

A selection of the BEST Business Success Strategies

20 Inspirational Business Articles

BY

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ABOUT INOVIZION AND THE AUTHOR



Gina Mostert is a business success strategist and founder of Inovizion, a management and business consultancy that provides individualised strategy and change consulting services, as well as executive, individual, team and creative coaching.

As consultant and coach, Gina works with executives, entrepreneurs, business owners and independent professionals to plan for success, get organised and take decisive action to get great business results.

By creatively combining the best of consulting, coaching and mentoring, she helps clients define exactly WHAT they want to be, have or do in business and HOW they intend to get there. Because of this, clients can:

- Get more focussed in business
- Plan to achieve better business results
- Improve productivity and profits
- Reach more ideal clients
- Get more organised in business
- Accelerate your personal and business development
- Restore professional passion and energy

Gina especially enjoys helping people who consider trading the corporate world for a new career, solo- or small business venture, as well as those who have already made the courageous leap to self-employment and now need to take the business to the next level.

Specific Service Offerings include:

High-Impact Facilitation and Consulting – For organisations and businesses who need a helping hand with the planning of strategic, business improvement or change initiatives.

Coaching and Mentoring– For executives, entrepreneurs, business owners and individuals - A facilitative, supportive and forward-looking process to unlock potential, maximise performance and bring about POSITIVE CHANGE.

Coaching Programs include VIP Private Coaching (Platinum, Gold and Silver), VIP Jump Start Coaching (Customised or Blitz Biz Planning) and Masterminds (as of May 2011)

Kick-Start your Business - 8 Essentials for Business Breakthroughs Program – For business owners, entrepreneurs and self-employed professionals who are super-ready to take their business to the next level. Workshops and Home Study.

NBI® Whole Brain Preference Profiling – For individuals in all walks of life to understand thinking preferences and discover professional passion to guide career and life choices.

Want to step up your game? Contact Gina to arrange for a no-obligation introductory session.

10 THINGS I WISH I KNEW WHEN I STARTED MY OWN BUSINESS

In essence, I'm a corporate refugee. After a thrilling and very busy corporate career of more than 12 years, I started-up my 'own thing' a few years ago. As an independent business consultant, coach and business owner, I'm following my passion to help other businesses and executives become more successful – and yes, I continue to do work for selected corporate clients, but on my terms. Life as a business owner has been interesting to say the least, but there are a number of things I wish I knew when I started out on my own – things would have been easier if I did!

Let me share my list (some things I knew of, but never realised the importance):

1. Passion is everything! Whatever you do in business or in life, try to do something that you are passionate about. This provides the energy and inspiration to get up and go every day (and keep going). Whatever you do, DO IT with passion, energy and enthusiasm and you will naturally attract opportunities in your business. Find your passion (what you love) and purpose (your natural talents, gifts and skills) and stay connected to it!

2. Without ACTION, nothing happens. OK, now this sounds obvious, but it is scary how we can delay our own success and progress by procrastination. A great idea, plan or suggestion means nothing (and generates no revenue) if no explicit ACTION is taken.

3. Your relationships will pull you through. Strong and authentic interpersonal relationships really make a difference. When the going gets tough, you can tap into a network where you are known, liked and trusted. You can ask for advice, find business opportunities or find ways to collaborate, bearing in mind that you also need to give back in the relationship. Despite all the technological advances and opportunity for virtual social networking, face-to-face personal contact, is still the best way to build authentic relationships. I try to maintain contact with most people I've dealt with in my professional career and still get referrals from people I might not have worked with for more than 10 years!

4. You cannot do it all on your own. I'm a DIY type of business woman. I like to try or figure things out before I delegate or outsource it. This has not always been the best approach for my business, as I could have leaped ahead much quicker, had I taken on a business and marketing coach earlier in my independent career. I still like to try and experiment with things myself, but have learned that I get things done much quicker when I'm supported by a strong team and network. I use the services of virtual assistants, a web designer, graphic designer, bookkeeper and more to improve my efficiency and effectiveness. I have regular contact with my life coach, I link into at least two business and marketing masterminds, and I participate in business and professional networking forums.

5. Things usually take longer than planned or expected. I am quite an optimist and tend to generate ideas fast and furious, BUT in reality, the implementation is not always as easy. Regardless whether it is starting up the business, implementing a new growth strategy, ramping up business, creating a website or launching a new product or offering, it usually takes longer than expected. I've learned to build in extra time for my business projects and have fun during journey – no use beating myself up for not getting everything done as planned!

6. Walk your talk. You cannot expect to attract top-notch clients if you and your business are not a reflection of what you claim to represent or are offering your clients! You need to 'walk your own talk'. This also implies that you need to INVEST in your business to have the right image, professional tools and infrastructure. You cannot expect clients to invest in your services if you are not willing to invest in your own business and professional offerings.

7. You need to be resilient. We all make mistakes from time to time and will most definitely experience setbacks. We need to be OK with it and learn how to bounce back, rather than blame-shifting. Every set-back presents an opportunity - you just need to step out of the detail to see the big picture.

8. Perfection can paralyze you. I personally set high standards and like to have things in my particular way. This has not always been a good thing – I would actually end up spending too much time and effort to get to the 'perfect' solution, without getting any additional financial benefit. It is also called Perfection Paralysis – MUST be avoided at all times!

9. More qualifications do not necessarily mean more business. I'm giving it to you straight - to grow your business, you need to grow and develop yourself, BUT, unfortunately many people think that this can only be achieved with an additional formal qualification. Unless an additional formal qualification is essential to conduct your business (such as a tax practitioner, accountant or medical professional), you need to carefully consider your options. A brand new qualification does not automatically bring new clients, more business or more money to your doorstep. For example, I did not automatically get more clients and business after completing my formal coaching certification. Although this was a great course, with excellent content, it did not generate more revenue for me. Only after investing and working with a business and marketing coach, I learned the real tips and tricks to create a growing and profitable coaching and consulting business! Take care when you invest in your growth and development – more qualifications do not always equal more revenue!

10. You need to use both your head and your heart in you biz. In your own business, you will always be confronted with decisions – some not really straight forward or simple. The facts may look fantastic on the surface, but your head and heart may be in conflict. It is always good to examine the facts guided by our values, but if the conflict remains we need to trust our intuition (heart).

In conclusion, it is fair to say that being in my own business had been a major reality check! Is it easier than corporate life? No. Is it more fulfilling? Yes, most of the time. Would I ever think of going back? Not easily, but there are no absolutes!

Your professional challenge - Regardless where you are - in a corporate career, starting up or in an established business - you need to understand that you are ultimately responsible for creating the life and career you want. Take action today to become the architect of your professional future! Dream big, define the goals and take the first step – you do not always have to know the HOW TO, before you decide to commit to a professional dream.

REAL RESULTS IN YOUR BUSINESS – 8 ESSENTIALS FOR BUSINESS BREAKTHROUGHS

For most professionals, aspiring and existing business owners and entrepreneurs life has been tough in the recent economic climate. Although the economic tide is turning, many professionals and businesses are still struggling to move beyond the recession.

If you have been affected by these negative conditions, you probably feel that you really deserve more in your professional life - More opportunities for growth, more clients, more business, more profits, more balance, more freedom, more security, etc. The need for change may be clear, but do you know **WHAT** is required to decisively move to the next level and **HOW** it should be approached?

Most business-minded individuals need some guidance and direction from time to time, especially if you are looking to grow your business for success. So whether you're just starting on your own, you've invested years into a business, or are somewhere in between, it is worth getting back to the basics, or what I would refer to as the 8 Essentials for Business Breakthroughs:

1. Follow Your Passion and Purpose – Life is really too short not to love what you do, especially if it consumes a significant amount of time in your life! It is just so much easier to get up and go if you are inspired about what you do. Find a business or job that is closely aligned to your professional passion and purpose, and the positive energy will flow naturally!

