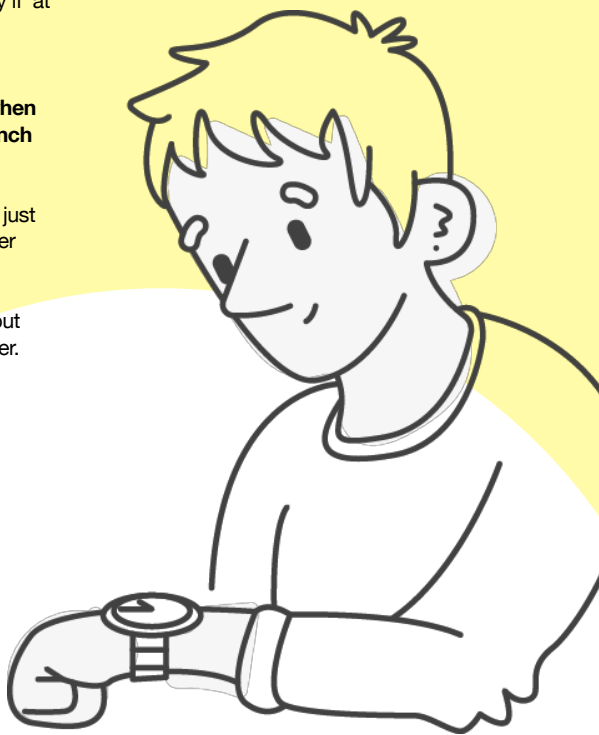
Without the regular patterns of the working day, it's hard to know when you've 'done enough', to close the laptop, and step away from work, especially if 'at work' is also 'at home'.

Exercise:

Add a little structure to your day, habits of when you're going to start work, end work, add lunch breaks, even regular meetings with others.

If you prefer working on weekends, that's fine - just make sure you're also taking the time off another day.

Things will always need to change, of course, but flexibility doesn't mean working every hour either.



Leave home.

Don't work from home on your own for extended periods of time.

Over 96% of our group told us they work from home on their own at some point.

Even if you love having the peace and quiet to get your work done, make sure you're mixing it up, and working from a variety of environments.

Coworking isn't affordable for everyone, but there are plenty of other options too: coffee shops, libraries, client offices, even at friends homes.

All of these offer a variety, and help to create a boundary between work and being able to switch off.

Exercise:

Find a list of local places and try working from one each week until you find a collection of new spaces you could call a workspace.

You can also suggest to your network that you spend time working from each others homes, meet at coffee shops, or discuss with your clients working from their space every so often.



Find your person.

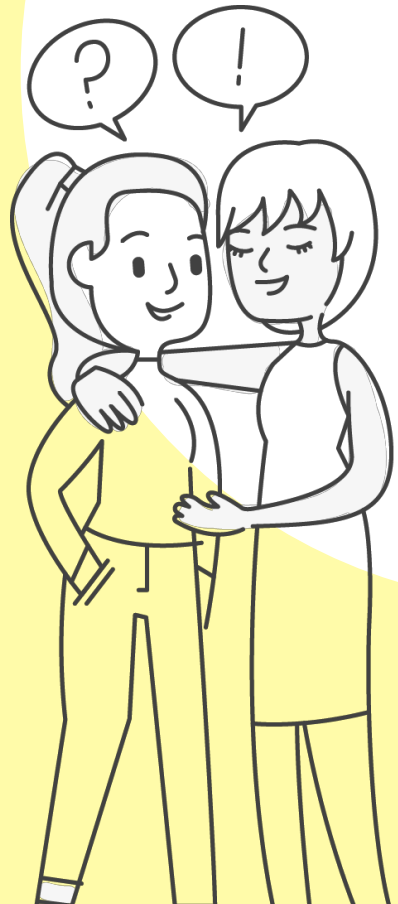
Invest in a mentor, a buddy or just regular meetups with folk to talk to.

