

HOW TO MAKE TIME TO WORK ON YOUR BUSINESS, NOT JUST IN IT



JOHN STRANGE

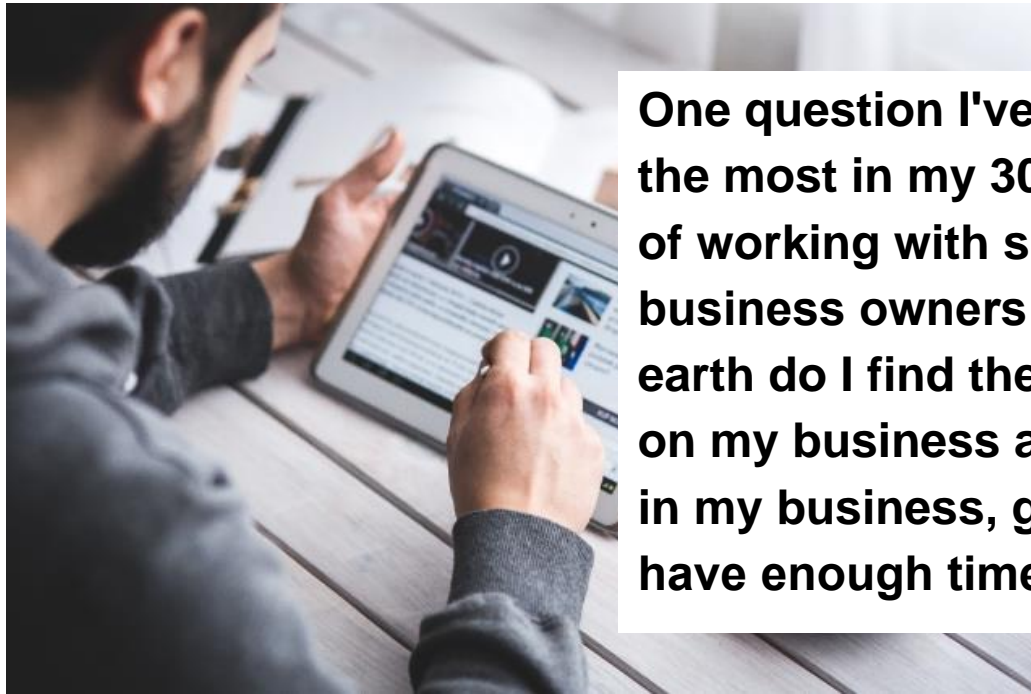
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ONE. THE PROBLEM



One question I've been asked the most in my 30 plus years of working with small business owners is “how on earth do I find the time to work on my business and not just in my business, given I don't have enough time now”.

I want to share with you how I dealt with this problem.

I'm not claiming it's necessarily the best way of doing it, but what I am saying is that it does work, and at least it will give you a starting point. Then, you can work from there on what is going to work best for you.

Before I tell you how I solved the issue for myself, I want to paint a picture of the situation I found myself in at the time.

This will give you some context as to the problems I was wrestling with, and you can then match it against your own situation and see how well it relates. I will add, I still follow this practice today.

I first started working on this problem back in the early eighties, when I was approached by some people who wanted to start a private school in

Gawler, South Australia. They were seeking someone to join the board who had business and financial experience.

I need to point out that this would be an unpaid role, and I figured out it would take up about 3 to 4 days a week for the next 5 years.

Agreeing to this appointment would mean leaving my job as a General Manager of a medium size business, selling our lovely house in the Adelaide Hills and moving to Gawler.

Now, the problem was that there was no new job for me in Gawler, so no income. I could see that it would be a few years before the school could afford to pay me.

Given there was no suitable employment in Gawler, the only option for me was to set up my own business; but, I would only have 3 or 4 days a week to work on my own business.



After a great deal of talking and soul searching, my wife and I decided to take up the challenge and we sold up – we moved to Gawler, and I started a Financial Planning practice, from scratch.

This was indeed a challenge, for, I had a wife, two children, my father who lived with us, a mortgage and a dog to support. Add into this mix the fact that I knew nothing about starting a school or a financial planning practice and you can begin to see the difficulties I faced.

I knew I needed to get some answers in a hurry, or the whole thing would be a disaster.

