

## TREATING YOUR BUSINESS LIKE A BUSINESS



**Rosie Spiegel**  
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If you are in business for yourself, the good news is that probably no one is breathing down your neck to produce. The bad news is that probably no one is breathing down your neck to produce. The responsibility for staying busy and productive falls on your shoulders. And if you are not getting regular massages, this can feel like a lot of pressure. Knowing the necessity of staying busy and knowing what the right steps are to take to keep your practice full are two critical elements to your success.

Busyness and success are defined differently for each of us as business owners. For some it might mean a couple of large contracts per year. For others, they are measured by the number of presentations you give, or the number of proposals you send out. Busyness and success can also be measured monetarily. As in, "I am so busy and so successful! My business netted over \$40,000 this month." As you build and maintain your business, figure out what you want your schedule to look like, particularly as it relates to realizing certain goals you want to achieve. How busy you are, in other words, should be balanced with what you want to accomplish. If you have decided to double your income and/or your client load in the next 6 months, your schedule would be impacted differently than if your goal were to cut back and spend more time with your family. If you can keep your finger on the pulse of your own business, how busy you are and which activities you choose to focus on will match what you want to accomplish.

The funnel is the container in which you manage your current list of clients, and prospective clients. It's the non-physical place where you go when you want to follow up with someone. Depending on the nature of your business, your funnel might also contain information on your associates, vendors, training opportunities, resources (such as books, CD's, on-line information, etc.) As a business owner, one of your primary roles is to keep your funnel full. A consultant without clients is like a dentist without patients. A networker without prospects is someone who may not be treating her business like a business. Doing what it takes to keep your funnel full should go at the top of your to-do list on a regular basis. As a business owner, if your funnel is not full, you have no one to blame, and must regard this as your own responsibility.

It is critical to the success of your enterprise that you know where to go to get the information you need. It is imperative that you have systems in place that enable you to get to this information efficiently and with a minimal amount of resistance on your part. This system can be high tech, like using a PDA or some on-line management system, to a paper tracking system for storing names, appointments, and other vital information. If you are trying to run a business without a good system, or systems, for storing and

retrieving this information, it is important that you make setting one up a priority ASAP. To illustrate this point, I will tell you a story about changing systems.

Up until about 8 years ago I relied on an out-dated accounting system that entailed using a paper ledger, where I entered all of my expenses and earnings. The categories ran across the top of a large tri-fold sheet. In order to enter data on the back side, I had to fold the paper back and justify it with the categories on the vertical line. In order to balance my bank statement, I photocopied all of the segments of the ledger sheets, taped the 8.5 x 11 copies together to recreated the full ledger, photocopied my bank statements, and put them all in an envelop, which was then sent to my bookkeeper. I then waited a week for her to send me back my statements. At that point I entered all of her plusses and minuses to bring my statements into balance. It seems funny now, but at the time it was a nightmarish process that took a few hours from start to finish. Also, since I found this process so unsavory (who wouldn't?) I procrastinated and was always behind in a vain attempt at keeping my accounting records current.

With technology, that same process which I dreaded then, *now takes me about 10 minutes*. There is no paper involved, no mailing, no waiting, no hassle, and most importantly no resistance. As an entrepreneur, it is obvious to me that creating this streamlined system revolutionized my business and dramatically changed how I manage my time, my finances, my records, and my bottom line. If my time is valued at \$250 per hour, this new system represented to me the potential of \$10,000 more in revenue per year.

How are your systems? Do they provide you with the optimum method for tracking and managing all aspects of your business? Are there areas that you dread, and thus avoid? If so, this will not only chip away at your productivity and profit, it is also dead weight that can negatively impact your feelings about yourself and your business. Maintaining a positive attitude toward as many aspects of your business as possible is another critical element in your success equation. You can literally not afford to have poor or lacking systems that weigh you down.

Two of my favorite business trainers offer excellent tips for maintaining productivity and satisfaction in running your enterprise. [John Maxwell](#), best-selling author of *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, suggests that we should each be able to define what high achievement looks like for ourselves. Since Maxwell is big on dreaming big, he says that if you can achieve your dream by yourself, it is too small of a dream. As business owners, we tend to think outside of the box more than people who choose a more traditional style of employment. I often refer to my entrepreneurial friends and myself as a group of happy over achievers. You may find it useful to take some time to get a clear image of what your big business dreams look like. Although a lengthier discussion of goal setting is beyond the scope of this essay, having high expectations of yourself can often propel you to greater productivity. I find this one particularly useful when it seems that things are not moving as fast as I would like them. This big dream propels me forward and keeps me in production mode.

Similarly, [Brian Tracy](#), one of the greatest business coaches of our time, describes in his *Psychology of Achievement* audio series the benefit of being a workaholic. This is an intriguing approach because that word can bring up a gamut of mixed reactions, many of which have a negative connotation. By choosing to put a positive frame around being a workaholic, and by also volunteering that balancing life and work and family and recreation are imperative, Tracy can get away with this unique spin. According to Tracy, by being the first one to work, the last one to leave, and the one who always does a little bit more rather than a little bit less, you can take your business to new heights by adjusting basic habits. Simple disciplines repeated over time can produce massive results. One extra call to a client or prospective client per day, spread over one year, allowing for vacation, can result in 210 extra calls. Can you imagine what that would do for your business over time? (Errors of judgment, even small ones, repeated over time, can have disastrous results as well!)

To make sure you really are treating your business like a business, you might consider these twelve traits of an entrepreneur.\* How would you rate yourself, on a scale of 1-10 in the following areas?

- **Persistence.** Staying on task with focus and energy. Being diligent and determined. Never finding excuses to quit.
- **Passion.** Having belief and excitement about the project and about your being the one to do it, with zeal and fervor. Being immune to any attacks from the outside that threaten your belief in yourself and what you are doing.
- **Commitment.** Putting that stake in the ground. Holding to your bottom line. Following through. Finishing what you start. Being unshakable in your belief in yourself and your enterprise.
- **Resilience.** The ability to bounce back from setbacks or distractions. Being able to see “opportunity in downturns.”
- **Patience.** Seeing the big picture, “tending the garden,” letting things emerge in their own time. Staying grounded and centered, especially when it seems things “should” be moving faster.
- **Creativity.** The capacity to generate possibilities. Being forward thinking, intuitive and seeing opportunities where others do not. Putting the pieces together in unique ways.
- **Courage.** You can live with uncertainty. Navigate through change. Moving in spite of fear. Being brave and willing to do what is necessary even if scary sometimes.
- **Flexibility.** The ability to “go with the flow.” Able to adjust to changing times and new information. Not fixed or rigid regarding a certain outcome.
- **Authority.** The ability to take charge, accept responsibility, take action. Be decisive. Be a reliable leader. Keep things moving even when others slow down.

For those of us who work for ourselves, we determined that we are more likely to achieve our dreams on this path, versus working for someone else’s dreams. By taking responsibility for our business, we are in a better position to take responsibility for our lives. Finding time for our families, having fun, staying healthy and fit, and nurturing our spirit are factored into that equation as well. It may be challenging at times, but nobody

said it would be easy. Many argue that the value in owning your own business stems from this self-imposed challenge. We are a unique breed and have more grit than most. This is what makes us consultants, networkers, and business owners. Marching to a different drummer puts us in a different parade, and leads us down a different path. Would you really have it any other way?



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\*Adapted with permission from Donna Johnson, certified coach and member of the International Coach Federation. Donna is the owner of Pathways Coaching.