Over 68% of our community say they miss having someone to bounce ideas off, share thoughts or concerns.

If you're fortunate enough to be in a relationship - perhaps that's a great starting point, or your family and friends can help.

But often, it's useful to have a professional buddy, someone who you can have regular conversations with, someone who understands the lifestyle, so you're able to share what's happening, and just put words to your experience.

It could be in a group setting like a meetup, or one-to-one. It might online or over the phone. Find what works for you - but build up some sort of regularity, so you know that people are there for you.



Eat. Sleep. Exercise.

Support your physical health to support your mental health.

Over 72% of our community use exercise to keep on top of their stress levels, and it's proven that maintaining a healthy diet, a healthy sleep routine and good level of exercise, makes you more ready to tackle the what the world throws at you.

Something as simple as a lunch hour can be massively helpful - going for a walk at lunch is an easy way of giving yourself a break, getting out of the house, meeting other people, and taking a pause for food.

Don't work late every night. Find a time which is the end of your working day. Give yourself time off. Take weekends (whenever your weekend is). Book in and protect your days off.

We know that taking a holiday can be difficult when you're self-employed, but sick days are even more challenging - and when 70% of sick days are caused by work-related stress, planning a holiday is always better than working through sickness.



Ask for what you need.

Understand and communicate what is essential for you to do a good job.

Getting started on a job can be stressful - there are often no onboarding processes, little in the way of understanding how your new team works, and clarity in what you're being asked to do might be lacking.

78% of our research group said that this lack of clarity or unclear expectations causes them stress on the project.

This isn't just about doing the work - many organisations offer their contractors support including access to mental health services or employee assistance programmes.

Exercise:

Consider what information you need to get started, how you like getting feedback, what you need access to, how you like being managed, where do you work best from.

If you're not clear on what you need, use tools like a <https://manualof.me> to gather insights on your working habits, and share them up-front to communicate clearly on how you'll be best supported to do great work.



Celebrate little wins.

Share and celebrate the small things, they really matter.

83% of our community say that feeling unproductive creates some level of stress, yet we often give ourselves a hard time and forget about all the small things we've done which add up to a great deal.

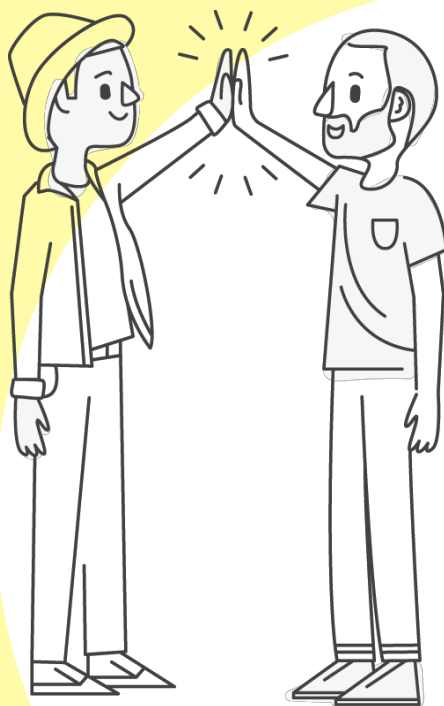
It doesn't have to be a big project you've just completed or finding new work - but the every day stuff too: finishing your invoicing, taking a lunch break, finally reading that book on japanese rope pottery.

Exercise:

Set a reminder at the end of each day to reflect on the little wins you've made, or kick start the day with reflecting on what you achieved yesterday.

Use #littlewins when you share via social, and don't forget to cheer for the #littlewins you see from your network.

Share with your peers, remind yourself of the things you're achieving, and recognise your productivity - even if you're not doing client work.



Rethink rejection.

**It's not you.
It's the process.**

The brain processes rejection, particularly social exclusion, in the same way and same place that it processes pain. When you get told 'no', it literally hurts, no little wonder that more than three quarters of our community struggle with the stress which comes from feeling they're not talented enough.

