

# Success Secret: Better Time Management

By Jan Yager, Ph.D.

reprinted from *Bottom Line/Business*, January 1, 2001

**M**aking more productive use of your time is a major ingredient of business success in today's hectic world. My workplace survey of 234 people and the many seminars I conduct on time management have shown me that the top problem for businesspeople is not procrastination, as is often thought, but trying to do too much at once. This is especially true of high-energy, go-getter entrepreneurs, who like to control everything themselves.

## WHAT AND WHEN TO DELEGATE

**A clear sign that you have trouble managing your time:** You work extremely long hours and you still don't get enough of the important stuff done -- activities that generate sales, income and new customers or clients -- while servicing your current commitments.

**Solution:** Make a list of the things that only you can do or should be doing for the success of your business. Be sure to include at least 30 minutes to an hour each day for thinking, planning and creating the next day's to-do list. Then try to delegate everything else.

## AFFORDABLE HUMAN RESOURCES

For a business that can't afford a large full-time staff, there are wonderful alternatives for getting the help needed to keep key people productive. *Examples...*

Commissioned sales help that can boost revenues without increasing overhead.

Freelance or part-time contract workers who can come in to complete specific projects, such as producing a catalog or a brochure.

Paid or unpaid interns -- students or family members whose tasks and responsibilities can be suited to their age and skills.

Various outsourcing services that can be used on an as-needed basis.

**Key:** Stay focused on how your business works... the flow of activity... seasonal spurts, such as holiday sales... the lead time needed to prepare for an annual trade show -- including back-up help to manage the office while the show is in progress.

Whenever possible, avoid getting bogged down with unnecessary detail work that takes you away from keeping the business on its course toward its top objectives.

## MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME

Once you have succeeded in minimizing the amount of time you waste, you can start practicing productivity techniques. I have formulated seven principles of creative time management that can help *anyone* become more efficient...

**1. Be active -- not just reactive.** Often, business owners become overwhelmed because they are dealing with everyone else's problems. Work piles up and nothing gets finished.

**Solution:** Set the agenda for your day's activities. Try to head off or prevent problems by being prepared and planning ahead. Delegate distracting urgent matters to someone else.

**2. Set goals.** Setting goals keeps your mind clear about where you are trying to go with your business. It's never too late to develop daily, weekly, yearly or longer-range goals to guide you in managing your time. Without specific goals, people can flounder, get bogged down and are unable to achieve key objectives.

**3. Prioritize actions.** Prioritizing, or creating specific goals for each day or hour and then accomplishing each task before going on to the next, will help you overcome the tendency to do too many things at once.

**Caution:** Prioritizing may be stressful because it means putting some people or things ahead of others. But remember Vilfredo Pareto's famous 80/20 principle – 20% of what you do will give you 80% of your results. It's essential to identify that all-important 20%.

**4. Keep your focus.** Once you have set your goals and prioritized the tasks to achieve those goals, stay on track with a project until it has been completed. Write down a task or project with a terse description, such as *reorganize files... write proposal... call vendor.*

**5. Set realistic deadlines.** Creating strict but feasible deadlines for yourself keeps you focused on your goals.

**Caution:** Most people underestimate the time it will take to complete a job, especially for projects that involve research, writing, creative thinking or working with others.

**6. D-O I-T N-O-W** ....Here is an easy way to remember this simple rule...

**D = Divide and conquer** what you have to do. Break big tasks into smaller pieces and give each piece a realistic deadline.

**O = Organize your materials...** and plan how you will tackle the job.

**I = Ignore interruptions.** Come in early or stay after hours to assure needed quiet time to complete important projects.

**T = Take the time** to learn how to do certain essential things yourself instead of always having to wait for a secretary, consultant or some other helper to do it for you.

**N = Now, don't procrastinate.** Put the task you have been dreading the most at the top of your to-do list.

**O = Opportunity is knocking.** Take advantage of opportunities.

**W = Watch out for time gobblers** such as the Internet, E-mail, watching TV, talking on the phone. But do make time to have lunch, exercise and take vacations to recharge your batteries and reconnect with your family and friends.

**7. Balance your life.** While becoming more productive is certainly a worthy goal, having a full, productive and balanced personal life is equally important.

These guidelines are not just for business. You can apply these same creative time-management principles to leisure activities and personal relationships.