

How to be Productive During August Doldrums?

08/08/05

Finding that things are slowing down, as everyone heads out of town, takes long weekends, or is otherwise not ready to deal with decision making until after Labor Day? I hear from lots of folks that the month of August is slow. And get the question, "What can I do to keep my business moving ahead, when everyone else seems to be taking a pause?"

Here are four things you can do, to make August productive: 1. Take a break yourself. 2. Plant seeds. 3. Review the first half of the year and plan for the end of the year. 4. Get ready for 2006.

Thinking you might want to take a break yourself? Good idea! Everyone needs a break, and if you haven't had one, between now and Labor Day may be the time. The closer we get to Labor Day, the more we seem to realize how fleeting the summer can be, and the more likely we, as business owners and decision makers are, to get out of the office for a well deserved break. It helps us to come back refreshed and ready to go to work. After a break, we seem to have better ideas, our intuitive self is more plugged in, and our energy level is higher – all good reasons to take off.

If you've already had your summer break, then think about planting some seeds. Many of us spend the late summer trying to close deals, to get a jump on the fall. And that can get frustrating,

as decision makers are out of town, people are leaving the office early or coming in late, and delays mount up. Instead, find out when your top prospects expect to make a decision, log it into your Contact Management System, and move on to new opportunities.

The summer is a good time for networking and introductions to new accounts. It seems to me that it in the summer it takes less effort to do introductions and break through to new account prospects. You may find suspects are open to receiving information, as they look for ideas for their upcoming fall and winter projects. Because it's summer, and the weather is good, more people are out and about, making them more accessible. Networking contacts and new prospects may be ready to meet up for breakfast or lunch, for a brief chat, as they look for an excuse to get out of the office.

Try direct mailing information to a list of new prospects. A lot of companies stop mailing at this time of the year, on the assumption that people won't go through their mail if they are on vacation. Make the mailing look personal, and follow up with a phone call – you may get through. Target your mail to arrive midweek – and stick to midweek for follow up phone calls. That's the time you are most likely to find people in the office. Get a head start on the

post-Labor Day rush for new business opportunities.

Made all the networking and prospect calls you want to make, and still have time on your hands? Pull out your records for the first half of the year, and evaluate how you've done, vs. your plan. Don't have a plan? Now is the time to draft one up. Assuming you do have a plan, compare actual to forecast, on both the income and expense side.

Determine what you have to do for the rest of the year, in order to hit your goals for the full 12 months. Break your rest-of-the-year targets down into four months: September through December. From a sales point of view, plan November and December as $\frac{1}{2}$ months, or $\frac{3}{4}$ months, given that the holidays, from Thanksgiving on, tend to be real disruptions to getting business concluded. Be ready to push your targets to closure as soon as Labor Day rolls around.

From an expense point of view, start year-end tax planning, by asking your accountant for a review now. Plan out what you will be paying in year end bonuses. If you think the business will be making a substantial profit, consider any long term projects you may want to get off the ground. If you think you will come up short, look for opportunities to cut costs now, in



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order to turn profits around in the fourth quarter.

All ready for the rest of this year? Then, take a little time out to think about 2006. What do you really want to accomplish next year? Take out a piece of paper and jot down some notes. Take an afternoon off to think about what you want the business, and your life, to be like next year. What would have to change, for that to come true? How could you make the business easier to run, more profitable, more sale-able? What would you like to change about the business, and how would that happen? Do a little day dreaming now. Visualize 2006, and give some thought as to how that would come about. This is what you can work towards, in the fourth quarter of this year.

Looking for a good book? Try You're in Charge – Now What? The 8 Point Plan, by Thomas Neff & James Citrin. Or, take a look at Be Happy at Work; 100 Women Who Love Their Jobs, and Why, by Joanne Gordon. And if you need a work of fiction, you could try Stephen Frey's The Insider, or Fictions of Business: Insights on Management from Great Literature by Robert Brawer.

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