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Business Management

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Get More Focus and Get More Business

Stephanie Ward

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As a business owner, you've got a lot going on. Sometimes it's hard to know what your top priorities are and where to put your focus. And since there are only so many minutes in a day, you need to find the best way to utilize your time so you can grow your business.

Figuring out what your priorities are, and then focusing on them, will require an investment of time. I know, you don't have any extra time and that's the whole problem. The fact is, nothing will change until you decide to do things differently. If you keep going the way you have been, you'll stay lost about what is most important to your business and therefore won't be able to focus your efforts.

You see, you do have a choice about how you spend your time. You can make the decision to use your time to think about what is most important for your business (prioritizing) and then choose to devote your time (focus) on those things.

Stephen Covey made a good point when he said, "The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

There's no time like the present, ready to get started? Why not stop what you are doing right now and identify your business goals. Focus on goals that are connected to the profitability of your business, goals that are close to the money.

Talking through your thoughts is a great way to get begin. You can do this by writing down your thought process, talking out loud to yourself, or better yet talking it through with someone you trust. Once you've written down all of your business goals, prioritize your list with the intention of selecting the top three goals.

Next to each of your top three goals, write down the things you are doing to reach every goal and how much time you are spending actually focused on those things. Sounds simple, I know, and sometimes we make things more complicated than they need to be.

Keep this list somewhere you can see it. Better yet, memorize it. Start a new habit of stopping to think before you begin doing something and ask yourself this question: "Will this action move me closer to my business goals?"

Here's another way to think about priorities and focus from Tony Robbins, "It's not what's happening to you now or what has happened in your past that determines who you become. Rather, it's your decisions about what to focus on, what things mean to you, and what you're going to do about them that will determine your ultimate destiny."

The point is this, the more time you invest in analyzing what the most important activities are for your business and then planning how you will focus on them - the more profitable your business will be!

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Business Goal Setting and Then Following Through

Joy Gendusa

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Your business can't go according to plan if you have no plan.

What do you want to achieve this year? More new customers per week? Higher average order amounts? Better customer service ratings? No matter what it is you are shooting for, goal setting is one of the most important things that you will do in the New Year. I've got a few tips to help you get there.

1. Keep it Challenging but Realistic.

Any goal that you set for your company should be challenging but don't over do it. For example, if you had an average order amount of \$700 last year, you wouldn't want to set your goal for this year at \$3000 per order. Unless you make drastic changes in how your company runs or what you are selling, that goal is just not realistic. You know best what you may be able to achieve in your particular industry, so be honest with yourself and set your goals accordingly.

2. Write All Your Goals Down.

You may say to yourself on January 1, "I want to get 20 more new customers per week this year." A few months later you will be saying "Did I say I wanted 20 or 30?" Or more realistically, you have forgotten that you even made that goal. If you have all of your goals written down you will be able to not only go back and check them, you will also be able to go down the list every few months and check to see how many of them you have completed.

3. Assess Your Current Situation.

To set goals you have to know where you are at right now. In 2003 I wanted to assess our customer service rating so we sent out a survey to all of our customers on which they could rate us in each department of our operation. That helped us establish our base. Now we send the survey to every customer after every order. This way we can keep track of how we are doing and if there is ever a hiccup we can fix it quickly. Don't assume anything. Always assess the current situation before setting a new goal.

It's Only Going to Hurt A Little...

Now, in financial goal setting for your business, one invariably comes to the question: "How do I decide on a budget when starting a marketing plan?"

This is obviously the first question that you have to answer in order to get started on your new campaign - and in order to reach the income goals you have set for yourself.

So how do you figure out what your budget should be? Here is an easy method to help you find a number that is going to work for you and your business. Some might say that it is a good rule of thumb, but I personally judge things on whether or not they work and get results. That's all.

Moving on... Start with the amount of income that your company generated last month and multiply it by .14 (or 14%). That means that if you had \$50,000 in Gross Income last month you should budget to spend \$7000 on marketing in the next month. Wait... I know, it sounds painful but it is just like a shot at the doctor. It might hurt for a minute (or in this case a month) but down the road you are going to be glad that you went through it. Putting that much toward the right marketing will bump up your income the next month and start you on a cycle of steady growth.