Recognising that being turned down for a project is not always based upon what you did or didn't do, but is simply part of the freelance experience, is essential to working as a freelancer.

Turn the "no" into "Look! Another time I was brave and put myself out there".

Reframe the "no" into "not the right relationship", and see it from both sides.

Ask for feedback, and turn it into a chance to understand why it was a no, and if you're finding consistent feedback, develop a plan to tackle it.



Share where you're at.

Find a regular way of sharing what you're doing out-loud.

The days of endless pointless meetings can feel long behind you when you're freelancing, but there are benefits in having regular sessions where you share with your team what you're doing.

If you're not part of a team, or you're working on multiple projects across multiple teams, find a way of creating your own status meetings.

Exercise:

Try creating a Friday Five, where you get five fellow indy workers together and share what you're up to over coffee or on a hangout, taking five minutes each to share.

Or you could try writing "Weeknotes". Using a platform like Medium, write a weekly blog post of what you've done, what you're struggling with, and what you're aiming for next week. Have a look at <https://weeknot.es/> for examples of how others have written theirs.



Always. Be. Learning.

Don't let personal development fall by the wayside. Do it. Log it.

In a job, you'll often have access to training, development, a career map, and a way to build new skills.

When you're working for yourself, that doesn't happen unless you make it happen - 35% of us want easier access to training and development.

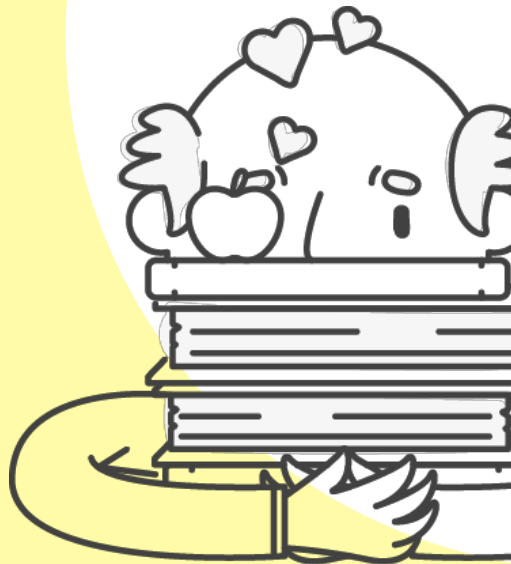
Fortunately, there's always an opportunity to learn, and it doesn't have to cost the earth.

Exercise:

Keep a log of anything you do which adds to your personal development. Doing an online course, going to an event, watching those TED videos, teaching yourself, getting coached or mentored.

Look for opportunities to learn. If you're working in a new sector, ask what training is available for people. Spend time in new environments. Ask for an hour of people's time.

Use feedback from your clients to develop focused areas where you can develop specific skills - and don't just focus on your core capabilities, think about relationship building, new business and emotional intelligence skills too.



Follow-up for Feedback.

Ask about how you did, and what happened next.

We all have a need to feel our work is having impact, but when you're freelance, it's common for you to not know what happened after you've left the project.

Exercise:

Keep in touch with your project leaders and clients, and set a reminder to follow up three months, six months and 12 months later, to see where a project went, and what impact it has had.

It's also essential to ask for feedback after a project, so you understand where your work is appreciated, and where you have areas to improve.

Feedback isn't always volunteered, and without it, you'll not know how you're doing - so ask.

These are both useful ways of gently getting back in touch and reminding them how valuable you were, so they're reminded of you for future projects.



Add you to the to-do list.

Don't forget to prioritise yourself in order to continue doing great work.

It's all too easy to forget the important task of looking after yourself when creating your daily and weekly to-do list.

Many freelancers opt for the lifestyle because it gives them flexibility and free time, but when things are busy, we're often the first thing to fall off the list.

