

SMALL BIZ AHEAD



SMALL BUSINESS OWNER'S GUIDE:

**BECOME A MORE PRODUCTIVE BUSINESS OWNER
IN 21 DAYS - WITHOUT LOSING SLEEP OR SANITY.**





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INTRODUCTION

We hear the message all the time: Work smarter, not harder. Don't be a workaholic, be more productive.

BUT HOW?

When you're a small business owner, it's important to make every minute count. If you're like many who own their own business, you're typically stretched thin, overworked and under-resourced. If this sounds like you,



remember that working more hours won't necessarily make you more productive. Instead, you could soon find yourself sleep-deprived, irritable and unhappy with the work you produce during those "extra" hours you try to tack on to your workday.

Increasing productivity is so important in our society that you don't have to look far to find apps, courses and various digital tools promising to help you become more productive. Yet it may be that we've become so overwhelmed with assorted time management and efficiency tools that they actually impede our ability to get things done.

New research from [Accenture and CSO Insights](#) found that 55 percent of senior global sales executives say their sales tools are actually obstacles to their selling activity. In a nutshell, having access to the very tools that promise to help increase sales productivity distracts salespeople from being more productive.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

If you're a small business owner who has already identified the activities critical to making your business a success, but who needs to complete these activities more effectively and efficiently, this guide is for you.

This eBook highlights seven key ways to become more productive as a small business owner without cutting into valuable sleep-time or over-scheduling yourself. Spanning 21 days, it includes simple, direct and actionable steps for you to immediately implement – steps that’ll improve efficiency and effectiveness in your business and personal life.

Plan to spend about an hour a day on these action items. Yes, you’ll be temporarily adding another task to your already busy day, but the activities completed over the next three weeks are designed to help you restructure and rearrange that jam-packed schedule, making you more productive without adding work hours, and hopefully even shaving a few off.

Before we get started, let’s clarify what productivity is and why being more productive is a good thing.

WHAT’S PRODUCTIVITY?

If being productive means getting a lot of important things done at the right time, then becoming more productive requires that we identify and then cut non-productive activities. This gives us more time to focus on productive activities that generate customers and profits. We then learn how to do the productive tasks more efficiently and with less effort.

The benefits of being more productive at work spill over into our personal lives, too, giving us more free time to spend with family and friends and to pursue non-work activities that matter to us. It also helps reduce stress, an important but often-overlooked issue for entrepreneurs.

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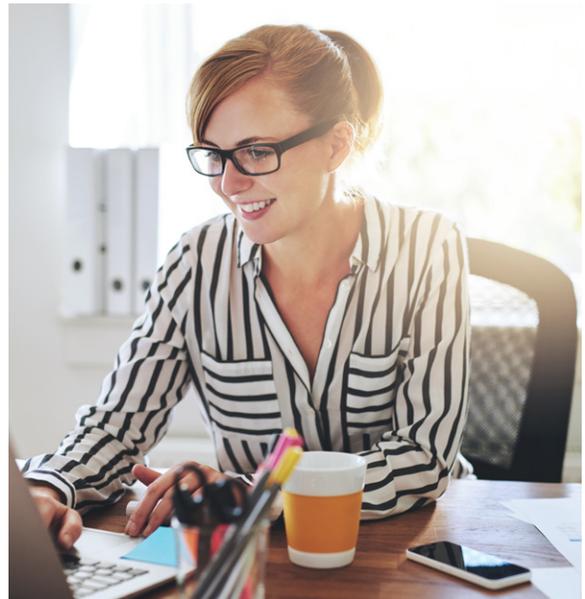
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The key to maximizing productivity for a small business owner is that the activity must be sustainable over weeks, months and years to keep your business running smoothly, without resulting in you dropping from exhaustion.

21 DAYS TO A MORE PRODUCTIVE YOU

Commit about an hour of your day for the next 21 days to follow this productivity guide. Try to tackle it first thing in the morning, so you can implement action items right away for immediate results. Expect to finish the guide with a customized plan that works best for your own personal and business life.

