

## Managing Time Before Burning Out

01/29/07

Do you have any recommendations on improving time management? I'm a small business owner, with a lot on my plate, lots of good ideas, some things that need to be fixed, - and not enough time to do it all. At the end of the week I have to face a messed up desk, and I'm not really sure if I got done what I needed to get done. If it keeps going like this, I'm going to burn out.

Time management is a critical success skill for business owners. Time management is made up of several parts – task lists, sticking with priorities, delegation and deletion, and regular clean-up, to name a few. Building skill in time management is something any business owner can practice, at any stage in the business. Results of building better skills are likely to include more satisfaction with the business, less personal stress, and higher levels of income and profit. Let's get started.

Begin with a task list. Do you have a list? Your best bet is to keep a task list on the computer, either as part of a CRM / calendar system, or even as a simple table in a word or excel document. Referring to your task list several times / day will help you stay on point, use small blocks of time efficiently, and plan out blocks of time going forward. If you need an example, let me know and I'll send you one.

How do you form your task list? You can start with a running log of requests for your time – phone calls, letters, proposals, customer follow up, research, employee issues – all the stuff you might need to handle as an owner. Then you need to prioritize the list.

Strike out anything that doesn't belong on the list. That's right – just because something made it onto the list, doesn't mean it belongs there. Deciding what has to go, is the first step to making progress. Keep asking yourself: what really happens to the company 5 years from now, if this item doesn't get done? If the answer is, "not much", then you need to consider letting go of the task. Learn to be critical, protective, and concentrate on where you want to go.

Use the process of weeding the list to focus yourself, and your company, on high payoff activities. Highlight top priority items—things that are most likely to contribute to the company's progress and future. This may only represent 20% of the list, when you start out. By the time you're done, your list should be made up of mostly top priority items.

Now that you're down to a more core list, you can organize and work with it. Put dates on each item – by when should each item be completed? You can put assignments on the list – who

should be working on each item? Then, by checking off what's done, as you work through the week, you can keep a handle on progress and sticking points.

If, like most of us, you have a short list of people to delegate to, think about how to solve the problem. In addition to employees and partners, are there vendors, other businesses, sub contractors, who could take care of tasks on your list. Delegate and find out who's up to doing the job – give them more and get rid of the ones who don't perform reliably. Share the load and find out who you can trust.

Finally, develop habits that will help you cut through chaotic times. Every day, spend 10 minutes cleaning up your desk, checking through your task list. When cleaning up your desk, only touch each folder or piece of paper once – dispose of it, log it onto your task list and file it, hand it off to someone else. Don't let it keep taking up workspace. Lower the level of clutter, and you're likely to feel a lot more in control.

At the end of the week, set up for the upcoming week. Put your task list where you'll see it first thing Monday morning. Make it a habit to come in 10-30 minutes early, on Monday, to go through your task list and review your priorities, before the day and the week heat up.



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By getting ready for the upcoming week, you're more likely to end up with the results you want, and the payoff you expected to achieve. You'll know, and be in control of the choices you, and your staff are making, about what you work on. You'll be able to see what's getting done, and where to put your attention. Great outcome for a small amount of effort!

Looking for a good book? Try *Time Management: Proven Techniques For Making The Most Of Your Valuable Time*, by Marshall J. Cook.

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