

## **The 4-Step Guide to Reclaiming Your Time, While Still Growing Your Business**

Joanne Macdonald

There's a trap that many small business owners fall into, often without realizing it. Days are constantly packed, and the work week only seems to get longer, but there never seems to be enough time to slow down and handle certain tasks.

Business consultant [Joanne Macdonald](#) has created a system for escaping this trap, and improving both your business and your day-to-day life. "We're all living in a reactive work environment," she says. "Business owners have to get clear on the fact that they need to make time to build the business, not just react." Here are her 4 steps to freedom from the Time Trap.

### **1. Determine Exactly How You're Spending Each Hour of the Day**

First, figure out what you're doing. "Many times, my clients find that they are spending very little time on what they know to be their most important tasks," she shares.

"Even tracking your time for a couple of days can be very enlightening. The more specific you can be, the better."

In other words, don't just jot down "worked for three hours this morning." That won't tell you anything you don't already know. Instead, write down each activity and interruption. Note when you take a Facebook break, when you get waylaid by a twenty-minute conversation, when a customer call takes an hour of your afternoon.

MacDonald recommends keeping it simple. "Evernote is great, on your computer or your phone. Or if a notebook works better, use a notebook."

### **2. Slice Activities Into a Pie, and Stack Them According to Importance**

Once you track your time, take a look at the major categories which take up your time. "Slice it up," says Macdonald, "and see what size each slice is. Quite often the smallest slices – tasks like forecasting finances, closing big sales, developing new products, or planning for expansion – are the ones you really should be spending more time on."

Compare those slices to the priorities you have inside and outside of the business. “As an entrepreneur, a business owner, you need to get yourself to focus on building the business, not scurrying around inside of the business,” says Macdonald.

### **3. Delegate Any of Your Duties That Don't Absolutely Require You**

Macdonald recommends that all business owners get very clear on the tasks they need to do personally, such as developing plans and strategies, overseeing the big financial picture, and managing their managers.

Other tasks, such as bookkeeping, marketing, customer service, and inventory control, should be handed off to other people.

In order to accomplish this handoff (and feel comfortable about it), business owners must first have a handle on the people and resources that are available to them. “You have to let go of the need to do it all yourself,” says Macdonald. “Would you rather micromanage everything, or have a successful business?”

Look to outsource tasks that don't need someone within the company in order to be performed well. Tools and apps are also affordable, and many can get you working more efficiently.

### **4. Document Processes for Important Things That Happen (Or Could Happen) With Your Business**

How do you handle the inevitable angry customer, inventory issue, or other unforeseeable business calamity? Says Macdonald, “You can never get away from all of the daily business needs, but you can minimize distractions.” Do so by laying out specific guidelines and procedures, not only for day-to-day operations, but also for crisis situations.

Macdonald recommends that business owners schedule a day each quarter to map out guidelines, procedures, and policies. Once the daily duties of normal business are documented, work on putting together guidelines for situations like computers crashing, products not working, or negative online reviews.

Documenting in this way will minimize the need for your personal intervention every time a crisis arises. Above all, fight the temptation to micromanage every part of your business; it limits you and limits your employees.

“When you struggle,” says MacDonald, “get yourself accountability with a business partner, spouse, or peer group.” Have them hold you accountable for following your own documented processes, and letting your employees do so as well.

**If you want to succeed and grow your business, there’s no magic trick. But you can release yourself from the Time Trap by sticking to priorities, revisiting your goals regularly, documenting and delegating, and putting accountability in place.**