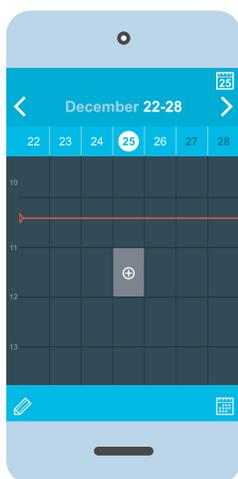


DAYS 1-3: SCHEDULE IT

Working from a schedule helps you know what you should be doing when – and keeps you from missing important to-dos and deadlines. Scheduling your time also helps maximize your productivity based on your own energy levels and time commitments. Jump into your own productivity plan by creating a master schedule.

ACTION ITEM DAY 1

CREATE A WEEKLY MASTER SCHEDULE



For a schedule to work, it must be accessible. Don't handwrite or print out a large poster schedule to pin to your office wall – you'll only look at it occasionally at first, then eventually forget about it. Instead, try an omni-channel scheduling app that works on your mobile phone, computer and tablet. Start by scheduling a week at a time with activities that occur daily. I like the free [Google Calendar](#). Other popular options are [Microsoft Outlook](#) and [Apple/iCloud calendar](#).

As a busy entrepreneur, your business is a big component of who you are as a person. However, some of your most important commitments have nothing to do with work. When creating your master schedule, don't start with work commitments.

STEPS:

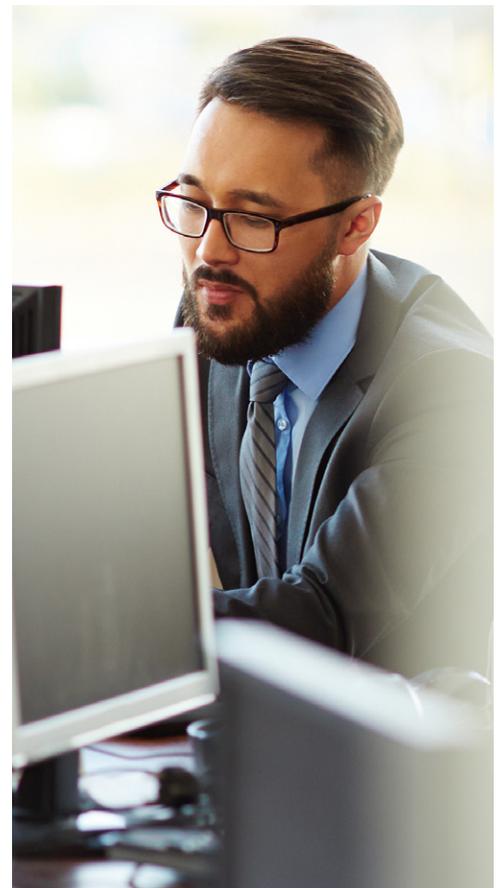
1. Start with scheduling sleep (at least 6 to 8 hours) and meal times. It may sound pretty basic, but it'll keep you honest. Studies find that lack of sleep or [poor sleep has a negative impact on productivity](#), because your brain finds it difficult to focus on the task at hand. Scheduling these health-boosting parts of your day will remind you of their importance.
2. Next add in community and/or family commitments, including kids' lessons, events, etc. Remember to account for travel time.

3. Include time for physical activity weekly – yes, schedule this. Like getting enough sleep, being physically fit helps you focus and be more productive.
4. Schedule household responsibilities that only *you* can do or want to do – grocery shopping, gardening/yard work, cleaning, etc.
5. Now add your work time based on your productivity levels during the workday. You'll likely change it going forward, but you need to get started somewhere, whether it's 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. five days a week, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. four days a week, or another weekly combination of hours.

**ACTION ITEM
DAYS 1 TO 3****MONITOR YOUR
PRODUCTIVITY LEVELS**

To maximize productivity, pay close attention to your effectiveness at different times of the day. When are you most alert? When do you have the least distractions from customers, employees, phone calls, etc. Distractions are a proven productivity-killer. In fact, it takes 26 minutes to recover and [refocus after a “trivial interruption”](#) according to a study by University of California psychologist Gloria Marks. That's 26 minutes where your productivity isn't maximized.