2. Create Focus in Your Life – You are the architect of your own professional and business life. If you have a clear picture of what you want to be, do and have, you can create inspiring goals and set your priorities accordingly.

3. Get Clear on WHAT you offer and WHO you serve – In tough times we often get confused about what we are offering and who our target market is. It is easy to think that you need to offer more options and more choices to a wider target market. You may even think that you cannot be selective and that you need to do business with each and every client out there, even if it is not an ideal client. A clear recipe for failure is trying to be everything to everybody. Do not get confused – you should be offering relevant, value-adding and quality products and services to a clearly defined, specific and viable target market.

4. Implement Compelling Attraction Marketing – It is really time- and energy consuming to be out there “pushing” the sale. For most of us this may feel totally unauthentic! On the other hand, the entire sales process is so much easier if ideal clients WANT to buy from you because they know, like and trust you and what you offer is exactly what they need! Through multiple marketing strategies, utilising effective and compelling communication, it is really possible to authentically pull ideal clients and customers in. More ideal clients mean more business!

5. Take Action and Be Consistent – The difference between a great idea and great results is ACTION. Consistent results, including consistent sales and revenues, require consistent planning, organising, marketing and action. Just do it!

6. Get Organised – To some, this may not seem like a priority, but every business must have its house in order. For your business to thrive, become really prosperous, reduce business risks and free up more time, it is essential to operate in an environment where there is organisation and systems to consistently deal with repeatable and predictable activities.

7. Get Support – The truth is that you cannot become prosperous and succeed on your own. For you and your business to be more productive, develop and grow, you need assistance, guidance and support. ASSISTANCE with administration or tasks where it can be done better, faster or more cost effective than on your own (aka outsourcing). GUIDANCE from mentors and professional affiliations. SUPPORT from a coach, business affiliates, peer-networks or masterminds.

8. Maintain a Winning Mindset – Last but definitely not least, our thoughts and beliefs are essential ingredients in the universal recipe for success. All too often we seem to have everything in place to prosper and succeed, yet we have doubts – and the great results are not coming through. These doubts can be the result of internal fears (fear of failure, fear of success) or even a scarcity mindset (“I do not have enough time, money, skills, training, experience, clients or perfect enough product to pull this business off”). We are often our own worst enemies, but by understanding the universal laws of attraction and taking decisive action to alter thoughts, beliefs and behaviours, a winning mindset can be cultivated!

Once you have these 8 essentials in place, you will be setting yourself and your business up to prosper and rapidly move beyond the recession!

Your professional challenge - Ask yourself 8 important questions:

1. What is my professional passion and purpose and is my current job/business aligned accordingly?
2. What is my professional vision and what are my goals, action steps and priorities to achieve these?
3. What is my niche, who are my ideal clients, what do I offer my clients and what is my unique selling proposition?
4. What are my various marketing strategies and what compelling communication and tools do I use to attract ideal clients?
5. What Monthly, Weekly and Daily plans do I have in place to consistently get the right results?
6. How organised am I in my business and what systems do I use to simplify repeatable and predictable activities?
7. What assistance do I have for my business and who do I network with for mentoring and support?
8. What is my current mindset and what are the dominant thoughts, beliefs and fears that are holding me back?

VISION – ONE OF THE GREATEST MOTIVATORS IN BUSINESS AND IN LIFE

Has there ever been a time in your professional or personal life where you felt stuck? You knew that you wanted to move ahead towards a more positive or successful space, but you just could not get going? You had a vague idea of where you were heading but you were still not clear about the final destination? Did you experience frustration and overwhelm? Well, chances are that you did not have a clear enough picture of **WHAT** it was that you were aiming for and therefore did not manage to get clear on **HOW** you were going to get there - you lacked a clear and compelling vision.

Today's article briefly explores the relevance of a clear vision and then goes on to present a few simple steps for you to define a compelling personal, professional or business vision.

A crystal clear “big picture” of what you want to be, do and have, also known as a vision, is probably one of the greatest motivators in business and in life in general. A compelling vision provides energy and inspiration - it can keep you focused when business gets tough and it can literally pull you ahead when you are dealing with individual goals and actions.

Without the clarity of a desired outcome for your business, professional or personal life, it is impossible to define a decisive course of action to achieve the latter. Consider the following extract from Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll: *"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. "I don't much care where" said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.* It is obvious, without a clear vision, you can pretty much head in any direction – it does not really matter!

Well, just how do you define a clear and compelling vision for your business or your life? Let me share a few simple visioning strategies and tips:

1. **Make it a priority** – If you are serious about a better business or personal and professional success, you need to set aside some time for planning on a regular basis. Make a date with yourself to do visioning and planning and diarise it – treat it as if it was an appointment with your best client!
2. **Think Big** – You do yourself no favour by playing small. Ask yourself if money was no constraint and if it was impossible to fail, what would you want to be, do and have in life and in business?
3. **Brainstorm** – Generate as many options as possible for what you want to be, do and have. Get creative and make a mind-map or list for each area. Use colours and pictures to keep the creative juices going. Only once you have finished brainstorming should you evaluate the various options.
4. **Make it real** – It is great to dream, but you should be able to make it real. Write it down, add detail to your big picture and attach a timeframe to it (for example, by end of 2011 or by my 40th birthday). Write down your specific goals to achieve your vision!
5. **Make it visible** – Make a vision-board, poster or composite picture of your dreams. Keep this visible where you can be reminded of your vision on a regular basis.

In conclusion, the first step towards achieving a dream is to make the decision to take **ACTION** – Define your vision and then do what it takes to get there!

Your professional challenge - Go out and define your Vision for the next year – Ask yourself, where do you want to be this time next year? What kind of lifestyle do you want? What will your personal and business relationships look like? Where do you see your business and/or your career? How many clients do you want? What products or service offerings do you want to create? What are the revenues that you will be generating? What will you have achieved in respect of personal development and learning?

Answer these questions in the present, as if it is already in place, then define snapshots in time of where you need to be every few months down the line to achieve the outcome. Finally, get clear on where you want be in the next month and start by defining the explicit actions to start moving towards your vision. Write it all down and make a commitment to review your progress monthly. This is the first step in translating your vision into reality!

A SIMPLE SUCCESS STRATEGY – FOCUS!

High achieving businesses and individuals have a common trait – They consistently look to find and follow the fastest, most direct path to profitability and success. Consistently working at doing the right thing, the most efficient and effective way, to get significant results in business and in life. It is called FOCUS!

Despite this principle being really straightforward, many business owners and professionals are still struggling daily. Some are not really clear what they should be focussing on, whilst others think they are doing the right things, yet heading for disaster.

Here are a few simple business success strategies and tips that, if implemented, can significantly improve professional focus, success and profitability:

Get a clear and compelling Vision. Where do you ultimately want to be in future? Is this space clearly defined and is there alignment with a deeper passion and purpose? Many individuals claim to have a dream or a desire, but yet the underlying motives are not clear. Take care to capture your vision in some form or another – it can be in a detailed journal, a one-page picture, or on a vision-board.

Understand that Less is More. Identify and commit to few core objectives (obviously the right ones) and work them hard. Once you have set your business and personal goals, identify the top 3 (or primary) goals and spend 80% of your time, efforts and resources on these. Secondary goals can be dealt with in the remaining 20%! Trust me, you will get more done by selecting a few specific tasks daily, rather than trying to multi-task a daily to-do list of 15 items.

During the working day, only do the tasks that are contributing to your predefined professional goals, your profits and your business success, otherwise, you are wasting your precious time!

Find a Speciality and Niche. The reality is that you cannot be everything to everybody. As a specialist, you can do the things that you are really good at – focus on your unique skills and talents. If you do have multiple, diverse components in your business, see how these can be combined to serve a specific and narrow target market or niche.