I know that some businesses run tighter than others and it is possible that you won't be comfortable with that amount in the beginning . Don't misunderstand me, any marketing is better than no marketing. Don't get discouraged if your budget is lower than 14%. But use 14% as the ideal to strive for because, for me as well as many other growing businesses, it has proven to give the best rate of growth possible. How do I know, you ask? My company has expanded 400% in the past 2 years. Now picture your business at 4 times its current size... There's that smile I was looking for!

The growth of your business is based on three factors; quality products, great customer service and the proper amount of marketing. If you know you have the first two taken care and you still aren't experiencing healthy growth then you need to take a serious look at your marketing budget.

So sharpen your pencils, start calculating and decide how rapidly you want your business to grow.

Please take a moment this week to sit down and decide on your goals for the New Year. Even if it is past the New Year and even well into the year, set your

goals for the rest of the year.

Everything is easier when you are working towards a goal. My goal is your success and I assume that is your goal as well.

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Joy Gendusa founded PostcardMania (www.PostcardMania.com) in 1998, her only assets a computer and a phone. By 2005 the company did over \$12 million in sales, employed over 100 people and made Inc. Magazine's prestigious Inc 500 List as one of the 500 fastest growing companies in the nation. She attributes her explosive growth to her ability to choose incredible staff and her innate marketing savvy.

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How to Avoid Giving Up on Goals

David Krueger MD

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Why do people give up on goals?

Goal setting, especially the proper tools to structure, is crucial for long-term achievement. The usual problem, however, is not setting goals but completing them.

While a vision involves creativity and foresight, goals require strategy and dedication.

An extensive study on goal setting by Marshall Goldsmith and Laurence Lyons helps us understand an essential component: Why people give up on goals. Six of the most important reasons people give up on goals;

- **Ownership.** Someone must “buy in” to their goals and take ownership. This shifts the ownership and initiative to an internal point of reference. Then effectiveness and mastery can result.
- **Time.** Goal setters tend to underestimate the time it will take to complete the task (an “optimism bias”), leading to giving up.
- **Difficulty.** The optimism bias equally applies to difficulty as well as time.
- **Distractions.** People tend to underestimate the distractions and competing goals.
- **Rewards.** Disappointment sets in when achievement of a goal doesn't translate into other goals or to the desired happiness.
- **Maintenance.** Maintaining changed behavior is difficult, and there is always the pull of the old and the fear of the new.

Create a map

A successful journey involves determining where you are now, deciding where you want to go, and figuring out how to get there. Creating a plan and plotting a course allows you to stay on track, recognize and avoid detours and

distractions, measure progress, and move effectively toward goals. Without a plan, you can't know where you are, and cannot strategize to get to where you want to go. If you don't know where you want to go (a goal), you can't figure out how to get there.

10 Steps to Ignite Success

The following steps will guide success when coupled with the blueprint of how to establish specific, attainable goals:

- Have your needs and values in sharp focus.
- Know what you do uniquely well.
- Assess specific strengths, passions, and weaknesses
- Establish SMART goals:
 - o Specific
 - o Measurable
 - o Achievable
 - o Relevant
 - o Time-Bound
- Determine 3 Key Initiatives to take for each goal (timetable: 1-2 weeks)
- Decide on the Next Best Action for each initiative (timetable: 2-3 days)
- Structure a strategy to reach and stretch each goal
- Increase tolerance of planned risk with associated fear
- Focus on specific results, action, and momentum regarding goals
- Continue assessment of disciplined activity with refinement of goals
- Endorse your progress

The time frame for each objective must be specified so that the sense of mastery can occur. A goal may have a several month timeframe. Each goal should have an initiative that can occur within the next several days, and each initiative should have a next best action, to begin within the next day or do.

Apply SMART Goals to a Personal Mission Statement

Five key questions apply SMART goals to a personal mission statement:

Who?

Who should accomplish the objective? In conjunction with others? Should certain aspects be delegated?

What?

What must happen focuses on specific outcomes within a particular time frame to achieve a goal. Each outcome should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound.

How?

How to accomplish the goal may be a co-created exploration and discussion of possible approaches and alternatives, but the choice of direction must come from you, because the outcome must belong to you. A commitment needs to result.

Why?

This exploration clarifies a pathway is and precisely determines the goal. If it is unclear or uncertain, the best intention would be a promise you never keep.

When?

