

## Managing Time to Plan

By John Vamos

### Did you get your plan done?

Now that the past year is behind us, I am curious to know whether those of you who promised yourselves that you would 'use your break to get some of your thoughts for next year down on paper', actually kept your promise.

You know what the business lie in business is? "I didn't have time". The fact is: unless the one task you are talking about is simply too big on its own to accomplish in the time provided, like building the Olympic Stadium in two weeks, then the statement is just not true.

What does the lie really mean? "I didn't have time" translates to "I choose to do other things instead". From your staff's point of view this can mean for the 'conscientious' that they could not see the task requiring attention above their day-to-day responsibilities, through to the spirit breaking 'clock watcher' who couldn't see the value of staying back one day to get the task done.

So if you didn't get your planning done I hope that the things you choose to do instead brought you great joy. Isn't it funny that business people find getting the time to plan, whether it be their day, their week, or their year, such a challenge? Particularly when you consider that the ability to manage time is a common characteristic amongst truly successful people. What makes it hilarious is that it's also one of the most common 'beef' from business owners when it comes to identifying what their staff need the most help with.

This piece cannot only be about making time to plan, because people that make time to plan usually have three characteristics.

1. They can manage their space.
2. They can plan their day.
3. They set aside time to plan their business.

### Managing your space.

Look at your desk. If it's not empty, save for the thing you're working on now, you are not in control. Save the excuses for someone else. Tell them to the mirror because the person you are looking at is the only one gullible enough to believe you.

Here is a simple way to keep the desk clear.

1. Have an IN tray for stuff you haven't looked at.
2. Have an OUT tray for stuff you've finished.
3. Have a drop draw for things you're working on.
4. Keep only what you're working on within eye's view.

A clean desk is an easy thing to have. It is simply a matter of choice. Don't be expecting your staff to manage their space if you can't manage yours. Take a good look at your desk and your office or workspace now and repeat this line. "This is as together as my business is going to get". If the thought bothers you, *don't* buy a book on time management. Find someone who can come in and coach you sort it out.

### Managing your day.

It takes fifteen minutes a day to go from being under stress and behind the eight ball to being in control and an example to the people around you. At the start of every day or at the conclusion you need to do these things. (Of course I am assuming you have a diary system that works).

Think about the day ahead/ behind. Prepare a To Do List. Work out who, other than you can do the things on that list. Study the next day's appointments (In your mind finish the sentence "That meeting



will be successful if...") and draft agendas. Make sure you are not trying to accomplish too much. Cancel something if you are.

Prioritise the remaining tasks into:

- Do it or die
- Do it or cry
- Do it or sigh.

Choosing to do this at the end of the day in preparation for the next day has two major business related advantages:

**Business advantage ONE:** Your family gets your full attention because the following day's activity has gone from your head to your diary/to do list.

**Business advantage TWO:** You sleep better.

### Planning Your Business.

I left the biggest till last. This is what you promised yourself you would do over the Christmas break, or any other recent break of any duration. This thought process is of course the first mistake. Planning is part of the business, not an add-on. It's in your job description.

"Responsible for ensuring that, at all times, the business has a clearly written and effectively communicated operational plan. This plan - to be used to set measurable objectives for all responsible staff – is to set, measure and review their priorities at regular intervals."

Don't like the sound of it? Too bad! You need to do it or accept a level of underachievement that you would not tolerate from your children! (Reader pauses for a moment to consider this statement)

### To Plan you need:

1. Your key staff: the team that has to deliver should all help write the script.
2. A big chunk of time. Don't put pressure on yourself. The company's biggest client is itself! (If you don't believe me just have a look at who signs the wage cheques)
3. A location. Don't do this on-site.
4. A 'scribe' - friend or colleague - with no stake in the outcome who can make notes and keep you on track. If short of candidates or unsure about them consider engaging a specialist – a business coach who is an expert at facilitating workgroups.
5. A *proven method*: Ask your colleagues and friends for a look at their business plan. When you find one you like do the following:
  - Ask them if you can use it as a template.
  - Delete all references to their business so you are left with the key headings.
  - Bullet-point what you want to cover under each heading.
  - Decide how much time you want to spend on each topic.
  - Brief the scribe (Scribe must be *outside* your business and preferably your industry).
  - Make sure you have an electronic whiteboard.
  - Make sure your scribe can write clearly.
  - Collect your staff and do the job.
  - Document the information and decisions: The Plan

Remember, make sure all who participate receive a copy and that tracking it becomes the first item on the agenda of your regular staff meeting.

Oh and enjoy the fun doing this!

