

Allowing Employees to Do What They Were Hired to Do

10/30/06

How do I tell my boss that I need support to free me up, so I can be more productive and do more of what I should be doing? I'm doing everything from answering phones to running errands, and not enough of what I was hired to do. I know I could contribute more, but there aren't enough hours in the day, and I'm starting to get burned out by the distractions.

Our question comes from a VP in marketing & sales in a privately held services firm. While good at sales, she ends up functioning as office manager because there are so many details to be handled. She says that she spends much of her time putting out fires and catching everything that is slipping through the cracks.

I hear variations of this question from lots of employees, and business owners as well. Very often a bookkeeper is brought in, and then asked to answer the phones while on duty. Or, a production manager has to take care of credits, returns, billing and invoicing, and customer complaints. Or, as in the case of our sales person, insuring the phones get answered, and the customer's paperwork is in order, ends up dragging that person away from what he or she does best – finding new business and getting repeat orders. In small business, multi-tasking is part of the environment. It's just the way it is, for most small businesses. It can be challenging to figure out

who should be doing what, who to hire next, and how to best distribute a workload made up of lots of different tasks.

Let's look at this question from several points. One part of the solution is figuring out what you do, and what keeps you from doing what you should be doing. Defining what tasks you, and others, should keep, and which you should let go of, or delegate, will help you to define who you next need to hire. Building a job description, based on your list of tasks to delegate, will help you search for, and hire the next employee. Building a payoff ratio – what is gained by each person focusing more on what they're good at – will help quantify the value of hiring the next employee. Let's get to work.

We often tend to be proactive, volunteering for activities that will help the company make progress. As time goes on, the list of duties and tasks keeps expanding. Then, one day, we look up and realize we're doing all kinds of things that get in the way of what we wanted to get done. Getting conscious about what we do during the day is a start to figuring out how to get more productive and more focused.

Carry a notepad with you, for one week, and make a list of all of the things you do. You'll probably be amazed at how much you actually get done. Many people

are surprised as how many of the tasks on the list are outside their core area of responsibility. In any case, once you have a complete list of the things you do, you can start to work with the list.

Using your list of tasks for the week, next to each task, put a "k" for "keep", or a "d" for delegate. Focus on keeping those activities that represent the best use of your talents and skills. Delegate those tasks that someone else could do easier, faster, better or at lower cost. Think: should I be doing the task? If a task is not a good use of your skills and talents, mark it with "d". If it is a good use of your skills and talents, mark it with "k" for keep. Remember to focus on talent, skill and cost, not on what you do or don't like doing – although often we are best at what we love doing. Even if you don't know who you would delegate it to, still put a "d" for delegate.

Now go back through the list. Focus on those tasks marked with a "d" for delegate. Add the reasons for delegating: "easier", "better", "faster", lower "cost". For example, someone might be able to do something faster because they do similar things now. If you're out of the office a lot, it would be easier for someone who is in the office to handle internal items, from ordering supplies, to keeping track of timesheets, to handling customer questions. "Cost" may be a factor, especially with routine items. And, once you

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start asking what people are good at, you may find someone more qualified to do some of the things you're now doing.

Now that you have a list of tasks to keep, and tasks to delegate, you can also use that list to define holes in the organization. Think of who you would delegate items to. If no one comes to mind, put the item on a list called, "need to hire". As this list grows, over time, try to fill jobs with people who can do this list of tasks. You might ask others in the organization for their list of tasks to delegate, which would further help you define your next hire.

Now it's time to build a payoff ratio. If you want to delegate tasks to someone, if you think you need to hire another person, you need to make a financial case. Here are some questions to ask, and answer:

- What will I accomplish if I am freed up to focus on my core set of tasks?
- What are those extra accomplishments worth to the organization?
- How does that worth compare to the cost of having another person on board.

Think in terms of multiples. If you want to hire another person, you need to have a way to bring in, or to save, three to four times that person's cost.

In the case of today's reader, the goal is to bring in an office manager. What will that person

cost, including salary, benefits and any bonus or profit sharing payout. Multiply that total cost by at least 3, better if you multiply by 4. That is what you will need to bring in, in additional new profit, to justify the cost of hiring another person to free you up. Any boss would be crazy to turn you down, if you could show that by spending \$1 on additional support, they would make \$3 - \$4 in profit.

Where am I going to get that kind of profit? Good question, and if you can't answer it, don't expect your boss to jump at your request to hire another person. Here are some suggestions for a payoff formula:

- bring in additional income and profit by devoting more quality time to sales
- protect and expand existing customer revenue, through better customer service or development of new products
- cut down on overtime and / or temporary staff cost
- identify services that are currently vended out that you can replace at a lower cost by handling them internally, or changing the way your acquire those services
- save on bank charges, or the cost of money by having additional support managing it
- improve cash flow by having additional support in customer service or accounts receivables collections

- lower product or other buying costs by focusing on vendor management and negotiations and improved buying practices

I hope you're starting to get the idea – get creative. Find a way to make the financial case for that new hire. Show how a new hire will allow you to make more of a contribution to the organization by freeing you up to do what you do well.

Finally, you want to sit with your boss, and talk about what it will take to grow the organization, from it's current size, to twice the size. Talk about the need to add personnel, skill, and profits. Show your boss that you understand the bottom line, and are ready to make a significant bottom line contribution. That's the way to get a boss' attention.

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