The time frame for each objective must be specified so that the sense of mastery can occur. A goal may have a several month timeframe. Each goal should have an initiative that can occur within the next several days, and each initiative should have a next best action, to begin within the next day or do.

A Framework for Change

These principles of change are ones I use in Professional Coaching. Coaching fully inhabits the present moment, looking ahead to form visions and goals. In doing so, what arises in content and process become useful information to fashion progress. A story is generated in the present moment; a current story can be discerned from a new edition of an old story. It becomes evident in the process when someone is recycling an old story, manifesting limiting assumptions, or not fully pursuing success. For example, procrastination informs about readiness; resistance guides implementation strategy; fear announces desire; intention forms commitment to action.

The coaching frame is the same as what you can ask yourself: “What needs to be done to begin change that I am willing to do today?” “What will I do tomorrow to further my goals?” The coaching model has the end in mind from the beginning.

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Haven't Done a Business Plan?

Megan Tough

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A Business Plan is the essential document we are all meant to have - right? So why do so many of us not have one?

The principle behind having a business plan is to think strategically about how to grow our business, create new direction and organise our thoughts:

What am I going to do?

Why?

When does it all have to happen?

What resources will I need?

What could get in the way of success?

How can I minimise the chances of that happening?

The principal challenge with traditional business plans lies not in the subject matter or the content, but in their format.

The majority of business plans are static documents, comprised of lists and columns with actions and dates. There is a proportion of the population that like to manage their work in this way - and they thrive on using the traditional business plan format. But the reality is that most entrepreneurs are entrepreneurial (funny that!) - and most entrepreneurs hate using lists! Lists don't really reflect our way of thinking, creating or managing information.

We need a process that reflects the flexible and dynamic way we approach business. It is this ability that sets us apart from our larger, slower competitors.

The Project Management Approach.

The project management based approach to business planning represents information in a much more flexible way, using mind maps or dynamic lists.

Essentially your thinking is represented in small and large chunks, and grouped by area or 'project'.

Let me demonstrate with a genuine example. My whiteboard contains all of my current and planned activities split into 3 areas - this week, medium term and long term.

My overall aims and goals for the business are listed on the right side. These don't change much - but they are always there in front of me to keep me focused on what is important. The middle of the board contains my longer term projects (3 months or more), such as developing alliances and approaching magazines to write for articles. The left side contains the major activities to complete this week.

Every Monday I think about what activity needs to happen to progress my medium and long term goals. These go in the weekly side of the board. I also include any other things that need to happen during the week, refreshing each list as I need to. During the week - if new things come up - they go straight up into the appropriate area.

You can use mind maps in a similar way. Put your long term goals in the centre, your medium term goals along each arm, and the detailed activity as the final level. Then cross things off or add new 'arms' as things arise. You can group your activities by topic, immediacy or any other way that suits you.

The key difference with this method of managing your work is that

- a) It's always in front of you, not locked up in a drawer,
- b) it's easy to add and subtract from the plan as you go, and
- c) it's actually practical and fun to work with

You still need to think strategically, and be organised about your work. But you don't need to feel guilty about not having a "traditional business plan!

If you're not a 'list' person, give this method a try. I think you'll get a lot more out of it

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Megan Tough is director of complete potential, a leadership and HR consultancy based in Sydney, Australia. At complete potential we understand people - what engages them, what encourages them to perform, and what drives them away. With over 20 years experience working on HR issues in business, our job is to help you make the most of your investment in people. To learn more visit www.completepotential.com

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Who's Running Your Business?

Lorraine Pirihi

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Recently I took my son Trent to purchase more school uniform items. He's a growing (very fast) 13 year old, and it was time for more clothing. When the school pants no longer drag on the ground and the hem barely reaches his ankles you know it is time.

Anyhow we went to a school uniform shop nearby which we hadn't previously been to. Trent insisted we go there as they apparently stocked the longer sports shorts he wanted and the usual place we went to didn't have them.

Well what an experience it was. Firstly the shop was in a time warp. They had probably been there for decades and nothing internally had changed. You didn't know who the staff were, in fact when we finally found them they looked like they had been dragged out of bed to come to work. The only exception was the older lady who seemed to be the boss. The girls who were in their early 20's looked scruffy and were very unhelpful. They stood around watching the older lady work and only did something when she asked them to. They had no initiative whatsoever and you had to (or should I say I had to) tell them what to do.

