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Small business owners can thrive by separating importance and urgency

As a small business owner, I feel overwhelmed by daily responsibilities. How can I organize my time so that I accomplish the most important goals of my business?

Small business owners face incredible demands on their personal and professional time. According to a recent Reuters survey, leaders of companies with fewer than 20 employees displayed the largest work-life imbalance.

Identifying and addressing your business priorities is critical to growing a healthy business operation and pursuing personal goals.

To execute on your company's highest priorities, you must distinguish between "importance" and "urgency." In general terms, if something is important, it has to be done; whereas, if something is urgent, it merely feels like it has to be done.

The key to effectively managing your time is to prioritize demands that are important and urgent and avoid or delegate tasks that are unimportant and urgent.

To determine if a task is urgent and truly important, ask yourself three questions:

- Do I have to do this now?
- Do I have to do this at all?
- Will this activity contribute to an important business objective?

If you answer "no" to any of these questions, the urgency of the situation is probably pressuring you to respond to an unimportant demand. In that case, addressing that urgent demand may not be worth your time because it is not a true priority.

In addition to prioritizing demands that are important and urgent, making time for items that are important and not urgent often results in great benefit over the long-term. For example, staff training may not need to be done today, but the sooner you can apply new training knowledge to daily business operations, the faster that knowledge can be turned into profit.

The key to effective time management is to plan your priorities and prepare for important urgencies by:

- Identifying and writing down three to five key business priorities each week.
- Blocking out ample time in your weekly schedule to address each priority.
- Committing to saying "yes" to your priorities.
- Committing to saying "no" to those demands that do not further your business goals.
- Letting unimportant urgencies find another taker.

For more information on time management and productivity, check out the Web site of the Kansas City chapter of the **International Society for Performance Improvement** at www.kcispi.org.

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