

Why a solid support network is key to avoiding overwhelm

Research has shown that entrepreneurship can be a lonely journey. Isolation was cited as one of the biggest entrepreneurial challenges in the Self-Employment Review carried out by Julie Deane, founder of the Cambridge Satchel Company. Although the majority of self-employed entrepreneurs reported that they would not go back into employment, 25% stated that they missed having colleagues.

Temps de lecture : minute

27 April 2023

Loneliness is closely linked to an individual's mental health and our ability to avoid overwhelm. Studies have shown that individuals feeling lonely over a long period of time have an increased risk of a range of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. This is why it is vital that entrepreneurs invest in their support network to prevent overwhelm taking hold.

In this article I am going to share why a support network is so important to avoiding overwhelm, and how you can cultivate yours.

The benefits of a support network

Social wellbeing can be improved by building a network of authentic, supportive and like-minded individuals both in your work environment and in your personal life. Our relationships with others can give us a sense of belonging, and help us to feel valued and good about ourselves. They can help us to reduce stress and worry through the opportunity to share

problems and seek support, preventing overwhelm.

Two (or more) heads are often better than one when aiming to create big results. Bringing together a diverse group of individuals to collaborate on a common goal can increase the success of a project through the act of sharing expertise. As well as helping you to achieve more, collaboration can make problem-solving easier and can open up new opportunities.

Preventing overwhelm through a support network

As an entrepreneur, it's normal to occasionally feel overwhelmed, uncomfortable and unbalanced. Loneliness quickly compounds these feelings, presenting themselves as anxiety, worry, anger and irritability which have a significant impact on the way you think, act and perform daily tasks.

As an entrepreneur, it's essential that you learn to use your support network to prevent overwhelm and resulting feelings. Next time you're feeling overwhelmed, consider trying one of these strategies with others to help bring you back into alignment:

1. Write it down and delegate where needed: Taking some time to write everything down can help release your mind from ruminating thoughts, emotions and tasks that need to be completed. Seeing everything in front of you (either on paper or digitally) can help you organise your thoughts, your personal to-do list and understand what could be delegated. Delegating keeps your workload manageable, reinforces relationships and builds new ones with others in your network. This could be offloading some work to an employee, outsourcing tasks such as marketing or looking at ways to automate through online systems.
2. Take a moment: Sometimes, you just need to take a moment to pause

and reset. Take this time to focus, move into a space where you can relax and practise one of your stress-busting activities. This could be with others if you find this more de-stressing. Consider going for a walk to get some fresh air, listening to a meditation exercise or just having a mindful cup of tea without stress-inducing distractions. Come back to your work once you're feeling refreshed.

3. Ask for help: If you're feeling overwhelmed, it can help to speak to someone who will understand what you're going through. It could be a mentor or business partner, a supportive friend who has been in a similar situation or someone completely removed from what you are experiencing. You might want someone to offer support and guidance, or just a listening ear. Pick up the phone and start a conversation with one of them.

Address negative social interactions too

A negative interaction can be presented by someone being intrusive and showing poor boundaries. They may be overly critical, argumentative, constantly negative and unable to accept responsibility, which can quickly intensify any overwhelming feelings you're already experiencing. If you find yourself in this situation and you must continue to deal with this person, then it's essential to protect your energy when negativity occurs and not allow their problems to become yours. Here are three ways to assist:

- Be aware of those that drain your energy: The term 'energy vampire' is often used for someone who leaves you feeling emotionally drained. Although not always obvious when you first meet them, trust your instinct with this. You may find yourself feeling irritable and negative, or even experience muscle tension and headaches when you're in their company.
- Set firm limits: It's sometimes the case that you can't detach completely from someone that may be having a negative effect on

your social wellbeing. For those that consume a lot of your time and energy, be clear on how much time you have available. At the end of that time period, politely disengage.

- Call it out: How often have you experienced unfavourable behaviour and chosen to either ignore it or complain about it to someone else? As both of these are natural reactions, it can be easy for this to become your 'go to' behaviour, but this can be counterproductive. Often negative behaviours are unintentional and without the intervention of someone else they can continue to go unnoticed. For example, someone making an insensitive comment might think they're making a joke. It's important to highlight what's really going on to educate and enact change. Calling out unfavourable behaviour when you see it can transform negative behaviours in a positive way.

It's helpful to get into the habit of checking in with yourself routinely each month. It's sometimes the case that individuals working under high pressure are so focused on achieving results that they neglect this vital practice, resulting in overwhelm. To combat those overwhelming feelings, engaging with your support network is vital.

This is an extract from *Don't Burn Out Stand Out* by Bethany Ainsley, a corporate wellbeing specialist, coach, entrepreneur and CEO of *OptiMe*.