Clear your Space. Mental- and physical clutter are killers when it comes to focus. Preoccupation with too many ideas or thoughts not only limits creativity and productivity, but drains energy. A conscious exercise of verbalising or writing down and then “parking” big issues, before going into a meeting or taking on a significant task, can really help to clear mental space. Avoid information overload and be selective with what you read, watch and listen to.

The same goes for your physical workspace - by creating order in a cluttered workspace, you minimise external distractions and enhance the ability to focus. Get systems to deal with paper and contain clutter before it enters your work space.

Keep an eye on the Outcomes, not Shortcomings. You get what you focus on, even if it is not what you really want! This means that if you keep focussing on what you lack, you are likely to stay stuck in

a scarcity-scenario. The bottom-line is to know where you are heading and consistently remind yourself of what you want to achieve, rather than negative self-talk about not enough money, time or resources.

You are responsible for your business success and you can decide what you want to do - With the right focus, you can become the architect of your own professional future. If you still need help finding your focus, get input from a mentor, or seek assistance from a business-minded professional or coach.

Your professional challenge

Ask yourself: - Am I laser-focussed, or am I standing in my own way and preventing my business success? Which of the above strategies are not implemented yet?

Take ACTION: Get a clear vision, set goals, stick to your to-do list and keep implementing with an eye on the outcome.

6 DIMENSIONS THAT CHARACTERISE SUCCESS ORIENTED SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS

Have you ever thought about what makes small businesses REALLY successful? What are the common factors, or characteristics of those who succeed and make it big in small business?

The US based Guardian Life Small Business Research Institute (www.smallbizdom.com) recently released results of a study that identifies the dimensions that characterise small business owners who exhibit a strong success orientation. This orientation is based on their desire to grow the size of their businesses, expand revenues and enjoy longevity in their business.

The study identified 60 critical factors, linked to **6 specific dimensions**, which provide more insight into the success-oriented small business owner. These dimensions outlined in the findings are:

1. Collaborative. No surprise! Success-oriented small business owners are serious about building relationships with others – They rely on key relationships to make things happen, ranging from their customers, employees and management team, to business partners, lawyers and accountants, to name a few. It is no wonder that networking is such an important relationship-building tool!

2. Self-Fulfilled. Success-oriented small business owners place a high value on personal fulfilment and the gratification that they get from running their businesses! They highly value doing something for a living that they love to do and enjoy being in control of their own personal income and net worth. Fulfilment is something most people strive for, but success-oriented business owners actually seem to get it right.

3. Future-Focused. This dimension is about having a vision, goals and well thought-through plans for the business, both for the short and the longer term. Well, if you have no idea where you are going with your business, you can follow any route – you are going nowhere! “in this dimension, financial and human resources are also managed with the future in mind.

4. Curious. Success-oriented business owners are open to learn from their own and others’ experiences, actively seeking better ways to manage the business and innovate to create new opportunities. They seek information from different sources, but highly value the internet as a source of knowledge.

5. Tech-Savvy. In our fast-moving information-and-attention age, it is no surprise that success-oriented business owners use technology for leverage. They rely on technology to make business more effective and efficient and to more effectively interact with their clients, customers, suppliers and public in general. Cell phone services, email, social media and instant messaging are all services that changed the way people do business in recent years!

6. Action-Oriented. Last, but not the least – action orientation is a key differentiator when it comes to success-orientation. Action oriented business owners are focussed on taking the business to the next level, take charge to set their businesses apart from the competition, are ready to take advantage of

emerging opportunities and devote most of their time to increase sales and generate revenues. They see opportunity in adversity and are generally less concerned about the general state of the economy. In conclusion, it is fair to say that the presence of these factors is critical in predicting success in setting-up, managing and growing small enterprises.

Your professional challenge – Take a few minutes out to reflect on the information shared – you may even want to read the entire report:

(<http://www.smallbizdom.com/research/monographs/success-oriented-small-business.pdf>).

Look at your own business and management style – What are you doing well, and what can you improve on? Write down 3 things that you can change in the next week (or month) to improve your success-orientation, and DO IT! YOU are responsible for your business success!

PROCRASTINATION IS THE THIEF OF TIME, AMONGST OTHER THINGS.

We are all too familiar the proverb “Procrastination is the Thief of Time”. Well, today I would like to add that, in business and in life in general, it is also the thief of energy, enthusiasm, creativity, productivity and ultimately money and success.

Have you ever been dragging your feet to complete an important task? Reluctant to have difficult conversations with employees or business associates where performance is not on par? Finding excuses for not making difficult phone calls? Avoiding tedious administrative tasks such as bookkeeping, invoicing or filing? Or even failing to complete projects or initiatives that could actually make you and your business smarter or better?

If you have experienced any of these situations (or any other self-imposed delays) in business and in life, chances are that you have experienced feelings of guilt, negative emotions, or you may have even suffered some direct (or indirect) financial loss as a result. No need to extend the guilt-trip – most of us have times when we procrastinate!

Why do we do it? Here are some possibilities:

- The task at hand may no longer be interesting or challenging enough.
- We may not be sure how to approach the project or may feel somewhat overwhelmed.
- The outcome or vision of what we want to accomplish may not be clear.
- Hardly anybody likes to have discussions where egos may get bruised.
- Not everybody enjoys routine tasks that require attention to detail.
- We may not feel confident or skilled to effectively deal with the task at hand.
- We want to get it all perfectly before declaring it done.

Initially our inaction or avoidance may make us think that we have things under control, but as time progresses, the thoughts of the uncompleted tasks keep lingering, occupying mind-space and eventually creating negative energy and even self-doubt.

Why can we not just get it done? **How can we move beyond our self-imposed mental-blocks?** Here are a few simple considerations to effectively deal with Procrastination.

1. Fix your mindset – The sooner you can get your mind in a positive space about the task being avoided or delayed, the sooner you will get the bottom-line benefit. Identify the **EXPLICIT BENEFIT** that you will get once the task is completed, for example:

- The sooner I get a new product developed and launched, the sooner it can generate **REVENUES** for my business.
- The sooner I invoice, the sooner I get paid, improving **CASH FLOW**.

2. Focus on one thing only – Your mind-space may be overloaded with clutter that is distracting you, negatively impacting your clarity and focus. Our minds are capable of processing multiple thoughts at

once, but this is NOT ideal when we need to focus. You may want to employ some simple focussing techniques to clear your space, for example:

- Deliberately decide to minimize external distractions – switch off the cell phone, email, close the office door, inform others that you are not available while you are working on an important task that needs to get done.
- Deliberately decide to “park” disruptive thought-processes that are not relevant to the task at hand.

3. Deal with your Perfection-Paralysis – It is easy to get stuck on a task where you want to get it “perfect” before moving forward. Get over it! You are merely delaying your own success. Successful entrepreneurs and businesses get new ideas, products and marketing launched quickly and do the fine-tuning later. Where would Richard Branson be if he first wanted to create the perfect record company or perfect airline before he launched it?

4. Be accountable– It is always easier to get things done if we have a deadline looming, or someone we need to account to. Set your date, and commit to it in a big way – you will naturally step up to the challenge. Here are some ideas:

- Need to get an important presentation or signature-talk prepared? Commit to do a review or “dry run” with a colleague or peer at a defined date.
- Want to launch a new book, product or service? Announce a launch date, publically commit to it and then identify a coach, consultant, peer or colleague to support you in getting there.

5. Take a “No Excuses” approach – This is probably one of the most empowering commitments that an individual can make. Never allow excuses such as ‘I do not have time’ or ‘I am too busy’ get in your way. YOU always have a choice!

Your professional challenge - Procrastination is a reality in our lives, but it is up to you to decide if you will allow it to control your thoughts, your mindset and your life. Whether it is a difficult phone call, an inconvenient conversation, a new business project, or even business administration or marketing, do not delay your own success - Just go out there and do it!

LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO PUT UP WITH NON-IDEAL CLIENTS, CUSTOMERS OR BUSINESS ASSOCIATES

In business we are almost 100% reliant on clients or customers to bring in our revenues. Many of us are just as reliant on business partners or associates to generate new business or to effectively deliver our products and services. However, just because we need clients, customers and business associates, it does not mean that we should do business with every available prospect out there. In business, some people should be avoided at all costs - Not just because of the negative energy that they generate, but because they may actually be impacting your financial bottom-line in a negative way!

Have you ever had your heart sink into your shoes at the prospect of dealing with a specific client or customer? Frustrated as you once again need to contact a habitual late-payer? Or even annoyed by the thought of a possible confrontation with a known fault-finder? I bet that you have had situations where you thought it was appropriate to “grin and bear it”. After all, you may honestly think that you need the business. Think again!

Business can be so rewarding, energising and profitable when dealing with IDEAL clients and customers. Ideal clients and customers value your products and services – they tell other like-minded people about your business, they do referrals and give flattering testimonials. Ideal customers remain loyal – thus repeat business for you!

On the contrary, do you have any idea of what it may actually cost you to do business with non-ideal clients, customers or business associates? Let me explain.

In recent years I've more than once entered into working relationships with non-ideal clients. In each instance, I thought that I would take the pain for the financial reward. In each and every instance I've regretted my decision. A few years ago I was almost out of business due to non-payment by a large public organisation – It took me more than 8 months to gracefully get out of the working relationship with my reputation intact. I have therefore become a lot more aware of who and what to avoid – it makes sense to stick to client selection principles.

Non-ideal business prospects drain your energy and enthusiasm. Their actions or inactions cause delays or diversions in the normal way you conduct business, thus wasting your precious time. For example, a late-payer is not only affecting your cash flow, but wasting your time and resources when you have to chase money that is due to you!

Another example of a non-ideal client is the chronic fault-finder. A person who is negative, finding fault right from the outset is probably never going to be satisfied with your product, service or working relationship, no matter how hard you try. They do not do referrals or give you great testimonials - thus not contributing to new or repeat business, regardless of your investment in the relationship.

So, just what and who do you need to avoid?

- Avoid those that are not **100% transparent or truthful** in their words and actions – this should be obvious!
- Avoid working relationships where clients or business associates do not take **full personal responsibility** for their decisions and actions – it is just too easy for them to blame you, or someone else, for their inaction.
- Avoid **negative individuals and chronic fault-finders** – they are probably NEVER going to be satisfied with what your business offers.
- Avoid people that are rude to lower-level staff, even if they are nice to you – if they do not **respect** someone in a lesser position, at some stage they will not respect you and your values either.
- Avoid clients, customers or business associates who **negotiate and bargain** right from the outset, especially if you are explicit about client value and if you have different offerings and options – you would feel exploited and unappreciated if you have to settle for less than your worth.

What do you do if you are already stuck in a non-ideal business relationship? End it gracefully as soon as possible – figure out an exit strategy which is supported by open communication. Do not compromise your integrity.

In my experience, for a business relationship to succeed, there has to be a win-win approach. If the benefits to all parties involved are not clear and equitable, think twice about entering into the relationship.

The conclusion – **BE SELECTIVE WHO YOU WORK WITH!** Your business and profits depend on it!

Your professional challenge – Make a list of all your existing clients, suppliers and associates. Rank them and make a call – do you gently need to release anyone?

5 COMMON SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING MISTAKES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

For most small business owners, marketing is an overwhelming concept. You may recognise that effective marketing solutions are required to gain visibility, connect with customers or clients and create a profitable business, BUT you (and many other business owners) may feel that marketing is “salezy” or inauthentic!

Small business owners are typically not excited about the prospect of marketing their products or services - After all, that is NOT the reason why you got into business in the first place! Most business owners don't know where to begin or how to focus their efforts and up to 9 out of 10 small businesses don't even have a marketing plan. Unfortunately, without effective marketing, your small business will probably not survive!

If you are running a small business which is still not getting enough clients or the desired marketing results, you may be making one of the following mistakes which typically can be avoided:

1. You are not connecting with a Specific Target Market:

Do you know your target market? Many small businesses try to reach too wide and in the process dilute their marketing focus, budget and effectiveness. It is so much easier to become client attractive if you know exactly who you are targeting, what their needs are and where to reach them.

2. You are expecting that your product or service will “sell itself”:

Many small businesses offer fantastic services or products – unfortunately this does not mean a thing if only a few people know about it! You need to be visible and valuable. You need to take action and avoid relying on your good qualifications, skills, experience or product/service features to do the talking on your behalf.

3. You have no Marketing Plan:

Without a plan (which is written down, if I might add), you have no focus. A good marketing plan for a small business can be short, on a few pages. Your marketing goals need to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART). The plan must address Why you are marketing (Purpose), Who you want to reach (Target Market), What diverse methods you will use (Marketing Mix), How Much it will cost (Budget and Time), When it will be done (Timeframe/Schedule) and How you intend to keep track of the results (Measurement). Remember, what gets measured, gets done!

4. You are focusing on your qualifications, experience, business, product or features rather than customer needs, motivators and benefits:

Successful attraction-marketers know that it is NOT about them, but about their prospects. Get to know what your target markets' motivators, challenges or pains are! What do they want more or less

of? Better health, more freedom, increased wealth, better relationships, less discomfort?
Communicate the benefits of your product or service, not the features!

5. Unclear and inconsistent marketing messages:

Marketing messages have to be formulated to speak to your target audience and their needs. There has to be reassurance that your product or service can solve their problems. There has to be consistency in all your messages. Communication has to be continuous and all messages have to lead prospects to a specific conclusion (call to action). You are ultimately connecting with the intention to convert a prospect into a loyal paying customer / client!

Your professional challenge - Is it not time to get YOUR Marketing Plan and messages up to date? It is up to you to take decisive ACTION. Write it down, then implement - Your business depends on it!

10 WAYS TO BECOME MORE CLIENT ATTRACTIVE

Have you ever wondered how some people just seem to attract success? Here you are, slaving away at your business, doing the stuff marketing textbooks tell you to do and yet other businesses and professionals in your field, doing seemingly very little, has a constant queue of prospective and new clients. How can this happen? What is their secret?

Well, let me share my take on it - They are probably very CLIENT ATTRACTIVE! To some out there, Client Attraction may sound a little new age, but if you really need more clients, you may need to pay attention!

How can you become REALLY attractive to your ideal target market? What can you do to get the right people queuing up to do business with YOU?

Here are a number of things to consider if you want to become more client-attractive and boost your business:

1. **Be Accessible** – Are you easy to do business with? Do your prospective clients know how to access you? Are you inviting them in to your business?
2. **Focus on Benefits and Results for your clients** – Are you clear about the results and benefits clients can get, or are you trying to impress with your own qualifications or fancy product features?
3. **Become a Problem Solver** – Are you offering a solution to your target market's most pressing business challenges? Do you even know their challenges?
4. **Be Generous** – By no means should you be giving away the farm, but are you offering real value, free information or even an irresistible free offer to pull prospects in?
5. **Provide Testimonials** – Are you sharing the great feedback or fantastic results you have achieved with other clients?
6. **Maintain a Positive Attitude** – Are you exuding positive energy? Trust me, not many people like chronic sceptics or fault-finders!
7. **Connect Authentically and Personally** – Are you making a personal connection with prospective clients? Do you share information about your personal (NOT private) life to establish a deeper level of trust?
8. **Consider a Guarantee** – Can you guarantee your products or services? Can you reduce the typical risk clients will have when working with you or using your products?
9. **Differentiate yourself** – What are you doing personally and in your business to stand out? How are you different from your competitors? You may want to read Seth Godin's Purple Cow...

10. **Walk the Talk** – Are you a good example or role-model? For example, a financial advisor who is not really managing his own financial affairs very well, is not really very client attractive, is he? Or, who wants to train with an unfit personal fitness instructor?

