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Managing Your Time: Creating Your Whole Life

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Consultants often find that running their own practices takes more time than their most pressing executive positions. Certainly they feel as if they are working most of the time, both as they build the business and as they enjoy their peak of success.

Time management and control of commitments becomes essential to the success of the business and to the success of the entrepreneur's whole life.

"Whole life?" "What whole life?"

The whole life that you need to create early on, or starting now, or you will be a burn-out, or lose your family, or your health, and then the stress gets worse and threatens the business, and you.

In order to control your time, certain fundamentals need to be in place:

1. You need to want to control it.

2. You need to want your inner self's identity to be more than your success at work.

3. You have to want and to create or participate in your personal life outside of your work-identity.

4. If your work and success is the pinnacle of your identity, read no further. Nothing else said here will matter.

If you have these fundamentals in place, there are tactics you can use. Begin them now:

1. ***Do the numbers***; you can't begin to manage your time if you don't know precisely how you are spending your time.

2. ***Begin tracking & tallying your time***. Every day, track the time spent on these categories (I did this for the first 20 years of my practice):

   a. Total time spent working (this does not include "e" below).

   b. Billable time for clients.

   c. Marketing and networking time: speaking, writing, going to networking events to meet prospects; prospecting; proposal writing, negotiating, etc. This is everything that goes into finding, closing and upselling a client.

   d. Administration: bookkeeping; insurance hassles; banking issues; directing your staff or assistant; cleaning the desk; filing; and so on.

   e. Even though you are sitting at your desk, do not count as total time: phone calls to your girlfriend, boyfriend, cousin; mother; staring at the wall; wandering aimlessly; blogging (unless it is part of marketing); online shopping/social networking/websurfing/video watching; instant messaging, throwing the iChing, downloading your music, watching television; planning your social life, etc.

   f. Tally the time every week and every month: Add up the total time, then each category time. Divide the total time by the category time to get a percentage. You may be surprised at how little you actually work on billable time for your clients. You may be surprised at how little you actually work.

3. ***Let's say you spent 50 total hours this week*** on Billable time + Marketing + Administration.

   § What percentage of the total was committed for each category?

   § Let's say you spent 15 hours on Administration (30%) and 15 hours on Billable time (30%) and 20 hours on Marketing (40%). Not bad.

   § (Is your score so good? Did you commit 70% of your time to client work and prospecting? Did you spend 50 hours working?)

4. ***Set these goals***:

a. Set actual total working hours to at least 40 hours per week, or whatever is appropriate to your work and life.

b. Get Administration to less than 10%. This may take an investment in time, but it will pay off over the years (later, get it to less than 5%). Do this by simplifying your processes, updating your email clients and data bases, learning to use software that saves time; hiring help if you can afford it; outsourcing web updates, transcriptions, etc.; consolidating all business expenses to a single credit card and having bills automatically paid to this credit card (preferably the one with airline miles).

c. Commit that all working hours not on billable time will be spent on marketing and networking, except for the 5-10% of unavoidable Administration.

d. Set aside 2-4 hours to focus on Administration, at the most appropriate time (Friday afternoons? End of week? End of month? When bills are due?) Turn off the phone as if you are in a meeting, and focus. The Administration will get done more quickly this way, and it will not haphazardly interfere with the flow of your work for clients and marketing.

5. ***Structure your working hours to suit your life***, and ***make a commitment*** to this structure:

a. If you are not a morning person, do your personal stuff (working out; thinking; communing with friends, sleeping, whatever) in the morning and train your clients that you will not answer the phone or email until 10:00 a.m. They'll learn to work around it if you don't make a scene, even the out-of-town clients.

b. If you are a morning person, structure your schedules around that, and be unavailable for late afternoon and evening meetings.

c. Do not fly red-eyes unless you like them better.

6. ***Live up to these commitments***. Try them out. Persist. Keep your discipline. Be polite. You will be surprised that you can have what you want if you quietly persist at setting the boundaries that create a whole life for you.

7. ***Create your "whole life***." It is easy to get caught up in your professional life and identity, and its pressures, and to forget the other parts of you. These tactics so far handle your work life, to allow for your other time. Use similar tactics to defend this private time:

a. Set up end-times for each day's work, and actually walk away from your desk, even if you are moving from one room in your house to another.

b. Manage your clients' expectations for reasonable schedules for deliverables.

c. Book time away for a week or more, as many times as you need, and make it clear to your clients that you are "off the grid" and cannot be reached. This can be done, and respected. Stick to it once you set it up.

Now comes the real challenge: expanding or maintaining your identity to include non-work time with non-work experiences. This may be fun, friends, partners, family, reading a junk book, creative work, travel, community involvement… you know, your "real life."

The next discipline is in your mind – to become a full person, to do the work when you are working, and to be your whole self when you are not, and to slip back and forth easily and joyfully between all the selves you are.

Joey Tamer consults to Fortune 500 companies and capitalized start ups to launch, build and expand technology companies, often serving as a "shadow CEO" to extend the CEO's bandwidth. She also advises consultants and service companies on their growth and profitability. She has consulted since the early days of the PC through to her Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 clients of today. Clients include J.P. Morgan Capital, Sony, IBM, Apple, Hearst, Blockbuster, Technicolor, Harper Collins, NEC, Time-Warner, Agfa and Scitex, and many early stage ventures such as Earthweb and iSuppli.