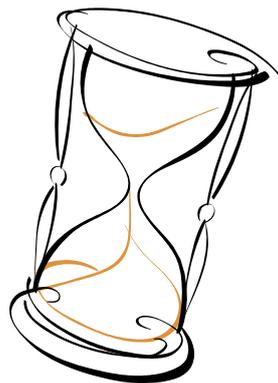# Time Management Tips

For

Busy Business Owners

Small business owners will always find themselves strapped for time because the primary responsibility for the success of that business is on their shoulders. The buck stops with you! Successful business owners understand that if they want to stay on top of things and keep their business running smoothly, and at the same time progress their business, then proper time management is essential.

Whether you have an established business or are just starting out on your own, you will find yourself extremely busy most of the time. When was the last time you spent a whole weekend not having any thoughts about what needs doing for your business? Are evenings relaxing with your family and friends a distant memory? If you follow the simple steps below, you will stay on top of things and even get to have free time during evenings and weekends.

Set Priorities and learn to Prioritise

Identify the things that will benefit your business the most and enable maximum profitability. After all, you need the income from your profits. When you have identified the tasks that need to be done, make them a priority and complete them before anything else. Often, not managing to efficiently organise just a few of the everyday tasks that matter the most can make the difference between a successful business and one that is failing fast. Concentrate on the important things and forget about the frippery. Write your To-Do list today and stick to it.

Perfection isn't always needed or is it Possible

You can spend a lot of time trying to get something exactly right and in the process waste time. Often it is more important to just to get something done, don't waste time aiming for perfection, especially when it's not really needed. Unless of course you are a brain surgeon! You know what doesn't need to be perfect, so take a bit of pressure off yourself.

Delegate

Many small business owners think that they have to do it all, it's their business so they should know how to do everything, especially where major tasks and responsibilities are concerned, but that is not the case. If you have reliable staff members and a full calendar, then delegate some of those tasks. You don't have to be Jack of all, and end up being Master of none, but it is important that you choose reliable and responsible employees who are suited to the task in hand.

Take Regular Breaks

Tests show that the human brain can only concentrate on something for a certain amount of time. You do need to recharge your batteries during the day. Don't skip lunch, give yourself a break and your time will be better spent in the afternoon. If you don't take a lunch break you will be flagging by 3 o'clock. I know from experience that this is one of the most difficult things to do, but it does make a difference. Set an alarm to signal lunch time and stop what you are doing to make sure you benefit from it.

Create Systems and Processes

In most businesses there are tasks that have to be done every day and are easier to manage once you have recognised systems and processes in place. Schedule time for team meetings where you can work on streamlining your business processes. Make sure that you have a settled process for following up on new clients and staying in touch with old ones. Write up a Process & Procedures manual and make sure that any staff members know about them. If another member of staff who works on a certain task, then has a suggestion for streamlining the task further, listen to them, try it out and edit your manual.

Outsourcing

Small organisations, especially Sole Traders will not have the same kind of skills base as larger ones. Some tasks only need to be done every now and then. Identify those tasks and if they require specialised skills, try outsourcing them. I bet you're thinking, well as a Virtual Assistant I would suggest outsourcing, wouldn't I. But it does make sense. As a freelance administrator/PA I have experience, and can get a piece of work completed far quicker than someone who has never worked in admin before can.

Keep on top of correspondence, and ignore the bo'ing of email

Make sure that incoming snail mail is handled straight away, open it, action it and file it. However when it comes to emails, stay on top of things by scheduling time in the morning and again later in the afternoon to process them. The constant email notification 'bo'ing' is far too distracting, so turn it off. Reply to emails sent and send your own emails in your allotted scheduled time only. Set up filters to make sure that you are not distracted by an interesting article or newsletter arrival. You can lose an hour or more a day by opening a newsletter and clicking on a link, which then takes you to another article which is also interesting. Do you get where I going here? I've done it myself so many times. Now though by keeping this down to twice a day reduces the time that I need to spend online and away from my core activity.

Get Organised

That sounds so obvious doesn't it? But piles of paperwork mounting up on your desk or on the floor of your van is going to drain your time away, especially when you have to find something in seconds. Use lever arch files and have a filing system. It may take time to set it up but in the long term if you file it away in the correct place and know where it is, the time wasted by having to search for it is going to be diminished. The same applies to your electronic documents. Think before you name and save, then you won't have to waste time thinking about where you saved a document. If you use logical file and folder names you will find documents you need instantly.

Get the tools you need

If you expect your staff to work effectively and efficiently, you'll need to provide them with the right tools to do the job. You can't work efficiently if you don't have the correct tools to do the job.

This does not mean you have to rush out to buy the latest techie gizmo if you don't really need it. However, it does mean you shouldn't be wasting hours to do a job, when an investment in technology would mean you'd be able to be far more productive.

It's usually false economy trying to make do with outdated technology. If you're not sure about whether to invest in tools, software, training or staff, do a quick calculation of how much time it will save you and compare this with how much it will cost.

PA your Day

Use a diary. Either electronic or paper variety, that choice is dependent on your personal preference. Before you leave the office or your desk at night, schedule your next day's activities. Remember to block out enough free time to eat and take a break. If you have a regular meeting each week or month or a family commitment, write in all of these dates in one sitting. This way you will never forget and you won't double book yourself. You also might like to colour code these regular meetings, then they are instantly recognisable.

Maximise your Time

People work better at different times of the day. Know when you're at your best and schedule high-priority tasks during that time. For example, if you're a morning person and wake up raring to go, but feel sluggish by the afternoon, work on the most important and most difficult things in the morning. Save the easier tasks for later in the day, such as checking emails or organising your desk.

Create a Productive Working Environment

Schedule 10 minutes at the end of each day in which you straighten up your workspace. Organise your desk, physical order of the items around you leaves you with one less distraction from work. Even a simple thing like knowing where your pens are will help. If your part of your working day involves being in car or van, make sure that everything that needs to be organised in it for the next working day is in order.

Learn to say NO

As a business owner it feels totally unnatural to say no to anything. When someone asks you to do something that you really don't have time to do, say so, politely, but firmly. And don't allow yourself to feel guilty about it. Taking on too much can lead to poor performance, stress, and low morale.

Stop Procrastinating

Procrastination occurs when you put off tasks that you should be focusing on right now. When you procrastinate, you feel guilty that you haven't started; you come to dread doing the task; and, eventually, everything catches up with you when you fail to complete the work on time. If you dread doing a task which causes you to procrastinate, then think about outsourcing it or delegate it to a colleague. You may even find that they really enjoy doing it.

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