Marketing and sales become so much easier if you do not have to go out and find clients to “sell” to – let your ideal prospects find you! Take action today to become more client attractive!

Your professional challenge – Which of these techniques will you be using to attract more clients? Do you have any other techniques to share? I'd love to get your comments on my BLOG!

NETWORKING FOR SUCCESS – TOP TIPS

Networking is well known to be one of the most effective mechanisms to build and develop business- and social relationships. After all, most of us prefer to socialise and do business with people we KNOW, LIKE and TRUST. Master networkers know that not only do they connect with and attract ideal clients as a result of networking, but they often have more influence in business and in the workplace as well! Learning how to network effectively can enhance your credibility and boost your business or career in a big way, BUT there are a number of critical do's and don'ts.

Here are some practical pointers to guide you in becoming a Master Networker:

1. Get out and become visible. Include networking as one of your business or career development strategies. Plan for it and make time to engage – building and nurturing authentic relationships with like-minded people. Networking should not just be random or once off - Remember it can take months and even years of regular contact to build strong business relationships where you are known, liked and trusted. The sooner you start the better.

2. Be prepared. Professional business cards with professional contact details are a must. Have a short and punchy elevator pitch ready – you need to be able to explain exactly what you do, who you work with and how they benefit in 20 -30 seconds. Wear clothes with pockets – It is much easier to move around and take cards than trying to keep it all in your hands.

3. Listen, Listen, Listen. The key to effective communication and connection is effective listening. Avoid talking about yourself or your own business excessively. Sure, you need to be able to do a short pitch about who you are and what you offer, but it is worth a lot more to understand what the other person's challenges and needs are. Ask questions - listen for business potential and opportunity – in this way you get to understand how you can link up with a prospect at a later stage and understand how you can be of service.

4. It is not about you. Effective networking is not about working the room and handing out as many business cards as possible. Do not expect to hand out business cards and have other people contact you - they hardly ever do. Once you've connected with someone, take initiative to get THEIR card or contact details and ask if it is in order if you check in with them at a later stage (and then do it!).

You could re-connect with your new acquaintance by responding to a specific question or problem that they might have voiced, sending them valuable information, or linking them up with someone in your wider network – the idea is for YOU to follow-up the leads (and do it within 2 -3 days).

5. Move around. It's no use sitting next to your colleagues or mingling with friends only during a networking event. Try to meet and authentically connect with new people at each event. Try not to get stuck in one or two conversations only for the duration of the event. If you are the same group of people week after week at regular networking or business events, what's the point? Reach out to introduce and meet new people regularly.

6. Take care of your personal appearance and attitude. You are your own best advertisement, so take care to exude the image and personal brand that you are representing. Take note of the general dress-code and remember that a positive, energetic and positive attitude will always be attractive!

A final word on networking – remember it does not always have to be formal or just at networking events. Networking happens everywhere, everyday. Interactions can be at your sports club, church, gym or neighbour's birthday party, so be prepared and be your own best advertisement!

Your professional challenge - Decide to incorporate networking as a key element of your marketing plan! Create your own elevator pitch, have your business cards handy and slot in at the next networking opportunity.

Not sure where to start networking? There are many formal networking groups or business chambers in all the major cities. It is worth joining one or two groups as a regular member, as there are many other benefits besides monthly or weekly socials or networking events. BNI has branches and chapters in most major cities (www.bni.co.za). If you are in Pretoria area, the Capital City Business Chamber (www.ccbc.co.za) has a number of chapters in the city and the Friday Club (www.fridayclub.co.za) has weekly events for business owners in different areas. Toastmasters is an organisation where you can network and develop public speaking skills (www.toastmastersptaeast.org.za). There are also networking organisations that are focussed on professional and business woman, such as BWA (www.bwa.co.za) or the SA Council for Businesswomen (SACBW) – you can contact the centurion branch at sacbwcent@gmail.com.

Finally, you can always start your own business networking or coffee group. There is always a need for like-minded people in business to connect! Ask me how if you are stuck!

COMPELLING MARKETING MESSAGES IN 7 EASY STEPS!

Do you have a great marketing message that make ideal prospects sit up and take notice of you and your business? Are you consistently attracting the right people into your business? Yes? Then you should be congratulated – you are obviously doing the right stuff to effectively target and communicate with your ideal market!

If however you are not yet attracting enough ideal clients, or if you are battling to get your message across, you may want to ask yourself if you really have a clear, concise and compelling marketing message.

You do not have to feel stuck! Here are 7 easy steps to follow to create compelling marketing messages and copy:

1. Connect with your audience or ideal target market. Are you clear about WHO you are targeting and WHERE to find them? The first step in effective communication is knowing who your target audience is and then effectively connecting with them.

2. Understand their problems. Do you really know what challenges your target market is experiencing? Long before you can position yourself at the ideal problem-solver, you need to demonstrate that you truly understand your prospects. Remember, effective marketing is not about YOU, but all about the PROSPECT.

3. Provide reassurance. After you have demonstrated that you understand the problems, you need to provide some reassurance. Think about it, when you are personally experiencing problems, isn't it good to know that you are not alone and that there is a solution to all these problems?

4. Elaborate on the Solution Benefits. The next step in the process is to get right to the benefits of the solution. Does it save time, help the prospect to make or save money, live longer, regain youth, reduce stress, simplify their lives, make them smarter, etc.? I think you get the message.

5. Provide Proof. Most of us want to see and hear how others have benefited from a specific solution before we dive in to get it ourselves. The sceptic in us wants proof, especially if it requires a significant investment. Share client testimonials, research, case studies or other proof as appropriate. What did others gain or benefit? Can these benefits be quantified? What sets your solution apart from others in the market?

6. Solution Features are still important. Many novice marketers make the mistake of wanting to share the features of their product or service right up front. Yes, features are important, but not the first priority. Only elaborate more about the solution features once the other bases have been covered.

7. Call to Action. Finally, remember to close. This means ASKING the prospect to take the action that you want them to take. Would you want the prospect to proceed with the sale, make an appointment for an introductory consultation, or pay there and then? You need to ask! Without this crucial last step, a prospective client or customer may be lost forever if there is no follow-through.

Your professional challenge - If you are struggling to get your message across or if you are struggling to connect with your ideal target market, look at your current marketing messages (verbal and written). Can you improve your current message? Can you use the formula above?

Take ACTION today!

STAND OUT - FOCUS ON IMPROVING CLIENT SATISFACTION!

One of the best ways to build a credible and prosperous business is with loyal base of satisfied customers and clients. Raving fans who do repeat business, give glowing testimonials and refer others will actually become your unpaid sales-force through word-of-mouth marketing.

Unfortunately, in many industries and businesses, exceptional service is not really top of mind. Sure, there might be a mission statement that says something about “being client centric”, “customer oriented” or “customer is king”, but businesses are not always walking the talk.

Providing an exceptional client or customer experience is not difficult at all. It is about taking CONSISTENT ACTION to create an authentic connection with a client or customer – focussing on the things that matter most to THEM, not you. It is really one of the easiest ways to **differentiate** your business in tough times!

There are obviously **many ways to create remarkable client experiences**, but here are my **six top tips** to improve client and customer satisfaction (and boost your sales at the same time).

