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AI / BUSINESS GROWTH / EBOOK & PLANNING WORKSHEETS

Focus, Boundaries & Sustainable Creative Work — Planning Workbook

A practical, non-clinical workbook for UK SME owners, managers, employees and independent creators to define workable outputs, protect attention with flexible boundaries, notice work patterns privately and raise workload, support and role-clarity issues without scoring or surveillance.



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Planning Workbook

Ebook & planning worksheets

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Use this workbook in a way that suits you

Creative work often involves open-ended tasks, changing requests and competing channels. This workbook helps you make a practical plan for attention, boundaries and workload conversations. It is designed for UK small-business owners, managers, employees and independent creators.

It is **general, non-clinical education**. It is not therapy, diagnosis, treatment, a personal exercise or diet plan, or a way to assess anyone's fitness for work. Nothing here promises that a routine will fix a difficult project, improve health or produce a particular creative result.

The pages are invitations, not requirements. Use a notebook, a private digital file or the writing space provided. You do not need to meditate, describe personal feelings, record a score, or share your notes with an employer, manager, client, colleague or AI tool. If any optional attention practice feels unhelpful or makes you feel worse, stop and choose a practical alternative such as changing the environment, taking a break, walking where that is comfortable, single-tasking, or talking with someone you trust. The NHS describes mindfulness as moment-by-moment attention, while also noting that it is not right for everyone and can make some people feel worse. 1

A useful distinction: personal routines can help you organise a workday. They do not remove an employer's responsibility to address unreasonable workload, poor role clarity, lack of support or other work-design problems.

Part 1: Start with the work, not with a productivity promise

1. Define the piece of work that needs room

A creative task can feel endless when the brief, decision-maker or next move is unclear. Before choosing a focus method, name the work in plain terms. This makes it easier to see whether the problem is attention, an unresolved decision, missing information, insufficient time, or too much work for the available capacity.

Use a **workable next output**, not a sweeping ambition. Examples include:

- a first draft of the client homepage section;
- three rough concepts for a campaign review;
- a list of decisions needed before a build can start;
- a ten-minute handover note for the next shift; or
- a short outline to test with a colleague.

A workable output is allowed to be unfinished. It gives you something concrete to begin, pause and hand over.

Quick framing prompt

Prompt	Your notes
What am I trying to move forward?	_____
What would count as a useful next output, rather than a finished project?	_____
What is known already?	_____
What decision, information or person is missing?	_____
What is within my control today?	_____

When the task is not workable yet

Do not try to solve an unclear brief with a longer focus session. Ask for the missing decision, agree a smaller scope, choose a holding task, or make the uncertainty visible. A simple message might be:

“To move this forward, I need a decision on . Until then I can complete , but I cannot responsibly confirm .”

This is a boundary around work, not a judgement about anyone's effort.

2. Check capacity before choosing a routine

There are days when a focus plan is useful, and days when the more honest plan is to reduce, defer, delegate or escalate. Caring responsibilities, disability, illness, shift work, client emergencies, limited control over a workspace and competing deadlines all affect what is possible. A small plan is not a failed version of a larger one.

Ask these three questions before committing to a block of work:

1. **Is this work possible in the time and conditions available?**
2. **What could be reduced, moved, shared or clarified?**
3. **Who needs to know if the current demand cannot be met safely or to the expected standard?**

If the answer points to workload or role problems, record that as a work issue. The HSE Management Standards identify six areas of work design: demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. They are a more useful starting point for a work conversation than asking a person to become more resilient. [2](#)

Capacity check

- ☐ The output is small enough to begin.
 - ☐ I know the most useful first step.
 - ☐ I have the information, access and authority I need.
 - ☐ I know what I will pause, defer or decline while I do this.
 - ☐ If the demand is not workable, I will raise it with: _____.
-

Part 2: Protect attention with flexible conditions

3. Choose a focus arrangement you can actually use

There is no universal ideal duration for concentrated work. Instead, choose a period that fits the task, the setting and your current responsibilities, then review whether it was useful. It might be a short protected start before calls, one contained task between service requests, or a longer period when the team has agreed fewer interruptions.

Start by making the first minutes easier:

1. **Name one task.** Put the next action where you can see it.
2. **Decide what counts as an interruption.** For example: a client escalation, an on-call message, a colleague needing an agreed response, or a safety issue.
3. **Make one environmental change.** Close unrelated tabs, move the phone away if that is practical, put materials within reach, or use a visual indicator agreed by the team.
4. **Choose an end point.** This can be a draft, a decision list, a sketch, a set of notes or a handover—not necessarily completion.
5. **Leave a re-entry note.** Before pausing, write the next visible action so you can return without reconstructing everything.

This is not a test of willpower. It is a small piece of work design that reduces avoidable choices while you are trying to do one thing.

