



Managing Your Time to Your Priorities

As the owner of a small business, you need to know everything and provide all the expertise that a large corporation will have on hand.

When you are responsible for growing your business, it's imperative that you manage your time. The problem is that everyone wants a piece of your time and everything is important. Interruptions crowd out your focus and waste your time.

Understanding your priorities and setting goals will get you started on the path to taking control of your time. Debriefing your successes and challenges on a regular basis will provide you with the lessons that give you traction to continue to manage your time to your priorities.

Setting Goals

The first step in managing your time is to set goals, because when you have goals you can set priorities to meet them.

SMART goals are Specific Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-sensitive. By setting SMART goals, you create a concrete picture of your future and that allows you to assign your time to create that future.

An example of a SMART goal for a business owner might be to expand operations and increase revenues by 50%. If we translate that statement into a SMART Goal it will look like this.

- **Specific**, expand operations to include the neighboring municipalities. Increase revenues from existing products by 50%.
- **Measurable**, enter one municipality at a time until all five municipalities are incorporated. Revenues will be increased 10% with each municipality.
- **Attainable**, we have the capacity to increase our sales within the current sales team.
- **Relevant**, there are no large competitors in the surrounding municipalities and this is a great time to expand.
- **Time-sensitive**, this move will be complete within two years to take advantage of the lack of competition.

Getting Control of Your Schedule

Now that you have your goals, you can begin to take control of your schedule.

Interruptions are one of the biggest reasons people don't have time to what they need to do. Interruptions come in the form of calls from friends, texts email, a call from someone you haven't seen for a while, Facebook, Twitter and whatever the next 'big thing' in interruptions is.

Interruptions cost more than time, but let's start with time.

You have a proposal to write and you think it will take a couple of hours. You start at 9 am and get thirty minutes of focused time. Then a call comes in and you take it. The call is from someone selling you advertising space and it takes you five minutes to decide it's not a good fit for your business. You go back to the proposal, but you have to spend a few minutes reviewing what you've written before you can start.

You work on the proposal for another fifteen minutes before an email comes in. It's a friend who wants to set a golf date. A half hour later you return to the proposal and you have to start again because you've forgotten what you intended to include.

Now your proposal that was going to take a couple of hours is already an hour and a half in and you've made no progress.

The other price you pay is that the focus is not on you and your business, but on everyone else. You are responding to everyone's needs and it becomes harder to focus on meeting your goals.

The next challenge to managing your time is the over-scheduling you already do. Is your calendar full of tasks and meetings? Do all of those tasks take you closer to your goals? If not, setting more goals will only put more tasks in your calendar that you won't get done.

The Schedule Process

To create a schedule that allows you to reach your goals, you need to take three steps.

Assess what is on your schedule. We all fill our schedules with activities we feel obliged to complete. Start by reviewing all the activities you've scheduled over the next four weeks.

Highlight any that lead to your goals, delete any that you know you won't get done, assess the remaining items and develop a plan to minimize the time you spend doing the 'must dos'.

Review the goals you set for activities that must be completed in the next four weeks. Now you need to find the time to schedule those tasks.



Plan your week before it starts. Building your schedule in advance will minimize the chance that you will force too many activities into your schedule. Take a few minutes on Sunday morning to review your schedule and plan the week.

Have perspective on your timeline. It is tempting to try to get things done as soon as you can schedule them. Not every activity needs to be done today, remember to schedule activities when they need to be completed, not all at the same time.

The Debrief

The best way to reach goals and learn to manage your schedule is to debrief along the way. Because we'll learn from what we have just done in a week, we are able to work on the firm ground that we've just covered, and keep things moving actively forward.

This is important because, you can only build success on top of success. By identifying your successes you are able to focus on your wins. And when you focus on your wins you will feel successful.

Conducting a debrief before you plan your week will help you to focus your schedule on those things that will help you achieve your goals.

The eight elements of a debrief

Brief overview of the facts: This section is for observations about what is true. For example: We engaged with four new clients. We developed a new strategy.

Key accomplishments: The key here is to identify the little accomplishments as well as the big ones. Analyzing the little wins allows you to realize that you have accomplished more than before. You may even find that you are closer to your goals than you thought.

What worked and/or is working: The accomplishments obviously worked, but what we want to know here is why they worked. For example, it may have been an accomplishment to deliver a proposal on time or even better, to finish it three days before the due date. Let's think about what worked: I was uninterrupted for 3 hours. I closed my office door. I re-scheduled a few things. I asked for help.

What didn't work and/or isn't working: Take the time to notice what needs to be improved. For example, if you were rushed during a meeting with a client, was it because you didn't leave time to prepare?

What is missing: This section is where you will gain access to action. For example: What is missing? More time to prepare for meetings with clients. Why don't I have enough time? Because I have too many activities in my schedule and I don't know how to say no when I don't have the time. What needs to change? I will protect my schedule so that I can prepare for meetings.



Priorities

Opportunities: What opportunities are present for you as you conduct this debrief? As you gain progress in managing your schedule, is there time to pay attention to your longer-term goals. Be sure to start scheduling the steps for other goals when you create these opportunities.

Next steps: What are some specific actions that you want to take next week to make your week better or start working on new goals.

Anything else to complete the picture: Sometimes useful observations arise through the debrief that don't have a natural place in any of the categories. This is a place to catch these, ensuring they don't get lost.

The debrief can be done weekly, or after a big meeting, or a big success, or even something that didn't go well. Learning about your strengths will help you to make progress toward the goals. See our Debrief Chart on the following pages.



The Debrief	
<p>Brief overview of the facts: What happened with no judgment</p>	
<p>Key accomplishments: What you achieved</p>	
<p>What worked: The successful tactics</p>	
<p>What didn't work: Challenges you met</p>	



Priorities

<p>What is missing:</p> <p>What you need next time</p>	
<p>Opportunities:</p> <p>How you can be more successful</p>	
<p>Next steps:</p> <p>What you will do next time</p>	



Smart Goals	
Specific: Describe the goal in concrete terms	
Measurable: Describe the milestones or success criteria	
Attainable: Explain the criteria that makes it attainable	
Relevant: Align the goal with strategy	
Time sensitive: Document the timeline to achieve the goal	