

THINKING OF JOINING A COWORKING SPACE?

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October 6, 2022

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All you've even wanted to know about coworking



If you're tired of working from home, you might have considered joining a coworking space. Perhaps you've even thought about setting up one, especially if you don't have one close by.

In this blog, I'm interviewing my good friend Shelley Cox, founder of [Workspace Barossa](#). I was actually the very first member at Workspace when it opened in July 2019, soon after I started copywriting full time. It seemed like a great way to make connections and remove the distractions of working from home.

I've divided my chat with Shelley into two parts. The first part is for someone thinking about joining an existing coworking space. And in the second part, Shelley shares her experience of launching a coworking space in the Barossa.

So, Shelley, how does co working work?

Coworking takes the cost of running offices, meeting rooms, facilities like kitchens, bathrooms and break-out spaces and divides the cost among the members. We manage the space and provide the facilities, and the people who use the coworking space bring in their work. It's a secure space that people can come and go from. It's a coworking community of people working together, but separately.

What are the benefits of coworking?

When I left winemaking and was working as a winemaking consultant from home, it was quite distracting and lonely. It was also hard organising to meet clients. It gets expensive going for breakfast and coffees all the time. And cafes aren't exactly a professional work area.

With a coworking space, you get a professional, comfortable space to have strategy meetings and conversations without the distractions of home. It's great for consultants, freelancers, and even small businesses that need an office space away from their usual place of work. And being in a different space can also generate new ideas and stimulate innovation.

Who can join a coworking space?

Everybody. Thanks to COVID, people now know that agile businesses, with excellent communication facilities, and high trust teams can work from anywhere. So, it's suitable for corporate, small businesses, and medium businesses. Some of our members are global businesses working with people on the other side of the world. It doesn't matter where or when they're working, they're productive and doing the work. And it's not just about work. We've even had people who have joined Workspace Barossa to have some dedicated creative writing time. So as long as it's legal, I don't care what you do. It's a professional working space, but there's no specific type of person or business we target. You don't even have to bring in a computer. Maybe you just want to write or even read a magazine. It's a flexible space for you to use in a way that suits you.

Is joining a coworking space a tax deduction?

Yes. Just as an office would be.

Can I work if I have a team or employees?

Yes. We've got a couple of options. You might start with an ad hoc booking for a desk or book a room for a meeting. We also have a workshop space which is great for planning and strategy days. Another option is a corporate flexi team membership for up to 4 people. You can be here at the same time or you can come and go as you please. We also have offices that 2-4 people can share.

Do I have to use the space every day?

No. It's worked out a bit like a gym membership. We take the cost of running the business over a month and divide it up between the different memberships. There are definitely levels to suit everybody, from a flexi day pass to an independent office.

When can I use a coworking space? Do I need to have set hours?

Members with an office or permanent desk get 24/7 access, while the flexi space is available from 7am till 6pm. The meeting spaces are available until 9pm, and on weekends, which provides a lot of flexibility. We also provide catering, which has made Workspace a popular venue for lots of local events and launches. People have even used the space to film a movie.

Can I invite clients or guests to my coworking space?

Obviously, this is different for every space. But when you book a meeting room, you get an access code to the space and a Wi-Fi code. It's all done via our software system. And if your client or guest wants to stay and work after the meeting, they can book a flexi day pass. As a member, you need to be responsible for your own guests and your visitors. That means meeting them at the front door on time and then escorting them out after the meeting.

What if I have a meeting?

If you don't have an office and you've got a meeting, you can book a room online. There's a range of spaces, including small meeting rooms and open lounge space. The workshop space holds up to 12 people with a large screen TV and whiteboards. You just hop online, make a booking and pay, or if you're a member, it goes on the invoice for the next month.

What if I want an office?

We currently have a waiting list for offices, but occupancy changes as people's business needs change. An office in a coworking space is a great way to work out what you need and whether an office is right for your business. The notice periods are minimal, which is super flexible.



Do I need to be quiet when I'm in a coworking space?