We all naturally have times of the day when we are at our peak performance. For example, I'm a morning person, so I schedule tasks requiring focus and creativity for early in the day.



**ACTION ITEM
DAYS 1 TO 3****TIME YOUR ACTIVITIES**

Starting on day 1 and for the following two days, keep a written record (you can use your laptop, tablet or smartphone, if that works best for you) to see how quickly and thoroughly you perform tasks at different times of the day. For example, if daily sales calls are part of your routine, schedule them in the mid-afternoon on day 1 (because you'll be working on your schedule in the early morning that day), then try them early morning on day 2, and late afternoon on day 3.

**ACTION ITEM
DAY 3****STUDY YOUR RESULTS**

How many calls did you make each day, or how much of your scheduled task did you complete? Which days resulted in closed sales or completed tasks? How did you feel during the time period you were carrying out activities each day?

If you find yourself with a few moments to spare, read [this short post](#) on

how to find your most productive hours

from the Trello (a project management organization and tool) blog

**ACTION ITEM
ONGOING****FINE-TUNE YOUR SCHEDULE**

Revisit and revise your schedule every three days during the next 21 days to move highly-focused creative, detail-oriented or calculation-based work to times when you feel the most energized and have minimal distraction.

DAYS 4-6: AUTOMATE IT

There are some tasks that we repeat daily, weekly or even monthly. Unfortunately, while these tasks and/or activities must be completed, they often don't improve productivity.

Automating a task involves using tools (usually already created by someone else) that schedule a repeatable task into the future. This reduces the work you're required to do on these non-productive (yet necessary) tasks going forward. Cut the time required to perform these tasks by automating them and you'll free up time to devote to other, more productive activities.

Automating tasks in your business and personal life may be easier than you think, and in many cases, it's inexpensive or even free.

For example, businesses and households of all sizes have bills to pay. Make bill paying automatic instead of spending time either visiting a bank or even making individual online bill payments. Check to see if your suppliers or utility companies have automatic bill payment programs by either visiting their websites or calling them. Then authorize them to take payment of a set amount (or the total monthly amount owed) from your bank account or credit card on an agreed date.

You may have even more control over automatic bill payments if you set them up from your bank account. Doing it this way, you'd set an amount and a date for payment each month for each bill.

An added bonus is that automating financial activities such as bill payments helps prevent late or missed payments, which could impact your personal and/or business credit rating. Automating the billing system for your clients may

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also reduce errors that can occur with manual invoicing. It could also help even your cash flow and reduce time spent researching and following up on outstanding invoices.

Additional items business owners may be able to automate include:

- Ordering inventory
- Billing repeat customers
- Paying bills

**ACTION ITEM
DAYS 4 AND 5**

AUTOMATE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Identify work activities that can be automated and set them up.



**ACTION ITEM
DAY 6**

AUTOMATE PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

Identify and set up personal activities that can be automated, such as bill payments, investment contributions and grocery subscriptions.

Automating tasks and activities in conjunction with using templates produced during the Scalability days (days 16-18) is a great way to save time on mundane tasks - time which you can then spend on more profitable and productive activities.

DAYS 7-9: SKIP IT

Are all your daily, weekly and monthly tasks really necessary? Chances are they're not, and not only are they unnecessary wastes of precious time, they're impeding your productivity by distracting you.

This step could also be called "simplify." The ["simple living" movement](#) is one that's become increasingly popular over the past decade as people strive to cut clutter from their homes, simplify their lives, their offices and their schedules. The idea behind "skipping it" - or simplifying - when it comes to being more productive is to simply stop spending time doing things that stand in the way of being more efficient and effective. One important caveat: This doesn't mean stripping out all fun, nonproductive activities from your schedule. If you love watching "The Voice" every week, by all means do so (and add it to your master schedule from day 1). If it's a genuinely enjoyable, stress-relieving activity that brings you joy, protect your time with it.