The older lady later told me that the actual owner of the business, never listened to her suggestions to make improvements, in fact he hardly ever visited the store.

Actually it was interesting watching her in action. In her position she could have taken charge and taught those girls how to deal with the customers and let them use their initiative. Even though she was disgruntled about the owner, she could have changed her own situation. Because she appeared to be the only person who knew about the stock and styles that would suit, she was run off her feet with the customers. The least she could have done was to organise the girls so that one was at the counter handling the sales and returning stock to the shelves and the other one assisting her with the customers' needs.

The amount of money this business could have been making if it was run properly would be enormous.

There's a couple of interesting points that come out of this story...

1. The older lady although she was disgruntled with the situation, didn't take charge (and she certainly was in a position to do so) and unhappily continued to work there. More than likely she had been there for years and didn't have the skills or self-esteem to make her role better. How many people do you know who stick at their jobs because they fear they may not find another one or aren't prepared to get out of their comfort zones to improve themselves? Of course, the business owner should have invested in staff training etc. however if they don't and you want to improve, would you invest time, energy and money in becoming better? Because if you're not getting better, you're probably getting worse.

2. How many businesses are run by untrained staff while the business owner is too busy to notice what is happening inside their own business?

3. And why are many business owners in business? They will generally tell you they are in business to make money yet if you look at how many business are run, they may as well be in business to lose money.

And as a result of our lifechanging experience, there is no way we will ever set foot in that shop again! My son is only in Year 8 so that leaves another 4 years to go before he finishes high school. How many more times will I need to buy more school uniform items because he's a growing boy? A few more that's for sure.

And being a boy he's more than likely going to be more hard-wearing on his clothing than what my daughter was when she was at school.

By the way, we also had to buy him another pair of school shoes in the same shopping strip. The staff in that store were fantastic and guess where we'll definitely spend more of our money?

Have a great week

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Lorraine Pirihi is Australia's Personal Productivity Specialist and Leading Life Coach. Her business The Office Organiser specialises in showing small business owners and managers, how to get organised at work so they can have a life! Lorraine is also a dynamic speaker and has produced many products including "How to Survive and Thrive at Work!"

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Run Your Business Safely

Robert Neuberger

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Failure to follow corporate formalities may expose corporate officers, directors and shareholders to personal liability. Maintaining good records, including corporate minutes, on a timely basis goes a long way toward maintaining the limited liability benefit of a corporation.

If incorporating was your first step to a new and safe way to do business, compliance with the law is the easiest way to keep you safe from any liability associated with the way you manage your company.

There are many reasons to pay attention to the formalities associated with running a corporation: Business Corporation laws require that articles of incorporation and bylaws be filed. In addition, other events must be recorded in the company's record books.

Articles of incorporation and bylaws serve as a contract between the corporation and its shareholders, obligating the corporation to act in accordance with them.

Directors and officers owe the corporation and shareholders a fiduciary duty to use good faith, exercise due care, and act in the best interest of the corporation. Majority shareholders must act in good faith, in a manner not calculated to oppress the rights of minority shareholders.

Corporate formality must be respected and observed to preserve the integrity of the corporation; as well as to shield officers, directors, and shareholders or related businesses from personal liability.

Don't think that due to the fact that you could be the only person holding all the positions of a corporation you are safe from keeping your company in compliance. Small companies also have duties with State Agencies, providers and even customers.

Why Are Minutes So Important?

It's the law. There is nothing clearer than that. Minutes are legal records that serve to document actions and support business decisions, made by the principals of the business throughout the year. Minutes help you to separate your own affairs from the company's actions. It is the way to protect you from

liability.

During an IRS audit a privately held company may be required to produce the minutes of the company. If they do not, or can not give the minutes to the IRS agent, the problems stand as found. There is no negotiation with the IRS. State law requires corporations to prepare annual minutes and in many cases; failure to do so has contributed to piercing of the company veil resulting in exposure to the principals.

As mentioned, without current and complete minutes, corporate players could be held personally liable for the actions of the corporation.

Protect Yourself.

Your legal protection could be in jeopardy if a creditor successfully pierces the corporate veil due to the corporation's failure to keep minutes.

Good recordkeeping habits and paying attention to detail are necessary for any successful business. Now you know it.

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About the Author :

Robert Neuberger is founder and President of [Active Filings LLC](#) a company dedicated to provide business incorporation and formation services in the US.

