

Business Success Begins With Regular Routines

Any business owner will tell you that starting and running a business requires thinking ahead while also staying on top of lots of details.

“Innovation and vision are great,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “But what really allows a business to succeed is paying attention to details.”

Keeping track of everything that needs to be done and then making sure each item gets taken care of on time is crucial. This need to focus on the details is what encourages business owners to be list makers. These lists include to-do lists and check-off lists to make sure nothing is forgotten.

Such lists need to become the routines or standard operating procedures that a business owner should put in place. This is true whether the business has no employees and is run by the owner alone or it employs large numbers of employees in numerous branch locations.

Several lists of activities are necessary for a smooth-running operation, including lists of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and yearly tasks.

“One of the most helpful and important lists focuses on weekly tasks,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “This period of time is long enough to see the beginning of trends but short enough that you can make changes before things become serious.”

Some of the things you need on your weekly list are:

- Monitoring your key projected outcomes - This probably will include sales, hours worked, customer contacts (especially repeat customers) and fiscal outcomes.
- Taking time for conversation - You probably are doing a daily walk-through your operation, but on a weekly basis, at a minimum, you need to check with your key workers to see how things are going. It is also the time, because you just have completed your review of your outcomes, to offer thanks for goals that are met. In your walk, you also need to venture into the parts of the operation that you may not go into every day.
- Engaging in proactive conversations with others in areas where a negative trend has been noted - You just might want to put this conversation on your watch list, but it also can be a discussion of ways to turn things around.
- Trying something new - This may sound strange, but make a habit of undertaking something different each week. It may be a new sales technique, a new manufacturing process, a new procedure or even a new way to maintain your work/personal life balance.
- Looking forward - Just as you watch the trends in your business, have a regular routine of checking out the trends in your industry, your community and the economy as a whole. Ponder, take notes, reflect on past notes, and just think about where you have been, where you want to go and how you will get there.

“There are more things you might add to this list or things you might replace,” says Muske. “The idea is building and maintaining routines or habits that help ensure things get done and that keep you looking forward.”

Great ideas are wonderful, but successful entrepreneurs often acknowledge the fact that “it’s in the details” when talking about their achievements.

For more help, 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. Another online resource is www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

Joining groups such as your local chamber of commerce can be helpful. 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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For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.