Fortunately, at that time, I read a book called "The E-Myth" by Michael E. Gerber.

In it, he was talking about working on your business rather than in your business, and this really resonated with me.

Given that time was a very precious, I started to work out how I could start working on my business to make it more effective and as efficient as was humanly possible.



I could not spend large blocks of time doing this, so I began by writing for half an hour a day in a coffee shop, away from any distractions, either from the business or the school: (I had the advantage of this being pre-mobile phone, but mobile phones do have an off switch).

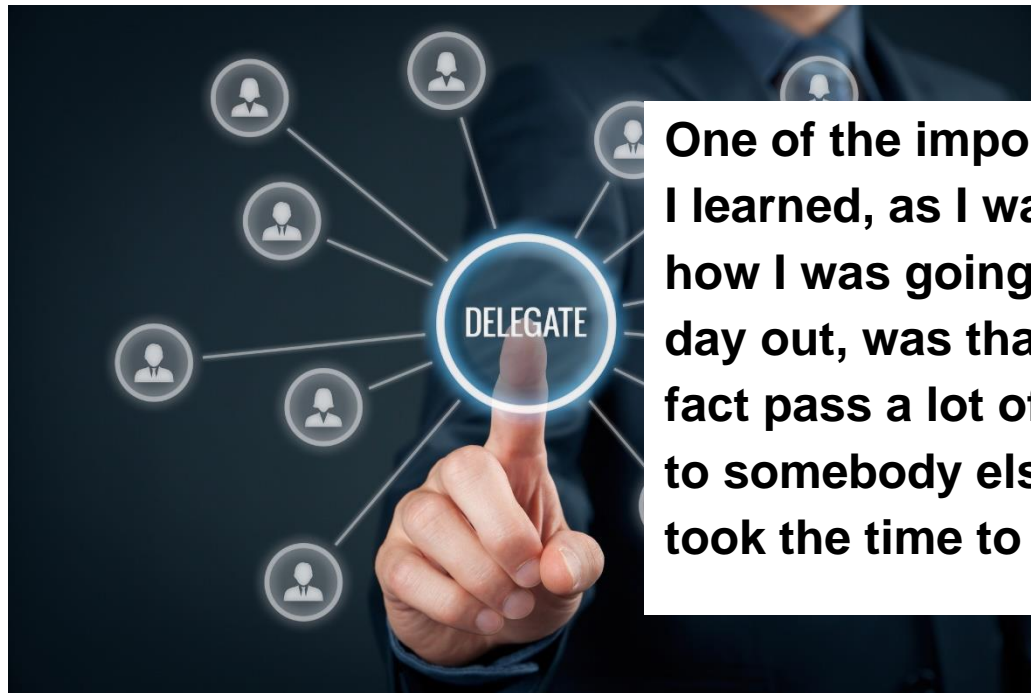
I tried several different coffee shops to find what worked best for me and came to the realisation that I got the best results from working in one that was really busy, one where there was a lot of noise going on and a lot of energy, as I seemed to feed off that energy.

Some of you will be looking for somewhere quiet, and you might go looking for a quiet spot where you can work.

To begin with, I set aside half an hour first thing every morning, before the chaos of the day began. Initially, all I did was work out what I should be doing that day; I worked out a to-do list, if you like.

However, as time went on, I started to fine-tune my to-do list. I am going to cover this a bit later, but, essentially, I worked out a method for determining the key things that I should be working on.

TWO. DELEGATION



One of the important lessons I learned, as I was working on how I was going to set my day out, was that I could in fact pass a lot of the tasks on to somebody else, providing I took the time to train them.

So, as part of my setting out my to-do list each day, I thought about the task and who was best suited to do it, other than me, providing that I trained them properly.

Over a period of time, it evolved from working on my to-do list, to working on how I could delegate more of what I had been doing to somebody else. As I gave away more of my task to others, I found I had more free time to be working on my and the school's business.