Be mindful of how you're spending your time on activities that don't help productivity, yet aren't really important enough to delegate to someone else. For many of us, this means changing how we respond to the constant bells and vibrations of our smartphones. A [recent joint study](#) between the University of California, Microsoft and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) found that people who "self-regulate" their email instead of responding to notifications reported higher levels of productivity. Instead of checking yours continuously, try reviewing emails, texts, etc. at scheduled times during the day, for example every two hours starting at 8 a.m., then 10 a.m., noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.

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Caution: Be wary of falling into that time-sucking inbox vortex! A [recent survey on technology at work](#) from the UK-based Future Work Center found that “email pressure” causes stress and even decreases productivity. While there are many online resources for developing an email management system, a few ways to “skip” email time-wasters include:

- Turning social media and email notifications off on your smartphone.
- Only answering emails that require less than two minutes to reply to when you check your email during the day. Otherwise defer your response to a later time (add it to your master schedule) or delegate it.
- Ruthlessly unsubscribe from email newsletter lists you never have time to read, and move those that you do read to a “weekly reading” folder to review during your downtime. You may want to schedule this, or simply make a practice of reading these non-urgent, but informative, emails when you have some downtime, such as waiting for a child to finish a sports practice or music lesson.



Another time-waster is continuously checking in on social media, then hanging out on Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest for half an hour (or longer). Instead, schedule a time-limited 10 or 15-minute social media checkup/chat time during the day or evening when you’re not at your peak productivity time. And stick to that time limit!

If self-discipline is a problem when it comes to social media, try an app like [OffTime](#) or [BreakFree](#) that’ll kick you off after a set time.

ACTION ITEM DAYS 7 TO 9

IDENTIFY TIME-WASTERS

As you move through your day (and the rest of your week), look for time-wasters that can be skipped. Be ruthless!

ACTION ITEM DAY 9

SCHEDULE TIMES TO CHECK YOUR EMAIL

You may end up tweaking the times but generally, good times to start with are the mid-morning, mid-afternoon and end of your day. And stick to it. During non-email times, try programming your smartphone to allow audible tones only for phone calls and texts, with all email and social media notifications on silent.

DAYS 10-12: DELEGATE IT

It's a well-known fact that small business owners are busy and wear many hats. You're providing the service or designing and producing the goods, selling them, managing cash flow and maybe even cleaning the office or shop floor when needed. Yet some (or maybe many) of the activities you're doing could be handled by someone else.

Boosting your own productivity often involves delegating things you do that aren't productive but are still necessary to your business. However, relinquishing control over even the smallest tasks may be difficult for some

business owners, especially in areas where you feel that only you can do the best job. And if you're thinking you'll skip this productivity step because you're running a sole proprietorship or operating as a solo-preneur, think again. Even those of you in single-person businesses have opportunities to get help from others.



Option 1: Get a virtual assistant

If you're bogged down in tasks that keep you from taking part in more productive business activities, but you don't have the time to train an administrative assistant (or you don't have the office space to put one), a virtual assistant (VA) could be the answer. A VA is an individual (often self-employed) who works remotely to help

clients with administrative, creative or even technical tasks. For example, many busy writers use a VA to provide research for larger projects and for finding and booking interviews with sources for articles or books. Internet-based businesses may rely on VAs for everything from running e-courses to video editing to customizing a new product banner for your website. To learn more about finding the right virtual assistant for you (and to post a want ad) explore sites like [VANetworking](#) and [Zirtual](#).

Option 2: Hire cleaning help

If you're rolling up your sleeves at midnight and sacrificing sleep to clean your office, shop or store, it may be time to pay someone to clean your business space and even your home. Delegate scrubbing, vacuuming and mopping to save your time and energy for more productive pursuits.



Whether you're looking for a business cleaner or a residential cleaner, word-of-mouth referrals from neighborhood business owners or your own neighbors may be the most efficient way to find top-notch cleaners. Look for someone who's [bonded and insured](#) and provides receipts for cleaning your office or shop, so you can claim your [cleaning expenses as a tax deduction](#). A bond is a form of insurance that protects you from criminal activities carried out in your home or office by the people who are cleaning it. And insurance protects you from loss if they break or damage anything while cleaning.