1. Know their true needs. Customers don't buy products or services, but solutions to problems. If you have the ability to understand and tap into what motivates, inspires and energizes them, you become so much better at anticipating their needs and responding accordingly. *Do you know your ideal client's biggest problems and greatest needs? What are you doing about it?*

2. Listen! Listen! Listen! Open the communication lines. Take care to connect authentically, ask questions about needs and listen to the feedback the client is really giving. I recently met with a salesman who was so busy delivering his sales pitch that I did not have time to listen to my requests. Needless to say, he did not close the deal - Even though I was really interested in the product and ready to buy, he was not listening to me at all and I did not feel comfortable to proceed at the time! To improve service, we need to stop making assumptions and start listening. *Are you paying attention to your clients feedback? Do you know what three things are most important to your ideal client?*

3. Make your clients feel valued. Everybody wants to feel appreciated. Everybody values sincerity. It creates good feeling and establishes trust. There are really many ways with which you can make clients feel good about doing business with you. It can be a simple phone call, a hand-written “Thank You”-note, a small special gift when they bring in new business or a quick call on a birthday or special anniversary. Authentic connections are made when clients and customers feel that we care about them. *What are you doing in your business to make clients feel valued?*

4. Follow-up. Client relationships are built over time, usually after a series of interactions. This usually requires initiative and follow-up from YOU, not the client. The reality is that we all get busy, but this is no excuse not to follow-up. The easiest ways to do regular follow-ups are to either set aside specific time every week for follow-ups (e.g. Friday mornings), or to make a note or reminder in your diary. *When at first a client is not ready to proceed, ask when they would like you to check-in again – 3 days, 3 weeks, 3 months? Then do it!*

5. Make business easy. One of the best ways to win clients is to be easy to do business with. This does not mean more technology, fancy call centres or more self-help tools! It means reaching out to clients in a way that works for them – This could be a personal touch, being accessible, easy to reach, uncomplicated forms where administration is required, etc. For each client this may be different. Always look for ways to be of better service your clients. Tell clients what to expect, when, and then do what you promised. *When last have you made an effort to ask and figure out how you can make it easier for your clients to do business with you?*

6. Know when and how to apologise. When something goes wrong, do not offer multiple excuses or shift the blame, apologise! It's easy and when done with sincerity, clients appreciate it. The client may not always be right, but they need to feel that they are getting a good deal. Deal with problems immediately and inform clients what steps have been taken to rectify problems. Be open for complaints and feedback – you can only learn and improve business in future.

Your professional challenge: What can YOU do, starting next week, to improve client satisfaction and boost your business?

Schedule it in your diary and to-do list and DO IT!

OUTSOURCING TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY AND SAVE TIME

Most small business owners and entrepreneurs are familiar with the situation. You feel you're totally overwhelmed with the multiple roles and responsibilities you have in your own business. The more business you do, the more time you have to spend on "stuff" that are not your core business or "stuff" that you are not really good at. The result? You have less time for running and developing the actual business and doing what you are really good at.

Many small business owners feel that they just cannot justify employing dedicated people to focus purely on administrative, logistical or back-office tasks. As a matter of fact, most of us do not want the responsibilities and headaches that are associated with a full-time workforce!

There are a number of ways to deal with these challenges, regardless if you are a start-up, growing or established business. Some of the options include outsourcing, joint-ventures, contracting or virtual assistance.

The goal of outsourcing is to create a more profitable business whilst streamlining the business owner's work. Taking the time to avoid common outsourcing mistakes will make the process go much smoother and reduce frustration.

Outsourcing, albeit to another company or a virtual assistant, has benefits and drawbacks. But, if you are aware of the potential problems before hand, you can increase your satisfaction levels. Here are a few potential outsourcing issues business owners should be aware of in order to avoid them.

Not Knowing Who You Are Dealing With - The number one problem when it comes to outsourcing, is not properly verifying the contractor or company who will be performing the work. As a business owner, you should take care to carefully interview contractors or the virtual assistants you are considering working with BEFORE assigning work. Get referrals and check references to verify experience and track-record. Can they actually do what they claim to do? Take care to get a written service agreement in place.

Poor Communication - Regardless what it is that you are outsourcing, there is a great deal of effort required to keep the lines of communication between the business owner and contractor or assistant open. If you allow workers to do work for you without communicating your goals and what it is that you need, you will find that the work will not be done as you'd expected. Assistants or external contractors are not mind-readers. Take care to clearly communicate expectations, goals, standards, budgets and deadlines.

Not budgeting adequately - For an outsourcing agreement to work well, you'll need to keep an eye on what you are spending for the work being done. Some projects will require single payments to your assistant or contractor, others may involve recurring or retainer payments and you will more than likely have some type of contract or agreement that binds you. Some service providers charge by the hour while others may invoice by project or will expect payment based on a commission. Take care to figure out how much you can afford and budget appropriately. Communicate the budget IN ADVANCE to the contractor or assistant!

Under Utilising the Service Provider or Resources - When you choose to outsource certain tasks, take care to utilise the assistant or contractor to their fullest capabilities. Understand what they can offer you, what they have done for others and what other services they provide. There are often freelancers who are willing to work on a recurring basis or who will complete larger projects at a reduced rate in order to get and keep your business.

Don't be afraid to start your outsourcing journey. By familiarizing yourself with some of these outsourcing stumbling-blocks, you can plan to prevent it and allow your business to grow while someone else takes care of "stuff" others can do better, quicker or more cost-effective than you can.

Typical tasks that can be outsourced include:

- Fulfilment (packaging, mailing, distribution)
- Bookkeeping and Accounting
- General Administration and Errands
- Deliveries / Courier Services
- Diary Management / Meeting Management / Transcriptions
- Events Management and Coordination
- Technical Support / IT Services
- Research
- Web development and SEO Services
- Visual Design / Graphic design
- Copy Writing / Content Development / Blogging
- E-Zine or Newsletter Distribution
- Bulk Mailing / Christmas or Birthday Cards

Your professional challenge: Identify the areas in your business where you are not the ultimate expert, or where the tasks can be done better, quicker or more cost effective by someone other than yourself. Are you getting assistance with this yet? If not, consider an outsourcing agreement, virtual assistant or external service provider to make business better.

SPEAKING BOOSTS CREDIBILITY AND BUILDS YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Speaking is really one of the most powerful ways to attract ideal business prospects and grow your business. It gives you the opportunity to connect, boost your credibility and create trust – all essential requirements to do business. After all, if you are the specialist in specific field, speaking gives you an opportunity to shine your light, share your knowledge and give others the opportunity to get to know you and what you stand for!

Unfortunately public speaking is also one of the most intimidating activities. Research has even shown that for the majority of people, public speaking is feared more than death! It need not be this way.

Because first impressions are lasting, you would want to make the most of each speaking opportunity, SO here are 7 simple tips to capture your audience's attention, connect, make a great impression and inspire prospects to take action.

1. Connect with your audience BEFORE you start

Get there early, greet people as they arrive and make the personal connection. Your relationship with your audience starts before you begin your speech. This will not only help you feel at ease, but will also give you a glimpse of your audience's personal world and connect with them at an individual level.

2. Prepare, Relax, Breathe!

Firstly, being well prepared will most definitely keep some of the nerves at bay! When you're nervous you tend to hold your breath. This actually makes you more nervous which makes you talk faster. Remembering to breathe correctly and deeply, will send oxygen to your brain, relaxing you and slowing down your speaking pace.

You really have little reason to be nervous! Trust me, most people appreciate the courage it takes to get in front of people and speak!

3. Share your story

Do you have compelling story? Have you faced and overcome challenges in relation to the topic you are speaking on? People will appreciate that you are a real person facing similar challenges than they might have. If you can overcome your challenges, your audience may just be inspired to do so as well!

4. Move around

Don't be frozen in one spot, or hidden behind a podium. Get physical. This will keep your audience engaged and interested, as well as help you burn off some nervous energy.

5. Keep eye contact

You need eye contact to authentically connect. Find the friendly faces and try to keep eye contact with a person throughout one thought. This one could be culturally sensitive so take care to know your audience.

6. Share personal experiences

People love well thought out stories. They are engaging and often entertaining. It is easy for your audience to place themselves in the story and relate to a situation. The bonus is that people learn best and remember more through story-telling.