I think the key is being respectful at all times. Conversations will happen. I explain this to people when they first visit the space. It's about being aware when your conversation might disturb others and needs to be taken to a meeting room or the breakout space. Obviously, if it's Friday afternoon and nobody's there, it's fine to keep talking. But if it's the middle of the day, there's people around us working, we need to respect them. That's a core value of a coworking space.

What facilities do you provide?

We try to make it as easy as possible for people just to bring their work in and start working. So we include Wi-Fi, printing, bathrooms and a kitchen with tea and coffee. There's a range of desk and lounge spaces for people on a flexible membership, and the permanent desks and offices are all set up with desks, chairs, etc.

Can I use a coworking space with kids?

Again, I think this comes back to respect and being mindful of others. Some kids are quiet and some are noisy. We don't want to tell people how to work, and we want to provide flexibility because we understand that sometimes people need to bring their kids with them.

Is joining a coworking space better than renting an office?

It depends on what you want as a business owner. If you just want to turn up, have a space, do some work and leave, then perhaps a rented office is fine, especially if you're an established business. But if you want to have a supportive network of people around and the opportunity for collaborating and networking, then coworking is fantastic.

We've really focused on building a community and giving our members ownership of the space. Sure, that might mean you need to unpack the dishwasher, open the door for someone or collect a parcel. But the positives sure outweigh the negatives.

How is coworking good for networking?

This is something we talk to people about when they first visit. Obviously, you want to work out the best way to meet other members without disturbing them. Sometimes, it's just a chat in the kitchen or while eating lunch in the break-out space. But we also provide opportunities for networking once a month, like morning teas or afternoon drinks. We survey members regularly and this was something that came up. But we wanted to make sure people knew they didn't have to attend.

Over the last 3 years, we've had lots of collaborations happen pretty organically because our members share the same core values.

We're also really careful about inducting new members so they understand that one of our core values is valuing the expertise of other members. Joining a coworking space doesn't give you a license to pick everybody's brains for an hour every day. We want members to engage professionally and appreciate the expertise of other members.

So Shelley, you've shared some thoughts on using a coworking space. But what about running it? What's it like? As I mentioned above, you opened in July 2019, so most time you've been open, COVID has been a factor.

Is it hard to run a coworking space?

Like most new businesses, it's tough because you want to offer everything and be everything to everyone. Fortunately, we realised early on that we didn't have to provide everything. For example, we don't need to run training and workshops. Instead, we can tap into our community and give them opportunities to facilitate events that also help them grow their businesses. Being methodical and setting up efficient processes from the start has also made a big difference.

We spent a lot of time researching the best platform to use to sign-up members and communicate with them. It also sends invoices and allows them to book. And having keyless entry that even people coming for a day can use has cut down on administration.

And is running a coworking space profitable?

It can be. But you need to look at what is driving you to start a coworking space. Obviously, you want it to be profitable, but what's most important? Creating a space to further your career, bringing people together or creating opportunities for them to be successful? Also, you need to be really clear on what you can be responsible for and what you can realistically provide. For example, we knew from the start that we didn't want to provide a front-desk or concierge because the cost benefit wasn't there.

We spent months researching and testing the right system. It had to be sustainable and something that could grow with the business. Members check availability of rooms, book and pay invoices. The software also has a helpdesk function so we can quickly respond to issues like the Wi-Fi not working or toilets not flushing. We've focused on making the coworking space self-sustaining, with some help from the community. As I said before, there's an expectation people will keep the place clean and help to look after it.

What makes workspace Barossa special?

Well, for most of the time we've been open, COVID has been a factor. That made things hard. But having a really clear vision from the start of what people could use the space for helped attract the right people. We've got the right mix of people that have the same values as us. In the end, a good coworking space is more than just a physical office. It's a living ecosystem, something that's living and breathing every day. Our members reflect where we live and what's important to us as a community. The mix of people that have joined is what makes it unique and works best for us.



Workspace Barossa's motto – Do Good Things