

## **ARE YOU WORKING HARD OR SMART?**

Average business people feel comfortable working about 2500 hours per year (50 hours per week for 50 weeks, allowing two weeks vacation). This number represents the total number of hours worked including all tasks. Yet, in a small business, most have difficulty “selling” 5 hours a day out of the 10 hours at work. The reason is a seemingly endless supply of non-”selling” distractions with which business people in large companies don't have to deal.

By the end of the day, you know you have been working hard, but you have no idea why you only worked on revenue generating items for three hours out of the ten you were there. This is a common problem faced by businesspeople in small businesses who are working hard but not smart.

The key to getting control of your day is to set clear priorities. Make a list of common activities in which you engage daily (including all the non revenue distractions) and prioritize that list according to importance (revenue generators and marketing your business will be at the top of this list).

After you have a good general priority list, you have a template for prioritizing your activities. Divide the tasks into four categories according to urgency and importance.

**Category One (Important & Urgent)** - In this category you should put tasks that are critical to your business, where time deadlines have passed or are imminent. These items are top priority. You should work almost exclusively on these items until this box is empty. Examples would be paying the rent, preparing for tomorrow's meeting, completing an order before time runs out, preparing a document you promised a customer for tomorrow's meeting, calling a customer who is threatening to fire you. This is the fire-fighting box. The more items in here, the more harried and stressed you will be, and the more your work will suffer. If you are running your business effectively, this box should be nearly empty.

**Category Two (Important But Not Urgent)** - In this category you should put tasks that are critical to your business where deadlines are not looming. These items are your second priority after completing category one. Most of your important matters should reside in this box. Your daily objective is to get items in this box complete before they reach a point where they belong in category one.

**Category Three (Urgent But Not Important)** - Here you put items that are screaming for attention, but are not critical to your business. Telephone calls from friends and family that are not bona fide emergencies should wait until you are home or until you have completely run out of items in the first two groups. Computer related projects that are not critical to your ability to do projects in category one and two (like organizing your word processor files) need to wait for a time when those two boxes are empty. These are discretionary tasks. They are distractions. Resist the urge to act on them until important matters are complete.

**Category Four (Not Urgent and Not Important)** - These are utter distractions and time wasters. They are allies in refining your procrastination skills and will destroy your productivity. They include things like reading newspapers and non legal periodicals, calling family and friends who haven't called you in a while, talking about college football with a friend or your partner for 40 minutes, going shopping for personal items. This is the money-sucking zone. Activities in this box need to be done on personal time and have no place cluttering up your day.

After you have completed your initial priority lists, you are ready to begin attacking your work. The tasks with top priority will be those in category one. Within that group, prioritize the tasks by which items have the greatest combination of importance and urgency. When you finish this group, begin working on category two, and so on.

At the beginning of each day, you should update the lists. Certain category one projects will be complete and thus

crossed off the list. New items will be added to your lists each day. This exercise might take 15 to 20 minutes each day, but it will improve your productivity by one to two hours.

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