7. Solve a problem or two!

Do what you do best. Solving problems from the stage is a great way to have your audience experiencing your personal power. This can truly help you in converting prospects into future clients.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that public speaking may be daunting, but it is truly one of the best ways to get credibility and grow your business fast. Remember, your message is bigger than you. Don't let your own fears and doubts stop you from sharing it. People are out there right now ready for what you have to say. Share it!

Your professional challenge – Have you included speaking as one of the ingredients in your marketing plan? If not, you need to seriously consider it – you will not get more business by sitting in your office or in front of your computer screen. Get up, get out and start connecting!

DEALING WITH NON-PAYING CLIENTS OR CUSTOMERS

Most business owners will agree that having to deal with late- or non-payment is one of the least exciting aspects of being in your own business. Unfortunately for most of us, outstanding payments can happen at any time, with any clients – even those that used to be ideal clients at some stage.

Failure to effectively deal with non-paying clients can potentially lead to the failure of your business as a whole – SO, how can it be prevented and what is the best way to deal with non-paying clients or customers?

Unfortunately, once payments are overdue, there is no guarantee that outstanding monies will ever be paid, but here are a few tips to effectively deal with non-paying customers:

1. Take Care of the Basics. Before you start a formal business relationship, take care to get a basic service agreement (contract with terms and conditions) in place. It does not have to be elaborate, but must be clear on who are parties to the contract, what will be delivered, by when and what the remuneration and payment terms will be. This is the first step towards good expectation- and relationship management.

2. Be Organised. Take care that all your business records and paperwork are up to date and organised. Accurate records will aid you in the invoicing process and enable you to track payments.

3. Establish a Clear Billing Process. It is important to have a clear (preferably standardised) billing process for each and every customer, guided by their service agreement or contract. A standard billing process makes it easier for business owners to know when to invoice, what was invoiced, when it was paid, or when it is overdue. If you are dealing with a high-volume of invoices it is definitely worth investing in an integrated invoicing-, bookkeeping- and financial reporting system. This service can be managed in-house or outsourced to a bookkeeper or accountant.

4. Set a Routine. It is important to act as soon as an invoice is due. Month-end statements can serve as a payment reminder to overdue customers and clients, and for many this may be enough to get them to make their necessary payments.

5. Implement a Simple Follow-up System. If payment does not arrive when it should, despite an initial statement being provided, it is necessary to start a step-by-step follow-up process. For example, this may firstly involve a polite, yet firm email reminder within one week of the statement being sent out, then a polite telephone call in the next week if the email remains unanswered and the payment is still not received. Next a professional, yet formal overdue payment letter with clear consequences may be sent if there is still no action. Decisive action should be taken before accounts age beyond 60 days.

6. Finally, involve the Professionals. Should formal attempts by the business owner prove to be unsuccessful, the matter might be handed over a legal professional, for a final warning letter, and ultimately a formal legal collection process if required. Remember it is essential to provide copies of

all formal agreements (step 1) and all subsequent customer interactions BEFORE embarking on a legal collection process.

In conclusion, it is advisable to remain professional and maintain courteous client relationships at all times. Should the client eventually pay, he deserves a polite acknowledgement of payment. Alternatively the business owner has to agree with the legal professionals if and how any of the diplomatically worded threats will be followed through.

Your professional challenge – Do you have Standard Business Terms and a Standard Billing and Collection Process? If not, it might be the right time to get the necessary systems in place. YOU are responsible for your business success!

5 IDEAS TO IMPROVE PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY

Have you at any stage of your personal or professional life reached a point where you REALLY wanted to get more done, but felt a little stuck? Have you ever wondered how some people just manage to get more things done and still have time for fun and leisure?

The thing with personal productivity is that it's usually about taking responsibility and taking action, in spite of inconvenience or objections. Here are a few ideas to increase productivity and unlock time and energy to get the things done that really matter:

1. Set and gently Enforce Boundaries. If you constantly agree with others and keep on pushing your personal boundaries out, the more likely it is that you will end up in a situation where you are frustrated as you are using YOUR precious time and energy to play to other's agendas. Learn to respectfully say NO where a request is not in line with your goals, values and priorities.

2. Plan your Time. A few minutes of planning daily will help you to become more focussed. Keep a to-do list and prioritise activities. Manage your time using a diary or electronic organiser. Cluster similar activities such as dealing with emails, returning calls or taking care of routine admin. Allocate time for significant activities and tasks in your schedule. Crossing out tasks on your list as they get done will give you a great sense of accomplishment!

3. Delegate and Outsource. To become more productive, you need to LIGHTEN your load. Use your time and energy on those tasks that you do best and where you have the most professional impact. Delegate or dump the rest.

4. Minimize Technological Interruptions. To really get things done and be able to focus on critical tasks, you need to switch off some of the technology from time to time, such as cell phones, email and social networking sites. You do not HAVE TO respond to all messages and calls in real time! Avoid getting sucked in by social networking sites with random games and insignificant requests.

5. Clear your clutter. Physical and mental clutter can confuse, sidetrack and overwhelm you, ultimately costing you time and money. Get rid of excess in your workspace, office and home. Clear your information clutter by sorting and clearing your email box and limiting email and internet subscriptions to 3 -5 subscriptions that really make a difference in your life. Keep papers organised (or delegate this to an assistant). Dump your mental clutter by using a diary or journal to write down important thoughts, ideas and reminders!

YOU have a choice how you use your time and energy. Just take ACTION!

Let me give you a challenge for YOUR business – Are there any areas where you feel “stuck” and wish you could be more productive, efficient and effective? Select one of the ideas above that you are not implementing yet and make it a daily habit for the next week, then reflect on the difference it has made in your life. The key is DAILY ACTION - Remember YOU are responsible for your business success!

MORE CONFIDENCE AND COURAGE TODAY!

I personally think that most people, even highly successful achievers, at some stage or another feel that they could do with a little more confidence and courage in their lives. We live in a world where negativity often dominates the media. At both personal and professional levels we are often reminded of our weaknesses, shortcomings and what cannot be done.

Whilst the media bombards us with subtle messages which highlight our shortcomings, we may also be reminded of what we lack by people closest to us – people who we actually rely on for encouragement and support. These all slowly erode confidence and courage.

I know that in my own life, there have been a number of occasions where I had doubts about my own abilities, knowledge or experience. I'd have internal conversations which ranged from "Am I good enough to do the job?" to "Surely I do not know enough to pull this off?" I think it is quite common to have self-doubts from time to time, but the challenge is that if we do not deal with it constructively, it could start to dominate our thoughts, actions and ultimate results.

The good news is that there are a number of proven techniques that, if applied consistently and on a regular basis, can help you to move beyond fear, doubt and uncertainty, and actually push up the level of confidence and courage you already have!

Start applying the following if you are feeling stuck in the confidence and courage department:

1. Create a Vision Board of what you want to achieve for the year. Make it visible and each time you accomplish a part of your vision, you can put a visible tick-mark on it. Take some time to reflect on an achievement and find a way to celebrate. This will help you to build the confidence and courage to take on bigger tasks and risks in the future!

2. Develop a Journaling habit. On a daily basis, try to keep notes of what went well that day. This is especially important if you are dealing with challenges, difficult people or tricky situations.

3. Use Success Notes or a Journal. This is really simple, yet very effective – Get a pack of A5 cards (or alternatively a special success notebook). Keep this book or the box of cards next to your workspace. Every week, starting on a Monday, start with a new card or page in the book. Make a note of the date and list daily accomplishments (a 1-line statement for each), as your days unfold. In our busy lives, we often forget what we actually managed to get done daily, but by writing it down and reflecting on accomplishments every week, we build a sense of accomplishment. When you are having a "low" for some reason or another, you can simply pull out the book or old cards and reflect on previous successes and accomplishments for extra confidence and courage.

For extra inspiration, you can also grab a pack of **Deepak Chopra's** beautiful and inspirational **Success Cards**, which contain really powerful success affirmations.