Accessible and low-control alternatives

A quiet, dedicated desk, headphones or a device-free room may not be available or comfortable for everyone. Try the smallest adjustment that is within your control:

- Work from a single printed page, a pinned task card or one open document.
- Use captions, a screen reader, a larger display setting, a quieter location, an assistive device or an agreed communication channel where these help you work.
- If you share a room, work site or home, agree a short visible signal or a time when non-urgent messages can wait.
- If you work shifts, at a client site or in a public-facing role, use a brief task reset between duties rather than trying to protect a long block.

- If you cannot control noise, lighting or interruptions, ask what adjustment or rota change would make the work more realistic rather than treating the setting as a personal failing.

4. Use boundaries that other people can understand

A boundary works best when it says what will happen, how urgent matters will be handled, and when you will next be available. It does not need to be a lengthy explanation of your personal circumstances.

Situation	Plain-language boundary	A workable alternative
Messages interrupt a task	"I am working on ____ until ____. Please use ____ for anything urgent."	Check messages at a stated point or ask a colleague to cover urgent triage.
A request arrives without a brief	"I can start when I have ____. Which outcome and deadline should I work to?"	Offer a smaller discovery step first.
The workload exceeds the week	"I can complete A and B this week. Which should move, be reduced or be reassigned?"	Ask the decision-maker to prioritise rather than silently extending hours.
A client expects instant replies	"I will reply by ____. For a service-critical issue, please use ____."	Set a named escalation route and a realistic response window.
Feedback keeps expanding a task	"This change affects the agreed scope. Shall we trade it for ____, extend the deadline, or approve extra resource?"	Capture the change in writing before work continues.

Boundary-building worksheet

The work I need to protect:

The people affected:

The decision or response I can make:

What is genuinely urgent and how will it reach me?

What can wait, and until when?

Words I am comfortable using:

Part 3: Optional ways to pause, reset or restart

5. A practical response to feeling stuck

“Stuck” is a work signal, not a diagnosis. It may mean the task is vague, the standard is too high for a first pass, feedback is missing, the setting is disruptive, or the workload needs to change. Begin with the work question before looking inward.

The four-step restart

- 1. **State the observable problem.** “I have not chosen a headline,” “I need approval,” or “I have five competing requests.” Avoid turning it into a label about yourself.
- 2. **Sort the problem.** Is it a decision, information, scope, access, interruption, skill, time, or relationship issue?
- 3. **Choose one response.** Draft the rough first version, ask the question, create a decision list, move to a lower-stakes task, or request a change to the plan.
- 4. **Set a review point.** Decide when you will look again and who needs an update.

What I can observe	What kind of work issue might this be?	A next response I can try
I keep reopening the brief.	The outcome is unclear.	Ask for one decision or write two options for review.
I am polishing one part repeatedly.	The finishing standard or approval route is unclear.	Define “good enough for review” and send it.
I cannot start because there are too many tasks.	Priorities or capacity need clarification.	Ask the owner to rank, reduce or reassign.
I am repeatedly interrupted.	Communication norms or cover are missing.	Propose a channel, status signal or cover arrangement.

What I can observe	What kind of work issue might this be?	A next response I can try
I have no suitable place or tool.	An access or environment change is needed.	Request equipment, a quieter slot or a different format.

An optional private attention pause

If it appeals to you, take a brief pause and notice one neutral detail in the immediate environment: a sound, the pressure of your feet on the floor, a colour in the room, or the sensation of walking from one place to another. Then return to one concrete next action. This is optional general education, not a treatment technique.

Other options are equally valid: look out of a window, change position or gently stretch if that feels comfortable, get a glass of water, use a screen break, make a paper list, or speak to a trusted person. You can stop any practice at once.

Keep private notes private. This workbook does not ask anyone to submit reflections, sensations, moods or “focus scores”. Do not turn these pages into a staff survey, performance measure, attendance record or AI prompt. If an employer is considering collecting health-related information, the ICO says it must be no more than is needed for a stated purpose and should be collected about as few workers as possible. [5](#)

Part 4: Plan sustainable patterns without scoring yourself

6. Notice patterns for planning, not for measuring health

You may find it useful to notice which task types, settings and communication patterns make work easier or harder. This is a private planning exercise, not a validated measure of energy, mental health or productivity. Do not score yourself or assume a pattern has a medical explanation.

For one or two weeks, make short factual notes only if they are useful. Examples:

- “Editing was easier before the shared inbox opened.”
- “I needed a clearer decision before starting the proposal.”
- “The site was noisy after lunch; a written task list helped.”

- “The rota left no time for handover; I need to raise this.”

The point is not to optimise every hour. It is to see practical changes you can test and issues that need a team or employer response.

Private work-pattern notes

Date / context	Work I tried to do	What helped or got in the way?	Change to test, request or escalate
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Build a lighter week, with a backup plan

A sustainable plan leaves room for routine work, interruptions and days with lower capacity. Instead of a fixed rhythm, try choosing a few **planning anchors**:

- one important task to start rather than finish;
- one communication boundary or expectation to make clear;
- one practical change to the environment or workflow;
- one conversation about scope, support or priority where needed; and
- one contingency if the original plan cannot happen.