41% of our group ranked "investing in my own wellbeing" as their lowest priority - and we believe that needs to change.

Exercise:

When you're planning your time and workload, include time and activities which invest in you as a client - development, rest, socialising, time with family, whatever you need for you.

You'll see diminishing returns if you're constantly in the service of others.



Join a community.

You're already part of a community so make use of us.

Being part of a community of people who understand the freelance experience is hugely valuable.

Not only will you benefit from the wisdom of others, but you'll also build relationships and connection with folk who have similar and diverse experiences, at every stage of the journey.

Leapers is a community which focuses on creating support for anyone who is working differently, but there are hundreds of small and large communities, locally and globally, where you'll find kindred spirits.

Many have events, some are online only, lots provide products and services to support you, some are paid for, others free.

Each group has its own focus and purpose. Join a handful, and see which work best for what you need right now.

Visit www.leapers.co to say hello, or we can point you in the direction of a community which might suit you.

**Some more things you might
find useful or interesting.**

What is Leapers?

A community supporting anyone who works differently.

Work is changing - we have more options than ever before of how we work, where and when we work, but when you step away from the traditional structures of the 9-5, there's a gap in the support you get - no career development, no emotional support, even spending time with others happens less frequently.

We're here to try and offer each other that support - a community of people who understand the unique challenges we face, and just be there.

We're mostly an online slack group where non-judgemental conversation takes place, but we're also creating products, resources and tools to help fill the gaps created by the new ways of work.

Come and say hello.

www.leapers.co



huru. hacking better support.

Swahili for “free”. Japanese for “to fall”.

huru is the group of projects from Leapers which aim to support Mental Health of our members and the wider community.

It's a Swahili word meaning “free” - which is at the heart of modern work; but also is a Japanese word meaning “to fall” - which can also feel like part of the freelance and independent experience at times.

So, we're doing all we can to create safety nets to catch people, or at the very least, create a little more reassurance and balance.

In 2019, we are:

- + Working with pioneering organisations who want to commit to tangible actions to better support their independent talent.
- + Running a research study into understanding how independent workers engage with and invest in their own mental wellbeing, which this guide is based on.
- + Open sourcing the interventions our pioneers create, so others can copy/steal/modify/build within their own organisations
- + Looking to find ways to celebrate and highlight those organisations where independent workers are welcome.
- + Creating better interventions, tools and techniques to support the community at large.

For a full research debrief, insights, resources and to get involved: www.leapers.co/huru/

Got Freelancer?

**If you're an organisation,
and want to better support
your ad-hoc talent,
work with us.**

We believe that you're responsible for the people you work with, regardless of employment contract.

As the way teams are built moves from 'one job for life' to faster-paced ad-hoc 'on demand' teams, the way we discover, design, support and reward teams needs to change too.

If we don't rethink how we invest in and support ad-hoc talent, we will create a skills gap, a quality gap, and a mental health gap.

**It's not okay to hire the happy and the healthy,
and ignore the rest.**

Supporting and investing in talent always creates positive returns, and the businesses who actively look to support their network will see higher quality work, lower cost of talent and happier people overall.

Leapers welcomes and supports any organisation who wants to better support their talent - contact us if you'd like to find out how we can support you - with resources, guides, advice, tools and insight, or if you'd like to provide this guide to your independent workforce.

www.leapers.co/orgs

#grateful

**This is the work of over
1000 people globally.**

In the two years since Leapers has started, we've had a wonderful level of input and support from so many within the community, plus the extended networks of our members, and everyone who has taken part in our survey.

This guide wouldn't be possible without their advice, suggestions, conversations and help.

Particular thanks to Mike Tannenbaum, Simon White, Sara Bender, Anna Codrea-Rado, and Allison Upton.

Mega special gratitude and kudos to Abigail and Chloe at Buttercrumble for their wonderful illustrations throughout this book.



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