

Are You an Entrepreneur or Simply Self-Employed?

By June Campbell

Are you an entrepreneur or are you self-employed? It's not just semantics. Entrepreneurs are leaders who know how to make their business grow over the long haul. Self-employed people continue working as they did when they were employed, but now they are their own boss.

If you are like many business managers, you work long hours, you're constantly fighting to meet deadlines and you have a big list of things to do.

But are you accomplishing the most important tasks? Do you know what the most important tasks are? According to many experts, your most important task is NOT customer service!

The first priority for a business manager is the strategic planning that will help the business to grow. Are you spending time every day on activities that will make you money in the long term, or are you busy, busy, busy with customer service, answering phone calls and emails, meeting customer deadlines and administrative tasks? All of these items are short-term efforts; none will build the business for the years ahead.

To increase productivity, try the following tips:

1. Set aside one and a half hours first thing every morning to work on strategic planning. Strategic planning could include activities such as developing new products, planning ways to increase staff productivity, determining long term goals, etc.
2. Clear your desk of clutter. Every post-it note, every printed out email, every scrap of paper will encourage you to split your concentration into many different areas. Efficiency decreases.
3. Use **Mind Map to-do lists** instead of linear lists. When you add an item to a linear list, you must compare that item to each other item on the list to rate its importance. This is time consuming and distracting. To use a Mind Map list, create a diagram that resembles a spider web. Each tentacle of the web represents a major category -- such as strategic planning, customer service, staff development, etc. Then, when you have a new item to add, find the correct tentacle -- there will usually only be 3-4, and add your item as a sub-spine to the appropriate tentacle.
4. **Delegate** work to other people. First, thoroughly analyze the task you want them to do. Write it down step by step until you are satisfied that you have it right, then

assign the work. Once the other person knows how to do the task adequately, stay out of their way and let them do it. When one sole proprietor wanted to hire a part-time sales representative, he wrote out a sales script, detailed each step of the sales process, then hired a telecommuter to work from home several hours a week. The strategy proved so effective that the sales rep is now moving up to full-time work.

5. Avoid getting caught up in "administrivia." If you are devoting time to administrative tasks, you are a clerk, not a manager. Find a clerk to do your administrative tasks, then spend your time working on strategic development activities.
6. If you're planning on doing a task for the first time, ask yourself whether you have the skills needed. If not, will you be doing this task often enough to justify the time spent in learning how to do it? If the answer is 'no', delegate and spend your time on strategic planning.
7. Figure out how to make people want to learn the tasks you intend to delegate. That's the sign of a leader.
8. Are you caught up in meetings, meetings, meetings? Are these meetings necessary? If they are, can they be handled in a more time effective fashion, such as telephone conference calls, Internet chat sessions, net-conferencing, etc?
9. Avoid being a perfectionist. Realize that no matter how much you fuss over a project, there will still be ways that it could be improved. Be too perfectionistic and you will accomplish little. I've seen a very apropos screen saver that reads, *Implement now. Perfect later.*

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