

Balancing: Taking care of business ... and you

Tchaikovsky composed his famous well known 1812 Overture and we can all relate to fighting the battle when our offices seem to have declared a state of war. There are days when your desk is covered with piles of paper, there are several “to do” lists of varying degrees of priority and the phone just doesn’t stop ringing.

After hours of struggling through all this you may think you’ve spent a long, productive day and achieved a great deal. As you review your day you ask yourself did you actually get paid for any of it? Did you make any profit? Was any of this work actually for a client?

There’s a tremendous difference between the time you spend chained to the keyboard and the hours which actually generate income. At first there’ll be far more of the former and not nearly enough of the latter. The trick is to balance the two but starting a new business can mean long hours and grandiose efforts for very little reward.

One aspect of working from home which I can’t imagine anyone misses very much is the daily commute to and from an office. Think of it this way – your walk from your kitchen is the only commuting you do to get to your office! In terms of cost and unproductive time, cutting out travel to work affords you to put more of your energy into productive hours. However, it can also lead to a tendency to work incredibly long hours, not all of which turn out to be revenue producing.

As far as promoting your business, time spent on marketing and networking your VA business should not be wasted. Make it a habit to set aside a number of hours each week for marketing but make sure it’s a structured effort. Make a list of your goals each week and be diligent about achieving those goals.

One of the first things you want to do in any business is aim to achieve a certain number of billable hours each month. Work out how much income you need. Then work out your overhead: how much does it cost to run your business each month. Calculate everything from electricity and stationery costs to advertising and insurance. Once you have that cost figured out, anything over and above that amount is a profit. It’s up to you to work out how much profit you need in order to make a sustainable income. Don’t forget that some of your revenues also must be put aside to pay income tax.

Once you have calculated your revenue needs you'll realize how many billable hours you will need to work. To achieve that, you may feel like you have to work every single hour in a day. Working too much makes some people become workaholics and can lead to a point where working too many hours is not productive or healthy. The important thing is to balance your time between family life, your own personal time for health and leisure, and your business.

Planning your time and sticking to that plan is essential to help you maintain an even balance to allow flexibility in your life. Prioritizing tasks helps you manage your time more effectively and efficiently keeping in mind that working for your clients comes first. No client will thank you or return with more business if you miss an important deadline. Allocate yourself so many office hours per day and per week. The number of hours you want to work and the needs of your clients will dictate how much time you will work each day.

It is important that you shut off your computer, leave your desk and close your office door at the end of your work day. Depending on how busy you are switching off your mind from thinking about your business can be a totally different chore especially when you have a lot of things to do and want to do. There will be days when there is so much happening in your business you'll find it difficult to tear yourself away from your computer and your desk. You may wake up at 3:00 a.m. because your mind is racing with so many ideas that if you don't write them down you'll forget them by the time you start your work day.

To avoid stressing yourself out, it is necessary to balance between the hours you work, the hours you market your business, doing your paperwork, "housekeeping" your computer files and client files, and developing, enhancing and learning new skills. Remember – you may have many clients but there's only one you and when you become run down with health problems, it will affect your business. Stick to the number of hours you have calculated to work each week. When you have to work longer hours on some days than on others, take some time out for you – look after your health, exercise, and do something you enjoy doing. Balancing your time for your business, yourself and your personal life will help you keep going, achieve your goals, and allow time for things you want to do for yourself, and enjoy spending time with your family and friends.

© Barbara-Ellen Gilbert, Words Plus Administrative Services, Claremont, Ontario, Canada