

Time Management Vital for Small-businesses Productivity

Do you own a small business and find you have no free time? Have you recently found yourself too busy to have lunch with a friend? Does your family start dinner without you?

While these are not perfect predictors (life happens), being “too busy” may be a symptom that your business time management needs some adjustments. Depending on how often it happens, it might even suggest that you have lost control of your life.

“Today’s society seems to expect any serious business owner to suffer from overload,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “When we meet someone, whether a network acquaintance or a new friend, it isn’t long before we are talking about how busy we are.”

“It seems to be a badge of honor if our response indicates that there is not time available for relaxation,” continued (Insert last name).

We often give such a response for ourselves as well as others. To the outside world, it suggests how well things are going. Plus being busy often is considered a virtue. To you, the owner, it is reassuring that you are maximizing your efforts.

Today, though, more and more people are beginning to question these statements. And more and more studies and anecdotal information point out that being busy does not correlate to being successful. Some researchers might argue that the exact opposite is occurring.

So what can the business owner do to take back control of his or her schedule?

The first requirement is to realize what is happening. Often the “busy-ness” is self-inflicted. You just can’t say no.

A related issue is the owner’s inability or unwillingness to delegate. How often do you tell yourself that doing a task yourself is easier than getting someone else to do it to your expectations? We want to feel indispensable, plus it feeds our need to be busy.

Another reason we stay busy is based on how we prioritize. Instead of taking on the big tasks, we avoid them by filling our lives with small chores.

The connected world also provides myriad ways to stay busy. And this issue will just continue to grow.

So what can you do to get back some free time?

“It starts with priorities,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “What are yours? There are many ways to approach priority setting. Pick a method that works for you and do it every day.”

“It helps to go back at times and check some of the red flags mentioned as to why we feel the need to be busy and what we are doing to help us feel that way,” continued Muske.

For the electronic overload, pick out the best information sources, then use an online aggregator to pull all of that information into one location, and, finally, allot one time during the day when you go through the information.

Similarly, opening every email the minute it comes into your computer is not necessary. Set aside two or three times a day to look at them. And when you read them, handle them right away if at all possible.

This idea may sound just too simple, but it works for some people: Use small notepads to jot down your daily to-do list. It limits how many things you can list. At day’s end, you maybe can check them all off.

Control of your time starts with yourself. Winning the game of the longest to-do list isn’t the goal. Taking some time away (and leaving your mobile devices at home) is a much better choice for you and your business.

For help with your time management efforts, check with your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske.

Other resources include <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE, also can be valuable resources.

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