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Great Business... Pity About the Boss

Lorraine Pirihi

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Many small business owners and managers will often say their personal assistant is invaluable to them yet they often treat them as if they're not.

Day after day, week after week the P.A. is in the office, slogging away making sure the work gets done. In many instances it is the P.A. that holds the business / department together.

Many of them are so conscientious they won't take time out and will stay at their desk until the work is done. Not only are they integral to the running of any business, their income and the way they are treated may not always reflect the importance of their role.

JENNY'S STORY

Jenny worked for her current employer for three years and thoroughly enjoyed her role as Personal Assistant to the General Manager. They had a great working relationship.

If she required the occasional afternoon or morning off to deal with personal matters, all she had to do was ask. Her boss praised her regularly for her contribution and rewarded her ... sometimes monetarily and other times with a dinner out for her and her partner or movie tickets when they achieved their sales targets.

Because of this attitude with her employer, she did her utmost best in her work and never thought twice about working overtime on the odd occasion. In fact she worked twice as hard because she was appreciated and had some flexibility in her working hours.

This is a totally different situation to Jenny's previous employer. Jenny had been working for another small business owner where her boss was a workaholic. Although he had a wife and family, his behaviour didn't reflect this. He was extremely disorganised, worked all hours of the day and night and couldn't understand why everyone else went home at 5.00 p.m.

Although she did her utmost best to organise him and get the work done on

time, he would always ask for tasks to be done just when she was getting ready to leave for the day.

On the many occasions when she worked back or took work home so that her boss would have what he wanted for the next morning, he never thanked her. He just assumed that's what she should do. He never considered her needs. She was a single parent and therefore had major responsibilities. She had a life too. Her boss on the other hand was fortunate to have a wife who didn't work and took care of their personal life...not that he noticed as he was always working.

Prior to Jenny being in this role, there had been three other people who had worked in her position, and each one had lasted less than 3 months.

Jenny had enough, she left after 6 months and found her current position. It wasn't the money that was her main issue. It was the flexibility and appreciation. Although her boss was pleasant enough, he just didn't understand that there is more to working with someone than just paying their wages.

LEARN HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR PEOPLE

As soon as you have people to manage, the most important skill you need to learn is how to look after them.

Every business owner or manager I have coached say their biggest challenge is the people that work for them.

There are many reasons for this including hiring the wrong people to begin with and the most common being the owner/manager themselves... they haven't developed the skills on being a masterful manager.

WHAT THE BOSS WANTS

1. Someone who can use their initiative, make decisions in their absence and carry out tasks without supervision.
2. A person they can trust and take many of the basic administrative duties from them so the boss can spend his/her time on more important tasks.
3. A person who can organise them (and in some cases be a mind-reader).
4. An assistant who is their right-hand person and can keep everything running

smoothly.

WHAT THE P.A. WANTS

1. A boss who they can communicate with.
2. A boss who understands that when they are given tasks to do, although they may have taken 2 minutes to discuss, could take the P.A. 2 days to complete with all the interruptions they have from others.
3. A boss who realises that the P.A. is a person who has to do many tasks as well as answering all the phone calls and often has many interruptions in their day which can cause them to get very behind with their work.
4. A boss who is appreciative of them and realises that the P.A. does have a life outside of work and needs to have time-out just like they do.
5. To be recognised on a regular basis that they are important. They also need to be remunerated for their valuable contribution and should have regular performance appraisals and be offered incentives.

THE FINAL WORD

When employing a personal assistant make sure they are the right fit. If you're looking for someone who can be extremely flexible in their hours and can come in early and stay late, then make sure that person is in the right personal situation to do that. Using our invaluable tool Hiring the Right People can save you time, money and stress before you go through the process.

Employing people is a skill in itself. Keeping them happy so that they will be an important part of your business is another story. That's why knowing how to plan and use your time effectively is a high priority. If you're too busy being busy, you will completely overlook the areas of your business which need your attention and will continue creating headaches for you as well as your people. This will affect productivity and your profits. Your people will do minimal work and may eventually leave and the time and energy it takes to replace and train new people will profoundly affect everyone.

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7 No Nonsense Principles for Corporate Directors

Robert Neuberger

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These 7 no nonsense principles for corporate directors were adapted from an article written by Hoffer Kaback in Directors & Boards Magazine.

