

## **Coming Out Of The Closet: My Name Is Allison & I Work From Home**

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***Here are some things I would like you to know about me right now, in this moment:***

- I work 60, 70, maybe 80 or more hours per week.
- I am my own boss.
- The walls of my office are orange (as I am someone who is generally afraid of color, I felt you should know this)
- My office is in my home. Past the kids' bathroom and before the guest room/playroom. An empire has been and continues to be built from this space.
- When I tell you I am working from home, I mean that. I am not watching Oprah, doing laundry and eating BonBons while pretending to work or fitting work in here and there. I am actually working my you-know-what off.

Except for a year-and-a-half or so period when I felt I needed to prove myself (more on that in a bit), my office has been located in my home since the time I went out on my own in business in 2001.

**In the beginning, as I tried to establish myself as a "real" business, I tried to hide this fact from people.** I needed to be serious and legit. I scheduled all my calls and meetings while my kids were in daycare, then later preschool, then later school-school. I didn't want anyone to hear my screaming kids or my loud life or the real side of the Real Me (as opposed to the put-together Business Me).

I met potential clients and colleagues in Starbucks and at their offices, never my own. (Then lamented spending an entire morning or afternoon in traffic or on the road.)

I expended a great deal of energy on making myself and my business "seem" like something "more serious" than "just" a business based at home. Meanwhile, I was getting more stuff accomplished and making more progress and headway than anyone I knew who spent all day in a "real" office, taking "real" meetings and putting in "real" face time.

A few years into the life of my business, I decided to get "real" (meaning outside of my house) office space. I was actually working too much and felt that an outside office would help better delineate my office time from my work time (no small feat for entrepreneurs/business owners).

A friend offered me space in a great building about 15 minutes from my house. The monthly rent was low and the people who worked there were lovely. The building had a koi pond in front and a cafeteria with a great buffalo chicken salad.

It was SO REAL!

But you know what?

The space, no matter how welcoming and friendly the people or the building, was still a stale office space.

My commute time actually cut down on my in-office work time.

The process each morning and each afternoon to pack up my snacks, my water bottles, my computer and various other things I insisted on taking back and forth got old.

And I missed my window in my home office (complete with palm tree views). I missed my comfy desk. I missed my home "cafeteria." I missed not having to make small talk when I didn't have to.

After a while, I'd forgotten why I needed that office space in the first place.

So I moved back home.

And this time, I went all out. I brought in more candles, soothing lights, pictures and "homey" stuff. Because I could have a real office AND still be a real person AND have a real business.

I learned how to set better boundaries -- work time, neighbor favors ("Since you work at home, can you just watch my sick child for a few hours?") and out-of-office meetings (most are not necessary, unless I want them).

**I learned that it takes a lot of work -- too much work -- to try to appear as something other than exactly what I am.**

You don't take me or my business seriously? That's cool -- you don't have to. And you probably wouldn't have anyway, regardless of where the chair I sat myself down in every day was located.

**What's more....here is my full disclosure:** I am writing this on President's Day, a day off from school. One of my kids is home (the other is out at a friend's house all day) watching TV, running the dog ragged and eating Lord-knows-what junk food downstairs. And because I often work on holidays or weekends, and because making all of this work requires a village of sorts, a close friend of mine offered to keep her occupied, and has been playing online Battleship with her for the past three hours.

I have let my work phone go to voicemail while I write furiously to meet about four different deadlines. My dog is asleep in my comfy chair about six feet across from my desk.

***What have I learned?***

**I can't live in the closet.** My name is Allison and I work from home.

Depending on the day and time of day, I have kids, a dog and various neighbors running in, out and around my house. The sun is shining, the palm trees are blowing in the breeze outside and my orange wall gets orangier as the day wears on and the sun shines in brighter.

The reality of my life, into which my business is totally intermingled, is noisy, sometimes messy, not always under control, stranger-than-fiction, generally efficient but always improving in the efficiency department.

And my empire-building continues. From home. The way I like it. The way I want it. At least for NOW.