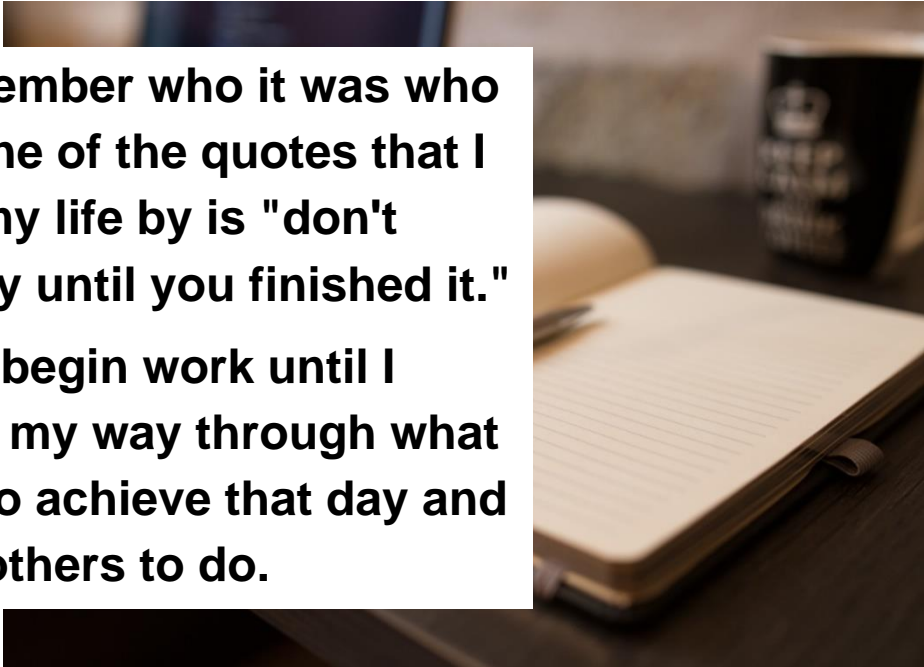
By now, my half an hour had become an hour and then an hour and a half and then finally two hours.

During this time, I started to work on longer term strategies, such as the vision statement for both my business and also for the school.

Gradually, I started to take more time each morning to work upon those issues that would make the business and the school more effective and that would give me more time.

This was an important issue for me, because, to begin with, I was working 7 days a week, and even our dog started to look at me with suspicion. I desperately needed to become more organised about things.

It all began with just that simple idea: spend a half an hour each day in a coffee shop and get my day organised.



I cannot remember who it was who said it, but one of the quotes that I try and live my life by is "don't start your day until you finished it." Now, I never begin work until I have worked my way through what I would like to achieve that day and what I need others to do.

Exactly how I do that I am going to cover a little later. But, for the time being, you can just start thinking about where you can get away for just a short time.

You cannot do it in your office; you cannot do it in your workshop; you cannot do it in your shop.

Wherever your place of work is, you cannot do it there; you've got to get away from all the distractions that your place of work gives you.

This may mean leaving half an hour earlier for work, as it did for me, and going to a coffee shop, or a park, or the library, or wherever.

But, you'll be pleasantly surprised by how easy it all becomes within a very short space of time, and even more gratifying will be the results you will achieve.

I would strongly recommend that you take this one step at a time. Use that time firstly to get started getting yourself truly organized.