By applying or avoiding these principles to your everyday decision-making, you can make the most of your company's prosperity.

1. The Davy Crockett principle.

Davy Crockett once said, "Be sure you're right and then go ahead." He always would say what he thought was right, fight hard for it, vote "no" when he disagreed, and resign if something was decided against your ethics and principles. This philosophy is highly applicable in today's business environment. If you always "do the right thing" you will always come out ahead, especially when trying to convince or persuade others of your desires and intentions. Crockett is also known for "picking his spots" and "saving his bullets." You should, too. Otherwise, you compromise your ability to effect change.

2. The Sam Rayburn principle.

Sam Rayburn, the late speaker of the House of Representatives, held the view that "To get along you have to go along." Carried too far, this becomes "I'll ignore your problems if you'll ignore mine." Remember your duty is to the business and its customers and not to your fellow directors. While there has to be give and take, you must strike a balance between too little flexibility and too much.

3. The Justice Rabinowitz principle.

Justice Rabinowitz once remarked "Never do anything you wouldn't be comfortable explaining to the Alaska Supreme Court." It's a useful rule, but all it does is avoid risk, it doesn't help you with the day-to-day decisions you have to make to serve as a corporate director.

4. The Always Trust Management principle.

"Always trust the executive director." This is a prescription for disaster. It's the error the United Way of America board made with its former president, William Aramony. The unwillingness to challenge management, when challenge is warranted, is a breach of your duties as a director.

5. The Never Trust Management principle.

This is the other extreme and is grossly unfair to your executive director and staff. Most executive directors are diligent, forthright, honest and hard-working. This attitude will make your tenure as a director unpleasant and ineffective, and can drive off competent staff.

6. The Healthy Skepticism principle .

This term comes from the attitude required of outside auditors engaged to perform audits or reviews of a business. Basically, it says that your executive director must earn your trust. It's not too far from what the law requires of a director, and it serves for all manner of board of director decisions, not merely risk management issues.

7. The Emanuel Lasker principle.

Grand Master chess player Emanuel Lasker believed in playing not necessarily the best move inherent in a chess position but the best practical move tailored to his opponent's style. Your response and performance as a corporate director to a given situation must be suited to the particulars of the situation. The right answer at one point in time may be the wrong answer at another. It is legitimate to resolve some questions differently at different times or in different situations.

Building a successful company requires dedication, commitment and specialized knowledge. Your decision to incorporate was a major step in the right direction. If you follow these principles, you will continue along that path.

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7 Sanity Saving Business Boundaries

Megan Tough

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The lack of strong boundaries is one of the chief causes of stress, overwork and overwhelm in the business environment.

Clearly set boundaries help other people to understand how you want to be treated. They are the rules, if you like, that apply when others deal with you and your business. Many of us aren't good at establishing boundaries, something that probably stems from way back in our childhoods.

As children we are often taught that other people's needs are more important than ours. That we should obey others without question. And we were rewarded for pleasing other people and sacrificing our own needs. Sometimes we do not set boundaries because we dislike confrontation or anger, or because we think we will hurt other peoples feelings. If this behaviour of putting ourselves last carries over into our adult lives, it's likely to stop us from telling other people what we want.

The good news is that setting boundaries is a learnable skill, and one that can make a huge positive difference to the quality of your life.

The first step is to identify which boundaries you need to set. These seven are suggested for easing the pressure on you in your business life:

1. Learn to say no.

Don't feel uncomfortable about saying no to an unreasonable request. If it is going to have a negative impact on you, or you don't really want to do something, then just say no. And don't feel as though you need to explain why. After all, we don't offer an explanation when we say yes.

2. Be clear about what you do and what you don't do.

If something is outside the bounds of your normal scope of work, then simply say so. It is easy to get caught up agreeing to do unusual things or one-offs that take up a lot of extra time. Your time is valuable and you want to spend it accordingly.

3. When it's OK for people to contact you.

If you get customers and suppliers calling you at all hours then you need to establish this boundary. You can take control in this situation by looking for a win-win outcome. For example, "I know that you would like to speak with me. Right now, I am spending time with my family. What time tomorrow can I call you back? I guarantee that you'll only need to say this once, and people will get the message very quickly.

4. Payment terms.

If people aren't respecting your payment terms you need to let them know that this is unacceptable. Be clear upfront about what your terms are (yes - actually advise new customers verbally), and consider using payment options that give you control. For example, the timing of credit card deductions and direct debits are controlled by you, rather than by the customer.

