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Entrepreneurs Take Time to Organize Their Time

By HILLARY CHURA

Time management is such a good idea — especially for small-business owners. It can increase effectiveness, productivity and profitability, as well as reduce stress.

Peter DaSilva for The New York Times
Peter A. Turla teaches time management seminars and urges small-business owners to be disciplined.
If only it didn't take so much, well, time.

Kim Zoller is like many entrepreneurs who struggle to strategize for their business while managing employees and customers. As **president of Image Dynamics in Dallas**, however, one of her bread and butter services is helping her clients conquer their own time management and effectiveness issues.

“What is very exciting and fun at the beginning, and is meant to help you, becomes a burden,” she said. “It becomes another thing on your plate, so you end up not doing it. It becomes one more thing you stress about that really should be helping you. The people in my office are much more organized than I am.”

With relatively few resources and often no support staff, managers of the nation's 26 million small businesses can find themselves even more pressed for time than overworked and stressed-out colleagues in big corporations.

“Time management, even though it's important for anyone, is more important for small-business owners simply due to the fact that they have more and varied responsibilities than a person working in a department or corporation. The small-business owner is very often the accountant, sales and marketing team, C.E.O. and janitor,” said Monica Ricci, owner of Catalyst Organizing Solutions in Alpharetta, Ga.

Those who are not too overworked to avail themselves of time management advice are turning to coaches, books, software and seminars to help them bring order.

Diedre Wachbrit, a lawyer in Westlake Village, Calif., is her own time management coach. She said she reassesses her skills every 6 to 18 months because she seems to need additional ones as her business grows. She is trying to teach herself to hand off tasks.

“It's work to delegate,” said Ms. Wachbrit, who specializes in planning for people with special needs and has a staff of 10. But she said it was important to resist the temptation to take two minutes to do something and instead to “take five minutes to think how someone else can do it, because that will save me hours if you think about how often I do that same task over and over again.”

While the tools, agenda and to-do list for managing time are the same for the self-employed as for everyone else, entrepreneurs may have more control because they are the boss, not working for him.

Time management experts say small businesses constitute no more than 20 percent of their clientele, despite the fact that entrepreneurs seem to have the most to gain.

Coaches charge from \$200 for half-day one-on-one sessions to \$6,000 for a daylong group seminar. Half a day generally is enough time to visit a workplace and establish a plan of action for an individual, according to coaches. A big emphasis is on urging clients to keep control of their schedule and not let their employees, customers or e-mail hijack their day.

Peter A. Turla, co-author of “Time Management Made Easy (Dutton, 1983),” teaches in-house seminars and said small-business owners must be disciplined and set priorities.

“Time is one of your scarcest commodities,” he said. “Train other people that you have a job and that they need to leave you alone when you are working. You need to train yourself to the very same thing.”

After working with Ms. Ricci, Jonas Berwick, a private detective in Lawrenceville, Ga., decided he should spend his time directing and expanding his seven-person business, not “the minutiae” like paperwork and routine administrative tasks. He reduced his workweek to 40 hours, from 70, and said that his stress level had dropped as well. Mr. Berwick later hired Ms. Ricci to conduct a seminar for his staff on overcoming procrastination.

Before, my life was one of worry and anxiety and stress,” he said. “I was a firefighter. All I did was put out fires. I never prevented fires from occurring, as I do now. I did not get any business growth or development accomplished.”

Experts tell clients to establish business hours — whatever works for them and their family — and to set boundaries. It is easier said than done considering that many small-business owners work 70-hour weeks, go to sleep worrying about the job and think they must have their fingers in all aspects of the business.

Julie Morgenstern, author of “Never Check E-Mail in the Morning and Other Unexpected Strategies for Making Your Work Life Work , Fireside, 2004)” said entrepreneurs were less open to the notion that they could change how they work than people in larger corporations.

“Small businesses are more resistant to changing their behavior,” she said. “It's hard for them to visualize that things can be different, because they live in a vacuum. Nobody is above them. They have no mentors. They are afraid that if they change what got them to where they are, they will fail and their business will collapse. There is no cushion and no safety net.”