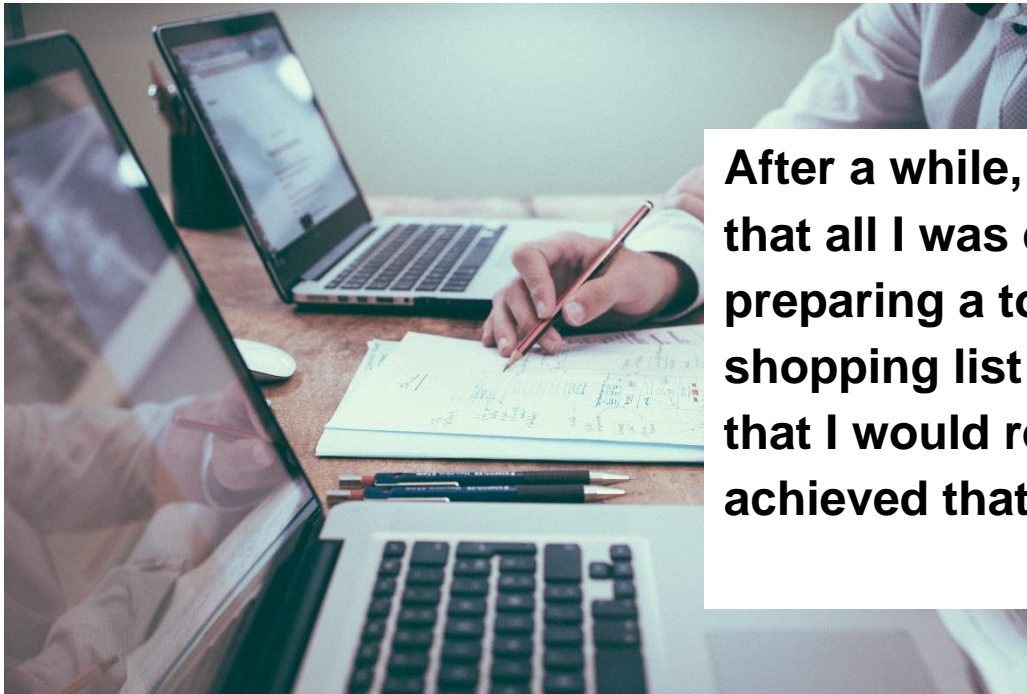
Once you've got yourself properly organized, then start working your way through who you can and should be delegating duties to and what training they need.

You are not going to perfect this in a week, or even a month.

This is going to be an exercise that is going to take you some months.

However, and here is the key, if you stick to the process, you will find that after several months your life is becoming so much easier and far less stressful.

THREE. PRIORITISING



After a while, I concluded that all I was doing was preparing a to-do list or a shopping list of the things that I would really like achieved that day.

But, this wasn't overly helpful, as the list was in no particular order, the tasks were as they had popped out of my head and bore no relationship to their importance of what needed to be achieved.

So, I went in search of a system which would allow me to prioritise what I was working on each day.

Like so many of many of my best ideas, it is a combination of the work I've copied from others.

I don't know who to give the credit to, but I thank them for it because I have been using this system for well over 30 years now, and I find that it works for me.

You now have the opportunity to take my ideas and make them work for you; so, let me share with you my system.

FOUR. URGENCY VERSUS IMPORTANCE

Let me explain the two major problems the following diagram addresses.

Firstly, there can only be one most important task each day, so how do you put the tasks into some sort of priority order?

Secondly, our minds pull out thoughts in a completely random manner, so how do we capture all that our minds wish to download, without trying to get it to act in an unnaturally orderly and logical manner?

So here's what I do.

I start with a template, which is broken up into four quadrants. (See *fig. 1 below*).



Figure 1

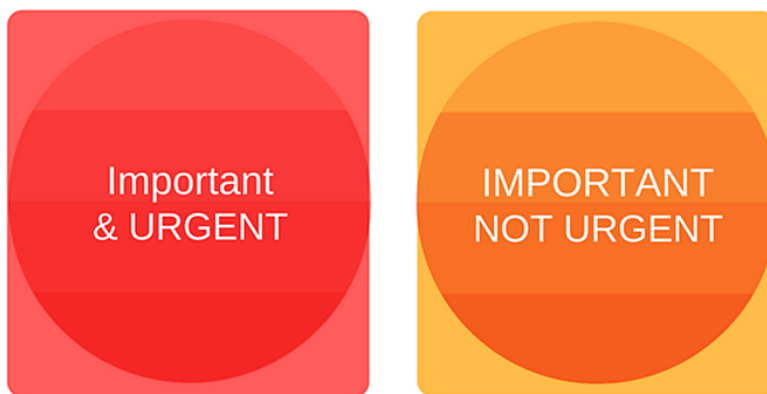
As you can see, the top left-hand quadrant is labelled 'Important and Urgent'.

In the top right quadrant, the label is 'Important': it is not 'Urgent' but it is 'Important'.

The bottom left hand corner, is called 'Urgent, Not Important'; and in the bottom right hand quadrant we have 'Not Urgent, Not Important'.