Option 3: Hire a freelancer or contract employee

If you're faced with a project or occasional task that you don't have the time, desire or expertise to complete, consider hiring a freelancer. Freelance writers, web designers, graphic artists and more are easy to find through LinkedIn, a quick internet search in your local area, or even through sites such as [Upwork](#) and [Fiverr](#). Of course, referrals from other business owners are great, too.

Option 4: Hire part-time help

While a virtual assistant or freelancer can help you with behind-the-scenes tasks and one-off projects, they can't mind the cash register or serve tables when you're busy or away from your business. If you're an entrepreneur with a brick-and-mortar business, hiring part-time staff may make good productivity sense, especially if you have long business hours. With someone else "minding the shop," you'll have time to work on creating new products and services, reaching out to new customers or even getting caught up on sleep.

Option 5: Delegate at home

If you have a family at home, maybe it's time to look to your spouse and/or children to take on some of your household responsibilities. Yard work, laundry, meal planning, grocery shopping, cleaning and caring for a family pet are all time-consuming chores that could be delegated to others in your household.

Sometimes the most difficult part of delegating isn't finding qualified individuals to take on tasks, it's identifying activities you're willing to give up. Yes, your teenage son can mow the lawn, but will he cut it in the diagonal pattern you love? It's time to get tough with yourself. In your quest to be more productive, remember that your way of doing things isn't the only good way. The important part is that the task gets completed.

ACTION ITEM DAY 10

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO DELEGATE AT WORK

Look through your daily "To-Do" list for each day this week. Identify and list the activities someone else could do and mark them with a "D" for delegate!



ACTION ITEM DAY 11

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO DELEGATE AT HOME

Identify and list activities someone else could do at home (i.e. cleaning, shopping, yard work, etc.).

ACTION ITEM DAY 12

DESIGN TO WHOM YOU SHOULD DELEGATE

List and evaluate your best options for delegation. For example, if you have many necessary tasks that fall into an administrative, creative or technical category, you may need a virtual assistant. Think carefully about individuals in your business or personal life who can take on some of the duties marked D, then either assign them the task (you could do this with your child or teenager) or discuss it diplomatically (a better option if you're hoping to delegate to your spouse).

DAYS 13-15: BATCH IT

Batching is another powerful productivity booster that requires completing similar tasks that require similar resources in “batches” to improve efficiency and productivity. Batching is the opposite of multitasking, because it requires focusing on one task without distraction from anything else, a more efficient use of your time.

For small business owners with big and/or young families, batching

could be **one of the biggest productivity boosters**
in both your business and personal life

Statistics and studies back up the effectiveness of batching when it comes to getting things done. Wharton professor Cal Newton interviewed 50 of the highest-achieving college students by test scores on [how they got such great marks though spending less time studying](#) than the group of students with marks just below theirs when researching his book “How to Become a Straight A Student.” The students told him they simply focused on maximizing their concentration by studying hard on only one subject prior to the related exam, without any distractions whatsoever – in other words, batching their studying. Instead of studying for multiple exams throughout the course of a few days, the students with the highest marks simply focused on studying just one subject for several hours – right before the exam.

For small business owners with big and/or young families, batching could be one of the biggest productivity boosters in both your business and personal life. For example, if you’re a writer, try scheduling hour-long brainstorm sessions to create new ideas in one – just one – content area. This lets you focus on just one topic and streamlines your ideas, instead of flitting between several different topics.

Another way to use batching to be more productive as a service business owner (web designers, graphic designers, etc.) is by spending an entire day working on just one client file. Batching may help keep you productive because you'll get in a groove, and won't have to waste time referring to notes on requirements or parameters for several different article types or clients.



There are also many ways to use batching in your personal life. For example, combining several errands into one trip is a simple form of batching, as is once-a-month (or bi-monthly) grocery shopping.

Once-a-month cooking (also known as [freezer cooking](#)) is currently a popular batching activity in which you spend an entire day or weekend preparing a month's worth of meals in double or triple batches to freeze and eat later that month. This works well for busy entrepreneurs with families, as you can co-ordinate [once-a-month cooking](#) with a monthly meal schedule. It reduces the daily stress of trying to decide what to have for dinner and also the time required to make dinner each day. It's also a fun family activity because you can delegate chopping, washing vegetables, shredding, measuring and portioning to your family members.

