

Business Bullet ~ Avoid Burnout as a Business Owner

Many people experience burnout at some point in their lives. Business owners and the self-employed are even more likely to fall prey to burnout because the stress of business entrepreneurship can be extremely hard on your body, mind and soul. If you feel as if you might be starting to burn out, here are some things you can do to help avoid it.

1. **Take care of #1. If you're run down, you'll burn out faster.** Make sure to get enough sleep, eat right, exercise and de-stress on a regular basis. I have found it very difficult to find time to take care of myself the way I should, so I have begun writing in activities on my calendar for things such as, play UNO with my grandchildren, walk the dog, take a couple of days over the weekend and go up to the campsite, remember to take vitamins. It may seem strange, but if you find yourself writing these into your calendar, you might actually do it. I have to increase my percentage of 'actually doing it' up from the current 60%, as I keep both a hard copy scheduler as well as electronic and many times forget to place these items on both of them.
2. **Make the time to do nothing!** We all need to take time to relax, refresh and replenish. Don't keep pushing yourself. Keep regular business hours whenever possible and take breaks during your work day. Make sure to schedule in time off and vacations on a regular basis. You'll come back with a fresh outlook and perspective. Now, I work a lot of hours each week, and don't keep regular business hours myself, but on those days, I try to stop working, walk outside, get some fresh air, or take a break and maybe take a power nap. And I've begun taking time off 2-3 times a year, something I hadn't done for almost eight years. And, of course, I always come back to a huge pile of work, but that comes with being an entrepreneur.
3. **Get back in touch with the things you value.** Is your work fulfilling and meaningful for you? If not, check in with your values. What's missing? Where are you compromising? What needs to be eliminated? What are you merely tolerating? Re-assess and re-adjust your priorities as needed. If you work for yourself, you're in control. Make the choices you want to make by honoring what's important to you. I have done quite a bit of revisiting my own values and priorities over the past year or so, and am trying to balance my work and family/friends a little more. I absolutely love what I do, but nothing is as important to me as hugs from my grandchildren. And that's where my values begin.
4. **Think out of the box and challenge yourself consistently.** If work has become a chore or you're in a rut, try spicing things up a bit! Find innovative ways to do mundane tasks, create new products or services to add to your offering, improve performance, or tweak what you do best and make it even better. I have found that occasion small things can help me focus and challenge me. An example, though simple, that is effective is working on the newspaper puzzles over coffee in the early morning to get my brain going.
5. **Establish realistic expectations for what you can and cannot accomplish.** If you find that you're driving yourself or your employees too hard, it may be time to let go of unrealistic expectations and readjust. Shorten your to-do list, give yourself some slack when needed and know when to let up on yourself and others. I'm a lot easier on others than I am on myself, so I'm working on that. It's very hard when you expect yourself to do everything perfectly, even though I know better. I'm trying to learn to accept when I feel that I have done my best, turn and move on to other projects.
6. **Learn how to communicate clearly.** Resolve conflicts, don't run from them. Let people know what you expect from them, and ask them what they expect from you. Be clear and concise with what you say, and how you say it. Listen closely to the people around you, it will teach them to listen closely to you.
7. **Manage your time.** Poor time management is another thing we do that leads to burnout. Set regular business hours whenever possible (dare I repeat myself on that one?). Make appointments with yourself to get things done—and keep them. Being on time counts, show up promptly for appointments and expect others to do the same. And have a clear objective for what you would like to accomplish with your meetings.
8. **Stop blaming yourself or others.** If you're playing the 'woulda, coulda, shoulda' game, perhaps it's time to re-evaluate your attitude. Blaming yourself or others for things that have gone wrong doesn't help. What does? Learn from your experiences and make changes to ensure that you get the results you want the next time.
9. **Value yourself by establishing boundaries and limits.** Learn how to do it in a way that is clear and consistent. Don't give away too much of your time. (I have a tendency to do a lot of 'giving back' which is fulfilling but does take more time away from my 'productive' work than it probably should.) Let people know your policies and procedures. Be upfront with what's acceptable and what's not. Learn how to say no. I'm working on that one.
10. **Deal with your emotions.** Keeping your feelings inside usually leads to trouble. If you are feeling any kind of negative emotion, don't deny it. Instead, learn how to acknowledge your feelings, be up front with them, and deal with the underlying causes. However, there is one emotion you should listen to. If you meet with a prospective business client, and you get a 'bad feeling' for any reason, pay attention to that feeling. If that feeling is strong, suggest that they find help with some other company, make a few suggestions, and come up with a reasonable answer as to why you can't proceed with them. Make sure not to burn any bridges, as you just 'never know'.

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11. **Laugh, smile and enjoy the ride!** Life is too short to worry and be serious all the time. Find ways to make your work fun and enjoyable. My mother used to tell me that I was born serious, and that statement is true. I began working at a very young age, and that seriousness definitely helped me focus in my early careers. When I had children, I did learn to have a little fun, but I was still a serious business woman. It was finally when I had grandchildren that I really learned how to relax, play and have fun. And they helped me learn some things about myself that I needed to change, and we have developed a very special relationship. You just never know where helpful suggestions come from.
12. **Don't feel embarrassed to ask for help.** Everybody needs a little help once in a while. You can't do everything yourself. Don't be afraid to ask friends or associates for help, or hire a professional when needed.

Now, these suggestions are not new, and they are not my original ideas. I have accumulated them over the years both in reading and learning from others. They are pretty basic suggestions, but can work wonders when you work hard in business and have a concern about burnout. Take some action today and you will find that not only do you feel less stress, but actually will find yourself being more productive.

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