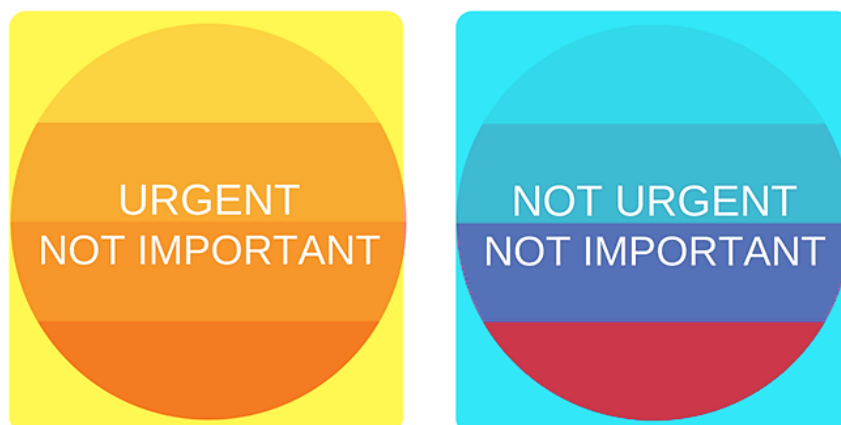
Ok, this is the basic structure I use for working out how I prioritise my tasks.

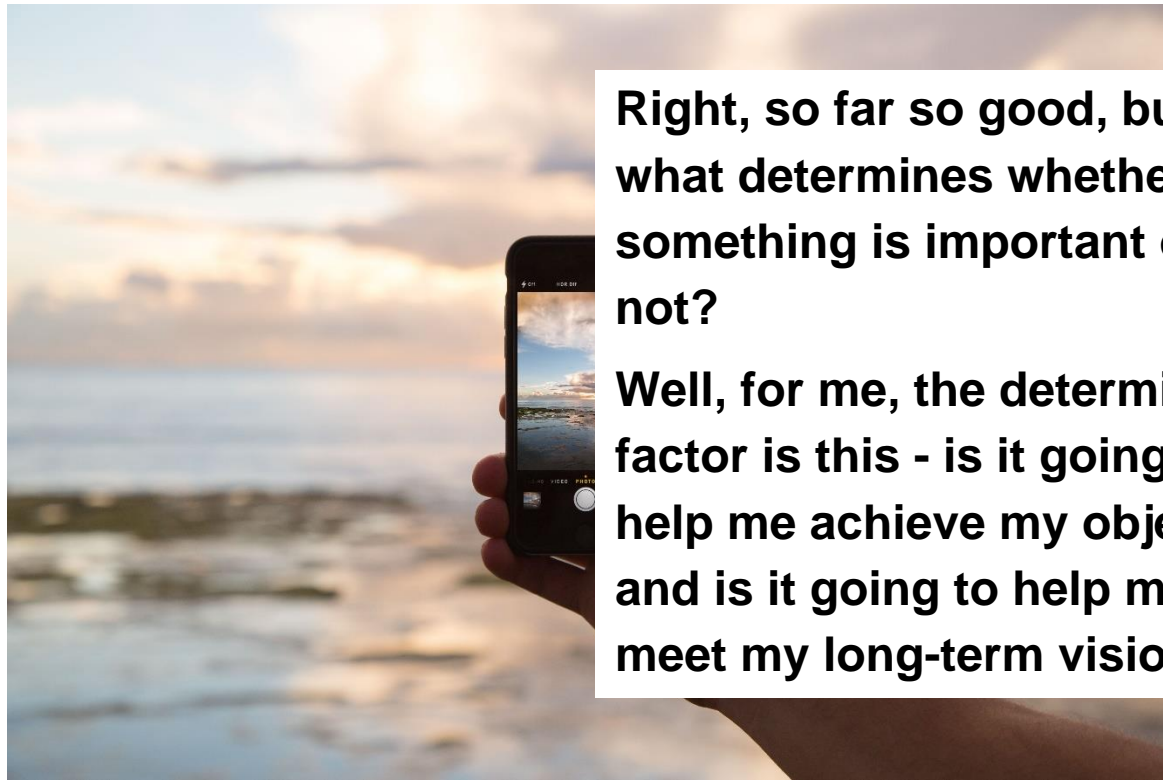
Everything above the line, in the top two quadrants, I classify as an A task.



The bottom left is a B task and the bottom right is a C task.