ACTION ITEM DAY 13

BATCH WORK ACTIVITIES

Identify at least two or three work activities that could be batched. Possibilities may include responding to emails, sending out quotes and invoicing.

ACTION ITEM DAY 14

BATCH PERSONAL ACTIVITIES

Identify at least two personal activities that could be batched.

ACTION ITEM DAY 15

ADD BATCHING TO YOUR MASTER SCHEDULE

Add your work and personal batching items into your monthly schedule. You can use some of the time you freed up from delegating and skipping things to fit in your batching tasks.

DAYS 16-18: SCALE IT

Once you know which time(s) of the day you're most productive, it's time to focus on scalability.

Scalability refers to doing something once, then replicating as much of it as possible for repeated tasks and activities. This helps you save time and effort, by enabling you to produce exponentially through the efficiency of not having to put in the corresponding amount of time and effort needed for the first attempt. Scalability can be applied to many aspects of business from mundane administrative tasks to production operations, to potentially your services, themselves.

Examples of scalability include:

- **Templating.** Use an email template to save time answering commonly received email correspondence. Or create a template or formula that can be easily customized for each customer's order rather than starting from scratch each time. For instance, if you're a web designer working with dentists, you might create a standardized one column website with places to include all the standard information that dentist offices typically should include on a website like their logo, biography, office hours and services. Once you've created a "dentist website template" you'll have a good starting point each time you get a new dental client. Scale this template outward to other sectors by adapting it to other sole practitioners such as doctors, lawyers and accountants.
- If you're in an advice-based business, you probably get the same questions from different clients day after day. Make meetings more productive for you and your clients by providing answers to common questions ahead of time. That way you can get to more specific matters earlier in your appointment.
- Why not gather the top 20 most commonly asked questions and package your answers in a way that gives you new resources for your clients? Direct them to this guide to save time and market your expertise.



- Packaging your expertise as an eBook, online course or webinar that you can sell as an additional product.
- Using a program with templates to take care of some of your administrative/bookkeeping tasks. Consider scaling up your customer billing or employee payroll by using an online accounting program such as [Quickbooks](#) or [Freshbooks](#), and proposal/bidding with a program like [Bidsketch](#).

**ACTION ITEM
DAY 16****IDENTIFY THREE SCALABLE ACTIVITIES IN
YOUR BUSINESS**

If you're having a tough time thinking of any, ask yourself what you find yourself repeating to each customer. And what do you need to know from or about each customer?



Remember, you're trying to identify activities that are scalable in your own business in order to create efficiency. It could be that it's time to consider adopting a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system that has digital templates for common activities. This could help you save time gathering and referencing customer information, streamlining communication and follow-up with potential and new clients about their needs and wants for a project.

Once you've identified your opportunities, but before you move on to day 5's action item, time yourself completing one of the activities (try a free online timer like [Toggl](#)). This will give you a benchmark to use as a comparison with your soon-to-be created scalable version of the activity.

**ACTION ITEM
DAY 17****CREATE A TEMPLATE**

If you operate a service-based business that requires detailed information to be gathered prior to a first appointment, such as a dentist or optometry office, create a Customer Information template for new patients to complete. This ensures you have the information you need all in one place and organized the same way for each patient, making it easier to find what you're looking for quickly (Note: this Customer Information Template can be a quick way to collect details to input into a digital CRM as well).

Templates are a great way to scale up productivity because they give you clear direction about your next task. Your “fiddling” time is removed, and they save precious time, by eliminating the need to repeat the same information or tasks over and over again.

Choose at least one of the activities from day 4 and create a template or formula to scale it up. For example, writers spend a good portion of their days pitching article ideas to clients. A pitch template may include:

- A possible headline
- Potential lead paragraph
- Several subheadings (including a “client’s choice”)
- Three suggested sources/expert interviews
- Suggested word count
- Turn-around time

Creating a basic pitch template

saves time and gives writers an outline to fill in quickly when inspiration hits. Writers may also use an email template for the first contact with expert sources, and for follow up emails letting them know the article they were quoted in was just published.