Weekly planning page

This week’s useful outcome:

First small action:

What I will make visible to others:

A boundary or communication expectation:

A practical support or adjustment I will use or request:

If the week changes, I will:

What I will not treat as a personal failure:

Part 5: Make work design part of the plan

8. What managers and employers need to change

Personal routines are not a substitute for managing work-related stress. HSE says employers have a legal duty to protect workers from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it. Its Management Standards frame the work around demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. [2](#)

For a small business, this does not require a programme of employee wellbeing scores. It requires a regular, practical look at how work is organised, listening to workers and acting on what is within the organisation's control. Acas advises employers and workers to identify stress risks, agree steps to reduce them, make changes and review the plan. [4](#)

A team or employer work-design check

Use this in project planning, a team meeting or a risk-assessment process. Discuss work arrangements and evidence from the work itself—not private journal entries, mood ratings or health details.

Work-design area	Questions to discuss	A practical action or owner
Demands	Is the volume, deadline, work pattern or environment workable? What should stop, move or be reduced?	_____
Control	Where can people choose the order, method, location or timing of work? Where is a decision needed?	_____
Support	Are tools, training, cover, budget and management support available?	_____

Work-design area	Questions to discuss	A practical action or owner
Relationships	Are communication routes respectful and clear? Is conflict or unacceptable behaviour being addressed?	_____
Role	Does each person know the outcome, authority, handovers and competing priorities?	_____
Change	What is changing, when will people hear about it, and how can they raise practical impacts?	_____

Good practice for a manager

- Invite a confidential, work-focused conversation; do not require someone to disclose a diagnosis or personal story.
- Ask what aspect of the work is difficult: volume, priority, hours, equipment, control, support, conflict, role or change.
- Agree an action, owner and review date in ordinary project or risk-management records.
- Include staff who work remotely, part time, shifts, at client sites or through agencies in appropriate work-design conversations.
- Seek proper HR, occupational-health or specialist advice where a workplace adjustment or formal process needs it. This workbook is not a substitute for those processes.

A worker can choose how much personal information to share. Keep any work conversation focused on the work issue and the practical change or support being considered.

9. Illustrative SME examples

These examples are fictional and illustrative. They are not results, case studies or promises.

Example: a two-person design studio

The studio owner notices that both people answer every client message immediately, even while preparing proposals. Rather than asking each person to improve their concentration, they agree a client response expectation, nominate one person for daily urgent triage and add a decision point to every

new brief. One designer uses a private paper re-entry note between calls; the other prefers a short walk around the building. Their shared action is a clearer service boundary, not a requirement to use the same routine.

Example: a small charity team with varied hours

A project lead has volunteers, part-time staff and a colleague with caring responsibilities. A long “deep work” session would exclude most of the team. At the weekly planning meeting, they list the three decisions blocking the project, define two short handovers and move a non-essential reporting task. The lead asks which communication channel is suitable for non-urgent updates. The team records the workload change and reviews it the following week.

Part 6: Bring it together

10. Your focus, boundaries and work–design action plan

Use this final page to choose a few practical actions. You can complete it alone, then take only the work-related requests into a team or manager conversation if that is useful.

A. One piece of work to make workable

Outcome or next output:

First small action:

What I need before I can progress:

B. One condition to protect attention

I will try:

I will tell the following people, if needed:

Urgent matters will be handled by:

C. One boundary or scope decision

The boundary:

Words I will use:

What I will offer instead, if appropriate:

D. One work–design issue to raise

This concerns: ☐ demands ☐ control ☐ support ☐ relationships ☐ role ☐ change

What I can observe from the work:

The change, decision or support I will request:

Who owns the next step and by when:

E. A kind, realistic fallback

If capacity, access or circumstances change, my smaller plan is:

The person or route I can use for work support is:

When to get further support

This workbook is not a substitute for professional support. If difficult thoughts, low mood, anxiety, sleep problems or day-to-day functioning remain difficult or get worse, speak to a GP or an appropriate local service. If the concern is connected to work, you can also use the routes available in your organisation, such as a manager, HR, worker representative, trade union representative or employee assistance service. HSE lists manager, trade-union or worker representatives, HR and a worker assistance programme or counselling service as possible routes where available. [10](#)

For urgent mental-health help, use the route for the nation you are in:

- **England:** NHS says to call **111** and select the mental-health option, or ask for an urgent GP appointment. If someone's life is at risk or they cannot keep themselves or someone else safe, call **999** or go to A&E. [6](#)
- **Scotland:** contact a GP practice when open; otherwise phone **NHS 24 on 111** and choose the mental-health option. For immediate risk, phone **999** or go to A&E. [7](#)
- **Wales:** call **NHS 111** and select **option 2** for urgent mental-health support. [8](#)

- **Northern Ireland:** contact a GP, GP out-of-hours service or local mental-health crisis team.
Lifeline: **0808 808 8000** is confidential, free and open 24 hours a day; in immediate danger call **999**. [9](#)
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