



Busy?

I have a theory that February is the most chaotic month of the year in business. It seems to me that most people have at least some time off in December/January and return to work refreshed and energised. Now that is a good thing, of course, but that enthusiasm is often manifested in attempting to achieve too many things in one month.

If it was just you it may be manageable and invigorating. However, when clients and suppliers are similarly keen to “get things done” then your available time shrinks alarmingly. This is exacerbated by similar time pressures in your non-business life: registering and trials for winter sport; back-to-school meetings; first meetings for social and community groups....

Here are a few hints that may be helpful in regaining some power over the 168 hours available to you each week:

1. Practice Saying “No”

Most advisers are, in my experience, friendly and helpful people. You can certainly have worse problems but it usually results in an ability to say “no”. Clients, staff, friends and family are after a chunk of your time because they respect you and your talents. Your response is usually “sure, no problem, happy to help”. But where does this leave your priorities?

It is important to practise saying “no”, politely and respectfully. You have probably built up a store of good will from your history of being friendly and helpful – so use it. When someone seeks your input, and it is not aligned with your immediate objectives, here are some options:

- Find someone else to help them
- Challenge them to solve it themselves
- Find a later time that suits you both to address the issue

Please ensure that the majority of your time is devoted to you what is important to you – not someone else.



2. Delegate Non-Critical Tasks

You are an expert, a talented individual. I believe that \$50 an hour people shouldn't be undertaking \$50 an hour tasks, far less \$15 an hour tasks. And that applies to your personal time as well. My rule of thumb is that if someone else can do the job 75% as well as you can, let them do it. With a bit of practice they may, in time, be able to do it 95% as well. (And dare I suggest that some people may even be able to achieve some tasks 105% as well as you can).

(There is an art to successful delegation, covered in my article in the Professional Planner of March 2010).

3. Focus on Important Tasks

How do you decide what you should say "no" to and what you should delegate? I believe that you need to be clear on what is important to you. This means being very clear on your values and your goals. (Again this is another large topic, addressed in my article in Professional Planner in December 2009). If you have a well thought out business plan you will be in a good position to determine your business priorities. It may be more of a challenge to determine your non-business priorities. For example, deciding between watching the Friday night footy, attending your child's parent-teacher evening or keeping your tennis commitments.

Do you recognise the difference between importance and urgency? Many people play the deadline game to confuse the two and convince you to drop everything. Just because they say it is urgent doesn't mean it really is urgent. And even if it really is urgent it doesn't mean it is important (to you). You can still say no – it is your choice.

4. Monitor Your Time

I know plenty of people who say, "I don't know where the day went". If you often find that you get to the end of a day wondering how it could have come and gone so quickly perhaps you would benefit from tracking your time for a sample week. It is amazing how many of my clients discover hidden time-wasters from undertaking the simple task of accurately recording their time, as they make decisions for its allocation. For example, someone who thought that their morning and afternoon tea breaks were 5 minutes each found that, in reality, they averaged 15 minutes each – that's more than 5% of their working day. Someone else was in the delightful habit of calling their spouse each day and didn't realise that, on average, the call duration was 20 minutes.



I am not making value judgments here – both of those activities were probably very important to the individuals – they just didn't realise the time commitment without consciously tracking it. Where might significant stretches of your day be evaporating without your knowledge?

5. Don't Use The Word "Busy"

Let me confess that this is a pet hate of mine...I hate the frequency with which I am greeted with, "How are you Martin? Busy?" It seems to me that it is compulsory to always claim that we are busy in contemporary Australia. I have a number of problems with this deplorable 21st century custom. Let me share just two of them today:

- There is no doubt that stress and burnout symptoms are increasing and these can be physical, mental and/or emotional. I think that repeatedly telling yourself that you are "so busy" is contributing to that state of anxiety.
- Most advisers are looking for new business. If you are regularly telling your clients, your referral partners and your team that you are "busy" then how willing are they going to be to refer new potential clients if they perceive that you can't handle your current workload.

Give yourself a test and count how many times in one day that you are asked how busy you are. Try a different response. I will often say, "I don't use the 'b' word. Business is going well and I am feeling under control".

These are the best of times to make smart decisions about your use of your most precious, non-renewable resource - time.