

What happens when the solo life isn't what you dreamed?

TAMMY TANSLEY - DECEMBER 19, 2017

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How will you know when it is time to pull up stumps from the solo life and return to more conventional employment? These six tips could help.

Usually, soloists come to solo life after a period of working in more conventional employment. And usually, it's because of a burning desire to something more, bigger, better, different than they could achieve in conventional employment.

Sometimes, it is about the perception of **flexibility** that solo life can bring – and how that might bring some magical balance to overall life. Sometimes, it is borne of an absolute need to do something to bring in the money.

And there have been volumes written on the benefits of being a **soloist** and running your own business. There is much that is really very good about being a soloist.

But the reality is that solo life really isn't for everyone.

And it's not a failure to give it a go and then decide that conventional employment is a better fit. The trick is to know if the discomfort/pain points are a natural part of owning your own business, and will get better with time, or a sign of something more fundamental.

If you're questioning if the solo life is the right life for you, here are some considerations that may help:

1. Not everyone is cut out to be a soloist.

When I was looking at starting my own business seven years ago, I sought out a heap of differing advice and opinions. One piece that has stuck with me was from a very successful soloist who said people not everyone is cut out to be a soloist, that it takes a particular type of personality and person.

2. Living with the ebbs and flows

What often unnerves soloists is the ebbs and flows of income that the solo life can bring, particularly when compared to a steady income received in more conventional employment.

The early days can mean a whole lot of expenditure which little (or no) income. Even when income does start to flow in, it can be patchy. Discovering that clients don't always pay immediately can be disheartening; to work your guts out, for little or no immediate reward. Not being aware of the terms that organisations pay by (sometimes up to 90 days after invoice) can also put the soloist on the back foot immediately as there can be no money coming in for months.

Being a soloist usually means having some tolerance for **risk**, to ride the peaks of demand and income, and plan for and tolerate (even enjoy) the quieter times.

3. Every day a job interview

One of my key learnings as a new soloist was that every day is like a job interview. It's not like in conventional employment where once you're employed, you get on and do your job. A soloist's performance is often scrutinised more closely.

And then there's the business development component of the soloists life. For those that have been in a non-sales type role in pre soloist life, having to sell yourself repeatedly can be challenging.

4. Being prepared for the solo life

Conventional employment has its downfalls of course– but also offers social interaction, being part of something bigger than just you – and being part of a team. Soloists often miss being part of the water cooler banter.

Once again, the key here is to understand your own personality. If the social element is important to you- how will you get that from your solo life? If being part of something meaningful gets you up in the morning – does your solo life provide that? And if not, can you still get it via other means?

Soloists often talk about being lonely and isolated. So being aware that this may happen and actively building in aspects to counteract it can help.

5. A phase in your career

For some, the soloist phase allows them to access experiences and a breadth of clients that they wouldn't otherwise have been able to do. Once those experiences have been gathered, it's time to return back to conventional employment to put those experiences to good use.

Not being beholden to this being forever can be a useful way to look at solo life.

6. It is just time to call it..

And finally – there are instances when it's right to just call time on the soloist life. Perhaps the business is not making sufficient income, despite trying different approaches. Perhaps the effort/cash ratio just doesn't stack up. Perhaps it's achieved what it needs to achieve and it's time to do something else. Perhaps the impact on your mental or physical health is such that it is time to consider if there is another way to make a living. Or perhaps, the joy has just gone and you're pretty sure it won't be coming back.

Calling time on a solo life can feel like a failure. But it's really not. Almost always the experiences you've gained through solo life will be put to good use in the next phase of business/employment/life. And always they will come with learning and growth that is almost impossible to gain in a more conventional employment setting. And probably most importantly, you will have given it a go.

It is better to have tried than to wonder your whole life.



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This can mean anything from getting the **people basics right**, to the **solving of a systemic or difficult people or team problem**, to the **introduction of complex organisational and cultural changes**. Why do I do this? Because I know that the bit that makes work unpleasant usually is when people interactions start to go wrong. I love working with clients to help them resolve issues or put in place approaches so that the issues don't arise in the first place, rather than for them to spend hours lying awake at night trying to work out how to move an issue (or person) forward.

There are lots of consultants out there; so how will you know if I am the right person to work with you and your business? Clients have described me as part confidante, part strategist, part tactician. Clients say that they have a sense of relief that things are being dealt with, and that they are no longer alone in trying to deal with an issue (particularly complex or long standing issues). They say that it is not just the quality of the advice but the depth of the advice. That they feel that they have someone on their side. In answer to the question - what do you do?

I work with either individual clients (usually via a coaching relationship) or organisations either at the team or organisational level. Sometimes I am working with a CEO on people strategy, a team on high performance and coaching individual employees, all in the same organisation. I can work in organisations for a discrete period of time or a specific project. Other times, it is an ongoing and varied relationship that evolves as the organisation evolves. I work as a **human resources, culture & change** and **industrial relations consultancy** for businesses in **finance, manufacturing, resources, oil and gas, government, retail, services and not for profit sectors** - both in Western Australia and nationally.

These include both smaller 100-500 employee organisations and large global businesses. I am also the author of *Do What You Say You'll Do* (a book for new leaders the top-1000 employing their leadership styles). Check out the website here: www.dowhatyousay.com.au and Enterprise Agreements : Made Easy (a book on how to easily negotiate an enterprise agreement that meets the needs of all parties). Check out the website here: www.easmadeeasy.com.au

To find out more about the person behind the business, take a look at my [Flying Solo Spotlight profile](#).