You might wonder why you would ever do a B or a C task; well, sometimes we have those odd moments where we need a bit of a fill in, so, rather than looking at unhelpful stuff on the internet, we can use the time to tackle a little task that is useful, but not important.





Right, so far so good, but what determines whether something is important or not?

Well, for me, the determining factor is this - is it going to help me achieve my objective and is it going to help me meet my long-term vision?

If it does fulfil either of these goals, then it goes in either top left or top right quadrant and becomes an A rated task.

If the task does not meet either of these criteria, then it goes below the line either as a B or a C. These tasks may just be of some small advantage to me, but they do not play a major role in the overall scheme of things.

So, where do we want to spend most of our time?

Well, it's in the top right quadrant.

Obviously, there are going to be times when we need to be operating in the top left quadrant, because, if something has reached the stage where it's both important and urgent, then it needs to get done.

But, here's the trick, try and get things done while they are in the top right quadrant, because that is how you have a low stress, well organised business operating.

FIVE. A FULLY FUNCTIONING STRATEGY



How do I now translate this knowledge into a fully functioning strategy that I can easily employ each day of my working life?

Well, as much as I like technology, the method that I have found works for me is a simple A4, one page per day, diary. (See *fig. 2 below*).

In the diary, I jot down all of the tasks that I would like to get accomplished today, tomorrow, next week, next month etc.

Because I love to delegate, you'll note that I use different colours for different staff members. This enables me to quickly scan my tasks for the day, when I'm discussing with other team members what I want them to do in the period under discussion; this way I don't miss critical items of the tasks I'm delegating to them.

Because I've awarded a priority when setting up my tasks, I can discuss with the team member where we can slot it into their own tasks for the day.

This avoids the problem of, 'if the boss asks me to do it, I must do it straight away'.

Diary

JOHN STRANGE'S TASK DIARY

1. Write eBook about Business Tips	A1
2. Film a video about training staff	C2
3. Pay staff	B1
4. Prepare weekly blogs	B2
5. Update Cash Flow	C1
6. Discuss objectives in Team Meeting	A2
7. Edit Documents	D1
8. Update Task List in Asana	B4
9. Launch New Facebook Ad	A
10. Prepare Marketing Matrix	B3
11. Organise Folders	D2

Figure 2

At the end of our discussion, we both are aware of how the task can be fitted into the team member's daily activity without completely disrupting their day.

So, how do I pull all of this together, into a viable process?

- I just download my thoughts onto the diary page. I don't worry at this stage, whether they are As, Bs or Cs; all I want to do is capture whatever my mind is telling me.
I will, quite likely, already have some tasks listed which have been captured from previous days, so I just add onto this list.
- I next go through and decide whether a task is an A, B, or a C, and I write the appropriate letter against each task.
I'm very careful in awarding the correct designation, as time is too precious to waste on activities that don't meet my long-term objectives.
I also need to make sure that it is a high priority for me and not just for someone else.
- The final step is to look through all of the As and decide which is the most important A that I have listed. Which task will have the greatest impact if I get that done today?
Remember there can only be one that gets the number 1 ranking, so make sure it will truly make a difference. This is your A1.
- Next, I go looking for the task that has the second highest priority and so on, until I've done all of my As.
- I'll then do the same for the Bs and the Cs, but bear in mind they only get done if you need a filler.

These days I complete this exercise before I'm allowed to go to bed, and, after doing this for some 30 years, I find it doesn't take me long.

You may find it will take you a while to begin with, which is why I suggested that you do this each and every morning, before you go into work. Although I do my list at home every night, I still go to a coffee shop to work on my business, as I've found no better way of finding the time to work on my business.

This system has enabled me to accomplish a great deal in my life and it could do the same for you, if only you work with these techniques and adapt them to suit your needs.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Having worked with small businesses for more than 40 years, one of John's greatest frustrations has been watching people giving their lives to their business, supporting their communities and providing employment, only to find that when it comes time to sell, either they are unable to, or unable to sell for what they hoped, and so their dreams get shattered.

John firmly believes that there are answers out there, and has made it his life's mission to help as many small businesses as possible to find these answers, taking back control of their businesses and finally achieve the freedom and the financial stability that they dreamt of.

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admin@yourbusinessfreedom.com.au

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