4. Keep copies of Testimonials or Uplifting Feedback. When you receive positive emails, compliments or great feedback from clients, customers or colleagues, take care to print it out and

keep it with other testimonials or constructive feedback. Once again, when you are having a bad day, pull out your kind-words and read, visualise and absorb the good stuff!

5. Share Accomplishments with others. Tell others about successful projects or happy client experiences, and do it often! I'm not saying you should be gloating, but there is nothing wrong in sharing true accomplishments, whilst at the same time using the opportunity to acknowledge others where it is due. Share messages of inspiration! Include it in your talks, post it on social networks such as Facebook or include it in your newsletters.

6. Update your CV or Public Profile regularly. This is an ideal opportunity to reflect on your accomplishments and the value you have added to others' lives. A great CV has examples of great accomplishments and instils confidence in the people who want to work with you! If you are a professional, take care to update your Linked-In profile as well AND ask happy clients to endorse you while you are at it!

Your professional challenge - Do you feel you could do with a little more confidence and courage in your Life? Start by selecting 3 of the techniques above and start implementing it one-by-one, week-by-week for the next 3 weeks. I would love to hear about the results and get your feedback!

TOP STRATEGIES FOR BALANCING WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE

In life and in business, most women typically have to wear many hats – that of partner, mother, daughter, career-woman, home-maker, care-taker, girl-friend.... You name it! Achieving a balanced and more fulfilled life is not always easy, yet some women seem to pull off this juggling act better than others – How do they do it?

There is no single formula for achieving work-life balance – It is pretty much a personal decision of how you integrate the various areas of your life, as well as the ability to formulate creative solutions as you approach the challenges of multiple responsibilities and roles. The reality is that the same skills and strategies that are used in the workplace, such as communicating, planning, delegating, networking and organising, can be used on a personal front to achieve better balance.

Here are some of my specific strategies that can help you achieve a more satisfying, fulfilling and well-balanced life, both professionally and personally (not that I always manage to get it all done myself!)

1. Firstly, take care of the Basics – You are your greatest asset and you need to take care of your personal health and wellness. With proper nutrition, adequate sleep and physical activity, you will get the energy to sustain yourself and get more things done! I personally find that I get a lot more done on days where I had an early start with exercise and healthy breakfast!

2. Build a Support Network. You cannot do it all on your own. Ask for help and allow others to help you. A good network of friends, family, colleagues and your community is invaluable!

3. Get off the Guilt-trip. Guilt can emotionally paralyze you and is one of the greatest drains on emotional energy. Use logic reasoning to counter-balance guilt – rather focus on the benefits of your current work-life situation, than only the draw-backs.

4. Get Organised. Good organisation enables you to work smarter and not harder. Implement simple systems and checklists to get routine work done, keep a visible schedule or calendar to coordinate personal and professional activities of the entire household, and steer clear of clutter. Everything should have its own place at office and at home. If this seems like an impossible task, why not enlist the help of a personal organiser or assistant to help you de-clutter and get organised?

5. Set your own Standards. Is it really necessary to be a perfectionist on all fronts? Is it worth spending 80% of your time to get only 20% of the result? Learn to let some standards go, as long as it does not compromise yourself, your loved-ones and your employer.

6. Be Flexible. Organisation and control are usually good, but you also need to be flexible. We will always be confronted with changes to original plans. It is much easier to change our attitudes and get into creative problem-solving mode than to change unfolding circumstances.

7. Communicate! With effective communication it is so much easier to manage expectations, set clear personal and professional boundaries and avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. If we are able

to verbalise what it is that we want, it is much easier to get it! Effective communication can help us to negotiate for better terms both at work and at home! (But we do not always do it!)

8. Set aside Time for Yourself. To be a good parent, partner and professional, you need to be good to yourself first. A good strategy is to create some quiet time for yourself on a daily basis where you can energise, clear your mind, develop your gratitude attitude and set positive affirmations! You only need 10 to 15 minutes a day, preferably before you dive into the hustle and bustle of the day!

9. Seek opportunities for Quality Time. If you do not have a lot of time with your loved ones, get creative to make the most of the time spent together. Create rituals to strengthen relationships with your partner, children, family and friends. This can be as simple as a regular date-night, special family meals, a weekly outing to the local farmers market, or even a circle of friends weekend-away once a year! Rituals build memories – and that is all that remain once the time has gone...

Achieving a better work-life balance is not something that your boss, your partner or anyone else can create for you. You need to take action to change if balance is truly near and dear to you.

Your professional challenge – On a blank sheet of paper, write down at least 3 things that you want to change to improve your work-life balance (for example - Take Friday afternoons off; or Institute a weekly games night with the family; or Create your own 15 minutes quiet time daily...it your choice). Write down the specific actions that you will take to do this, as well as a target time frame BY WHEN you want to have completed it. Share this with someone significant in your life, then DO IT. Start by taking PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY for change in your own life today!

YOUR HEALTH IS YOUR WEALTH!

Are you and your business on PEAK PERFORMANCE? Do you start your business day feeling energized, motivated and ready to take on the challenges at hand, or are you not quite as productive and focussed as you would like to be? What would happen to your business or your career if you are unable to work – would it survive?

Well, whatever your situation may be, it is essential to take stock of your personal health and wellbeing on a regular basis and how it is IMPACTING your professional life. As an executive, independent professional or business owner, your professional future DEPENDS on you being healthy (and not just in survival-mode)!

While you may be considering various strategies to maximize your business performance, growth and productivity, you need to ask yourself, what are you doing to maximize your personal health and wellbeing?

You need your health to build your wealth - Here are a number of things to consider if you want to take better care of your biggest asset - YOU:

- 1. Start your day the right way** – You need fuel in your tank to get moving – If you have a demanding day ahead of you, the best you can do is to start with a healthy balanced breakfast. This does not mean the traditional English Breakfast, but wholesome foods that will sustain energy and mental vitality. No Excuses!
- 2. Hydrate** – Let's face it, most of us do not drink enough water daily. 6-8 glasses of water daily (approximately 1 glass for every 10kg's) will not only help you to flush toxins, digest food better, clear up your skin and reduce headaches, but it is also one of the best weight-loss tools available!
- 3. Are you getting your 40 winks?** – Sleep deprivation can vastly impact performance and productivity. The amount of sleep each person needs depends on many factors, including age, health, recent physical exertion and mental activity. For most adults, 7 to 8 hours a night appears to be the best amount of sleep, although some people may need as few as 5 hours or as many as 10 hours of sleep each day. Take care to get enough!
- 4. What you put in, determines what you get out** – Most of the processed foods that we include in our modern-day diets do not contain all the nutrients our bodies need. Smoking and alcohol further depletes some of the essential vitamins that our bodies need. It may be worth investing in a decent multi-vitamin or nutritional supplement if you are not getting balanced meals with lots of fresh ingredients daily.
- 5. Get Active** – This is a no-brainer. With multiple independent studies showing how physical exercise can improve longevity and quality of life, combat chronic diseases, reduce stress, manage weight, increase energy and improve sex-life, what is there to argue about? If you are not active enough, get going today, OR if you are already active, step it up a notch. I know a number of “busy professionals” who have expensive gym-memberships, but hardly ever use it – what are you waiting

for? Alternatively you can take up walking or running – shape and size is hardly an excuse – I've seen many well-rounded individuals completing various road-races!

The Runner's World Magazine's website (www.runnersworld.co.za) has some excellent NO-COST ideas if you want to get going, including: How to go from walker to runner in 10 weeks, how to run your first 5k race in 5 weeks' time and how you can drop 5 kg's by running 5 km's.

Your professional challenge - Get ready to THRIVE - With proper nutrition, adequate sleep and physical activity, you will get the energy to sustain you and get more things done! I personally find that I get a lot more done on days where I had an early start with exercise and healthy breakfast! HOW ABOUT YOU - is it not time that you start taking better care of your greatest asset?