If you have the time, create templates for each of the action items from day 4 and watch your productivity increase.

Templates are a great way to
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 because they give you clear direction
 about your next task

ACTION ITEM DAY 18

SIMPLIFY ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

Who loves bookkeeping and accounting? Unless your business provides bookkeeping or accounting services, chances are you’d rather spend time doing what you love, not tracking your expenses and creating invoices. Today’s action item requires that you identify at least one administrative task you could scale and then make it happen. Possible items include:

- Bids, proposals or quotes
- Invoicing
- Payroll

**ACTION ITEM
DAY 18****BONUS: EVALUATE YOUR SCALING SUCCESS**

Remember when you timed your activity pre-scaling? Time it again after scaling to see how much time you saved. Then apply your saved time to another activity. For example, say you're a writer and it took you 25 minutes on day 4 to create a typical blog post pitch for a client prior to using a pitch template, and that you created two, taking a total of 50 minutes. Today when you timed yourself using the template it took you just 15 minutes for one and

30 minutes for two. Your template gave you another 15 minutes to create a third pitch with five more minutes to spare. You were more productive and gave yourself some extra time.



DAYS 19-21: FIND AN APP FOR IT

For all its potential for distracting us from the tasks we should be focused on, technology has also put some powerful productivity tools right in the palm of our hands. While there are literally thousands of time-saving, list-making, simplify-your-life apps available, keep it simple when it comes to choosing and using productivity apps. Try to find just three or four that you're comfortable with, are easy to use and are either free or inexpensive.

Stick to apps that sync between your laptop and your smartphone. This way you won't have to spend the extra time and effort to key information in twice. And while you may love trying out new productivity tools and apps, don't be surprised if you find yourself returning to these tried-and-true apps for organizing your business and personal life in a logical, efficient and effective way.



Evernote - Organize lists and ideas, and capture images from websites. Evernote's free version has everything you need to

keep track of shopping lists (try coordinating them with a monthly meal plan, tracked in Google Calendar), new business ideas, and to store other important information in a library of virtual notebooks. Evernote is also great for capturing snippets of information like business cards or web pages and then sharing the info with others using a shared notebook. Use Evernote on your laptop to create and keep ideas, and download the app onto your phone so if you're out and about and inspiration strikes, you can key in a few notes.



Freedom - Cure yourself of online distractions. If you spend most of your workday on a computer but struggle with the distraction of social media or other websites, try Freedom on your Windows-based PC or Mac computer and your Android or iPhone. Freedom is what's known as a blocker - it blocks distractions such as other apps, social media and everything else on the internet that could get in the way of you actually working on your digital device. You choose what you want to block (and when), so you can focus on being your most productive during work-designated times.



Google Docs – Save time organizing, accessing and saving documents to be more productive, especially if you run an information-heavy, team-based business. To access documents across devices and allow others to quickly view and edit these documents try Google Docs. Changes happen in real time, so there's no need to waste time trying to incorporate the edits of three or four different people in different locations – everyone with permissions can edit in one spot. Download the Google Docs app on your Android or iPhone device for editing on the fly.



Toggl – Track your time to see when you're most productive. Though there's a paid version, as with Evernote, the free version provides everything a busy small business owner needs to track work. When you sit down to work on an assignment for a client, set your Toggl timer and get started. Use Toggl to compare your productivity at different times of the day as well as calculate hourly earnings for different clients, so you can see your productivity through a financial filter. Try using Toggl along with following a loose **Pomodoro** time management system to maximize your productivity. For example, work in 30-minute batches with a five-minute break for stretching and moving around. If you manage to do this four times without interruption, you could then take a 20 minute break.



Remember, when it comes to finding and using apps to become more productive, less is more. Too many apps may clutter your digital devices and even distract you from your goal to become more productive – it can be tempting to hop onto a Facebook or Instagram app when you should be completing a work task. Whittle down your app list to just a few that'll help maximize productivity. Four may be all you need: one for time-tracking, one for organization, one for file-sharing and one to eliminate distractions.

