

Where Did the Day Go?

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Many of us have lengthy “To Do” lists that keep morphing into more and more things to do and less time to do everything. Getting everything done on our “to do” lists is one of struggles business owners face, especially independent service professionals and sole practitioners. The hours available in a day aren’t going to change, so something else needs to change. How about changing the “To Do” list into a To Don’t” list?

If most of your time is spent working in your business, the rest of your life also suffers. Think back to one of the reasons you wanted to start your own business. One of the reasons was to have more time and flexibility to do other things. If you are stressed out about not getting the right things done, then your business is not living up to what you had hoped.

The answer is to get better at focusing only on the main drivers of your business. I bet you’re thinking that everything on your list is important to do. The reality is that not everything is equally important. Have you ever forgotten to do something on your “to do” list only to discover down the road that not doing it didn’t make any difference to your business? Think about the hours you would have spent trying to complete a task that didn’t matter. Doing the important stuff is a matter of choice, and only you can decide how you choose to spend your time.

In many cases, you may know what the most important things are, but somehow loads of other things seem to get in the way, right? This is where a "to don't" list can come in handy. So instead of a long list of things to do, try turning it around and focusing on what you won’t do.

To get started, make a list of all of the things you are going to stop doing, things that are not directly connected to the core of your business. Here are some examples of things for a “To Don’t” list:

- Don't schedule meetings with everyone who asks
- Don't check e-mail every 10 minutes
- Don't spend hours thinking about small things like the best font type
- Don't get lost surfing the internet
- Don't keep doing things manually that you can automate

Keep your list where you can see it. Don’t file it, don’t put it in a drawer or your briefcase – hang it up at your workspace. Start each day thinking about the things you want to accomplish that will make a difference in your business. Also think about what you will NOT do. As you go about your day, look at that “To Don’t” list to see if something you are doing is on your list. If it is, STOP doing it immediately! You can always add new things to your list as you become more aware of how you spend your time.

After awhile, you will automatically notice a "to don't" and you will choose not to do it before you get lost in the activity and wonder where the last hour(s) went. Saying no to certain things makes the things you do choose to say 'yes' to, that much more clear and powerful.

It's fun to make a list of all of the things you don't have to do. Get started and see how many things you can identify that are not supporting the creation of your profitable business. You will be surprised at how much you actually accomplish in less time. You can grow your business and have a life.