



Your Business Deserves Help!

By Stephanie Edsall, Sr. Project Administrator

External Symptoms: I'm always swamped! It should slow down soon. I'll get to it next week. My to-do list has stuff on it from months ago!

Your Inner Voice: Is it time to find some help? What would they do? Is it worth the expense? It just seems easier if I do it myself!

If you're nodding your head yes, it's time to explore the idea of getting help. Your operation has grown, and so have the activities involved in managing your business. Getting help is not just about learning to be more efficient or use your time more wisely. It is about your role in the operation, what the businesses priorities are and who is best suited to fulfill those priorities.

Diagnosing the Issue

Do you find yourself sitting on hold with the phone company, booking travel arrangements, making the bank deposits, or filtering calls because other employees are just too busy? These "delegating-up" activities cost businesses big money simply because owners and managers have no one to farm out their administrative tasks to. A skilled administrator's return on investment can be substantial. Duncan Melba's article featured in Harvard Business Review (HBR) says a top-notch assistant is crucial in advancing productivity. Many corporate cultures ask top talent to misuse their time, while the most economical approach is to hand-off tasks to the lowest-cost employee who can do the job well. As an owner of a small business, this challenge is even tougher to avoid. Likely, you are not completing these administrative tasks in the most efficient way, and in many cases, you are barely getting the tasks done at all.

Duncan goes on to say assistants are vital for new employees and aside from the standard clerical activities, today's assistants are taking on more supervisory roles by managing information flow, dealing with basic financial management, meeting coordination, and doing a lot of the planning and organizing of information (HBR/Melba, 2011).

Finding a Solution

In the simplest form, this is the only question you really need to answer - "Is this the **BEST USE OF MY TIME?**" If you are spending time on five-minute tasks all day, you're not the one who should be doing them. Help can come in various forms, and it's important to decide what help means for you. It might mean a little relief, such as someone to be on your team, keep things moving, and catch a few of the balls in the air. This could be a part-time: 3 hours in the afternoon to cover the office, file, make copies, and run errands. Maybe it looks like a full-time person to manage the office, cleaning, supplies, general

clerical, enter timesheets and print payroll. On the other hand, maybe it is someone you can start grooming now for other areas in the future.

Making It Work

Ok, so you're convinced you could use a little help. Where to start? Let's make a list. A very, very long list, of your typical day. Identify what items require a decision, and what items are not decisions, but actions. Actions are likely the daily tasks that you can transition over to your new support person: Checking voice mail, mailing payments, and scheduling with the accountant (the things you have already decided). As you make your list, look for routine administrative tasks such as pay periods, month end, or ordering supplies. Which of these tasks are routine? The routine tasks can be taught to someone else, freeing up much of your time.

It is hard to measure how much your time is worth. However, because time is limited, you must continually make decisions for the best use of your time. In your business, does your time add more value during a meeting with your key employees or when you are sitting at a desk opening mail? What has more lasting impact: Spending time at the monthly breakfast networking and hearing about global growth trends or deciphering and entering timesheets for payroll? What's worth more: time spent at home for dinner with your family or on finishing month-end production reports? If you're spending time on tasks your support person can do for you, you're risking opportunity costs by losing focus on leadership, strategy, and decisions that directly strengthen your business.

The Power of Teaming

Your support person should have strengths that compliment your personal weaknesses, or opportunities. If you are not an organized individual, fill this gap with detail strength in a support person. If you are not the best at following through, your support should be results oriented. Your assistant will not be the one to correct employees for you, but he or she will support your direction, carry out your decisions, and be a sounding board for problem solving. Your message should convey, "I trust this person to represent me and make decisions," says Melba (HBR). Your support person should bring value to your business every day. You want to hear their opinion, you trust they have the best interest of your reputation, and you will eventually ask yourself how you ever did it without them.

Stephanie Edsall is a Partner of GROW and manages the office, operations and contributes in consulting projects as project support. Your business and your family deserve administrative support. Contact GROW and Stephanie to find out how they can help you create an administrative support plan.



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