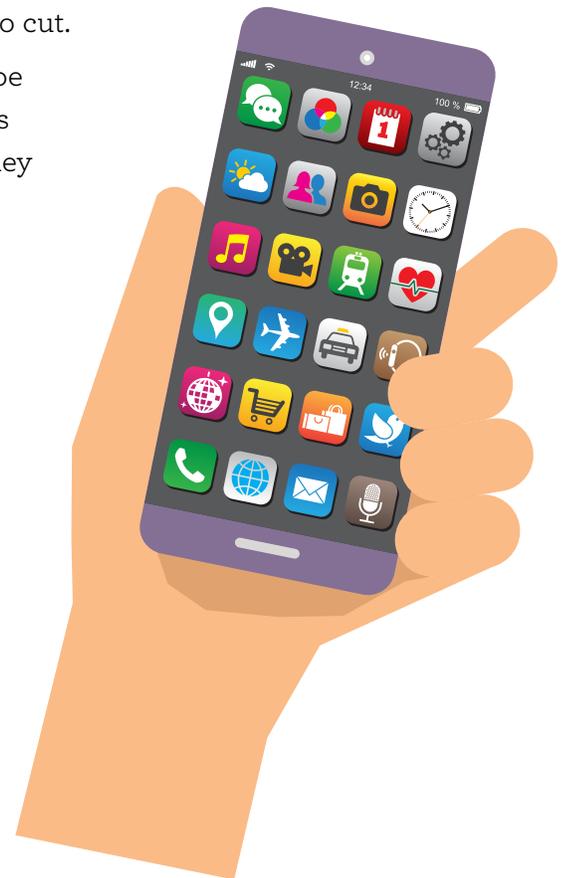
**ACTION ITEM
DAY 19****CLEAN UP YOUR DIGITAL TOOLS**

Consider the apps and/or digital tools you currently use to organize your life and business, and ask yourself these questions:

- Is there overlap between them? If so, choose one to cut.
- Are you using all (or most) of their features? Maybe one of your current apps provides enough features for you to cut another to save time, effort and money (if it's a paid app).
- Are they synced between your devices?

**ACTION ITEM
DAYS 20 AND 21****TRY A TIME-TRACKING APP**

Try a new app to track how you're spending your days. This is a great way to monitor your productivity as you apply what you've learned over the past three weeks.



CONCLUSION

Once you've made it to the end of your 21 days, congratulate yourself on work well done! However, your commitment to being productive doesn't end here.

Your dedication will have helped you determine the times of day you're most productive, resulting in a new and improved schedule. Revise your schedule as your business and life changes. Make a point to revisit your schedule monthly (why not schedule it in right now?) and update it as needed.

You'll also have had a chance to apply the principal of scalability to your business by creating and using templates, and saving time and effort by automating tasks. You'll have simplified your life by identifying activities that can be skipped without compromising productivity, and freed up more of your time by delegating some activities to others. Finding areas of your business and personal life where batching similar tasks that use similar resources will have helped you maintain focus and work more efficiently. And then you'll be working on finding and using the best apps to maximize your productivity.

Customize your productivity plan

to best suit your personal and business needs, and plan to commit to ongoing tweaking and refining as your business and personal life evolve, or as your focus changes

Only you can determine how successful this guide has been in helping you become more productive, and to do this look back and evaluate the work you've done over the past three weeks.

How many hours did you shave off each week? Look for ways to boost productivity by investing these hours in both your personal and professional life. For example, if you saved three hours a week, you may choose to invest

one hour in additional sales/marketing time, one hour in producing more services or products, and one hour for additional personal time, maybe to leave an hour early on Friday, or take an extra-long lunch one day a week.

Don't get discouraged if you aren't yet as productive as you'd like to be. Maximizing productivity takes awareness and time. It's also important to note that no two small business owners are exactly alike. Customize your productivity plan to best suit your personal and business needs, and plan

to commit to ongoing tweaking and refining as your business and personal life evolve, or as your focus changes. Keep at it, and soon you'll find a productivity rhythm that works for you.



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