5. Working hours (Value your own time).

You are in control of your diary, not your customers. If you find yourself consistently working excessive hours, or longer than you want, then you are taking on more work than you can manage. Be honest about how long it will take you to complete the job. For example, "I can start working on this on Wednesday, which means it will be ready for you on Friday afternoon".

6. The way in which people can speak to you.

Some people use aggressive or abusive language to get what they want. You need to let them know that this isn't OK. For example, "I can see that you are upset. We do need to discuss this but I am not prepared to do so while you are angry. Let me call you tomorrow at a better time".

7. Pricing.

There are times when we are happy to provide a discount -to valued and regular customers. At other times we can just get talked into it before we realize what has happened. Be very clear in your own mind about the circumstances in which you are prepared to drop your prices, and those in which you are not. And just stick to your guns. You'll find that most people are just trying it on to see if it will work.

The bottom line in setting boundaries is asking for what we really want. There

is no need to defend, debate or over-explain your boundaries. If questioned, simply say something like “it's a business decision”. When faced with resistance, repeat your statement or request. Stay strong. If you give in, you are inviting people to ignore your needs.

Each of us has a right to set boundaries. . While others may not always get what they want in the short term, you will garner more respect from them and for yourself by standing up for your needs.

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Megan Tough is director of complete potential, a leadership and HR consultancy based in Sydney, Australia. At complete potential we understand people - what engages them, what encourages them to perform, and what drives them away. With over 20 years experience working on HR issues in business, our job is to help you make the most of your investment in people. To learn more visit www.completepotential.com

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Your Business Success Checklist

Megan Tough

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As a business coach, I spend a lot of time working with people who want to improve different aspects of their business. Many times these aspects are merely symptoms of a more fundamental, underlying issue.

If you want your business to truly shine, then there are some basic principles that, if not present, can lead to sub standard performance in other areas. And here they are:

1. Crystal clear purpose.

The most common reason companies run into trouble is losing sight of the customer and their needs. Having a crystal clear purpose helps keep the focus from becoming too internally fixated, instead articulating why the business exists from the customer's perspective. A clear and inspiring purpose will also give your employees a reason to be connected with their hearts, not just their minds.

2. Discipline.

Sometimes this is an unpopular topic, but it is critical. Discipline means having a sharp and constant focus on your objectives, whether they be growth, profits or customer objectives. Successful businesses build continual monitoring into their processes, constantly aware of the gap between where they are and where they should be.

3. Goals that compel action.

Most people are motivated to work for a cause of some sort. The business must continually paint a picture of what the future may hold. And it needs to be more compelling than 'surviving' or 'selling lots more'. Goals that challenge without being unrealistic, and that inspire people to go above and beyond, will reinforce a culture of innovation, effort and excitement.

4. Prepare for several futures.

Successful businesses are rarely taken by surprise. They spend time thinking

about "what if" scenarios, and planning their responses. It's a fact that most business owners don't think beyond the next quarter or six month period. This can lead to sticking with products and services for too long and failing to identify shifts in the market - making change and innovation almost impossible.

5. Leadership.

The leader's job is not only to inspire effort and provide direction. They also carry the task of meeting the psychological needs of their employees while they are at work. Leaders that are emotionally mature, energetic and future oriented are an absolute necessity, if the business is to thrive rather than plateau.

6. Excellence in everything.

Companies will not survive long today if they are "just average". What does it take to foster a culture of excellence? High standards, accountability, a willingness to learn and a continual focus on creating value for customers. If these things are in place, excellence becomes a by-product.

So how can you tell if your business lives these principles? See how you go at answering these questions:

How do you measure performance of the organization as a whole?

What is the purpose of your business?

What is it to "go beyond yourself" and how is that important to the business?

Can you articulate the differences between what you need personally and what the business needs?

Assuming most companies reach an early plateau, what do you think successful companies do to avoid that?

Far too many organizations are limited in their capacity to grow because of the skills, capabilities and attitudes of their people (including ourselves). How do you plan to address this potential problem in your business?

How can you be sure that your employees tell you everything you need to know?

So how did you go? Any room for improvement? Aim to instill and live these principles in your business, and you will have laid truly solid foundations. From there, the sky's the limit.

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