

Hard work never made anyone rich

Or the lessons I learnt from a fallen tree

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I went for a big bushwalk by myself recently. One of the reasons for doing so was because I felt stuck writing this article. While listening to the birds, enjoying being by myself in the bush and giving my brain some space away from my business, I found the missing link that allowed me to become unstuck.

Walking along in the National Park, I stumbled on an enormous fallen tree, blocking the path ahead completely. It was muddy everywhere, but I felt like a rest so I decided to sit down on the tree. As I was eating my apple I noticed that the tree had been down for a long time and it had become a whole ecosystem in itself of lichen and moss and fungi and ants and beetles. The more I looked, the more fascinated and inspired I became about the system of life and abundance in and around the tree.

I moved on again but the only way ahead was to climb across the tree. After spending 15 minutes observing the tree so closely I realised that I had to climb across it with great care and attention so as not to disturb and destroy the beauty of the tree. As I continued my walk I started thinking about the tree, its beauty and the important lesson I had just learnt by taking the time to observe this particular obstacle closely.

Nearly every time I work with my clients at some point we come across the same two obstacles on the road to continued business development: The number of hours in a day and the number of cells in our brains, and as in the case of the beautiful tree across my bush track, the only way forward is to appreciate the beauty of these obstacles and learn to see them not just as obstacles but as the most valuable resources in your business.

Jane

You may recognise all or part of this scenario: Jane, is the owner of JW Solutions: Business is growing, Jane is happily spending more and more time fulfilling her contracts and extinguishing the ever present number of brush fires. Her customers love JW Solutions and the personal attention they get from Jane... and Jane is pleased with herself for keeping all the balls in the air... she is buzzing.

And things progress apace... until... "Oops"... One of the balls crashes on the floor..."Buzzer, I won't fix this with a bunch of flowers... I suppose you can't win them all... I just don't seem to have the time to supervise properly these days... better start doing some of those non-critical things in after hour's time... Focus on

the guys delivering during the day... Haven't had a holiday for while... ah well cash is a little tight anyway... next year..."

Slaves to the business

And so it goes, For Jane and for you; you work harder, longer hours, weekends..."Business doesn't stop just because I take a day off!"

But in the back of your head you can feel this little voice that says: "Wasn't this business supposed to be something that worked for you? Wasn't it supposed to give you freedom? Instead, have you actually become its little slave?"

"Nonsense" says Jane, "I just don't work hard enough... after all, "No-one ever died from hard work... right?"

Right indeed, but no-one ever got rich from hard work either ...

No, the most effective way to get rich in a business is not to work harder, but to employ more people producing more products or services. We all know that of course, it is one of the reasons we are in business in the first place. But as you develop your business on this model, you will at some point be confronted by those twin obstacles of time and brain cells and you may, like Jane and like many before you, get stuck.

How you manage to get unstuck and how you interact with those obstacles in the middle of your path determines where your business will get to and if it truly starts to deliver the freedom and personal reward you want from it.

Stop and observe

When you do come across these obstacles in your path, instead of running faster, pushing harder and yelling louder, I would like you to stop for a minute instead. Take a breath and observe the striking beauty of the obstacles, just like I did when I came across the fallen tree.

You see, the missing link I found while being in the quiet space of the bush is this: The reason these same two obstacles appear for you and every small business owner that ever was is that your time and your brain cells are the ONLY truly scarce resources in your business, you simply can never go out and buy some more of them. At the same time, your business can not survive without being constantly fed with your time and your brain. Therefore they are far and away the two most valuable assets of your business and at the same time their scarcity is also what causes them to become obstacles.

The work of the business owner

Scarce resources need to be protected and once you truly start to value your time and your brain cells, you will start to let go. Because with every demand on your time or your brain you will first ask: "Does this actually need to be done by me? Is there anyone else who can do this? Does this need to be done at all?" You will want to use your time and your brain only for the "Work of The Business Owner" instead of the "Work of the Business".

This is how you will incorporate the beauty of the tree in your business.

I appreciate that this is a big change for you. Most business owners never make this change, and they remain stuck.

Don't think you have to make this change in one fell swoop though; all I want you to do from here, to set out on the road to becoming a True Business Owner... is to actually get ON the road and take the first little step.

Little Step 1: A good first little step to take to start on this road is to set aside 1 hr a week for "Business Owner Time", during business hours, at the same time every week, blocked out in your diary.

Don't worry about how to use this time... just block it out first. At the appointed hour, turn off the phone, turn off the email, turn off the mobile, you might actually leave the office, go to a café, or sit in the park, but do not take any calls, emails or anything else, (except from your spouse of course)

You can do this!

Let me assure you, every business owner can do this and nearly every client I have ever worked with has tried to convince me that there was some special reason why they couldn't possibly do this... but they could and they did... because it is an absolutely critical first step, and basic to the long term development and viability of your business.

Later you will need more than an hour a week but start with this hour first.

Little step 2: What do you do with this hour? This hour is business development time; It is strategic work; It is the work that no-one besides you, the owner, can do; and it is the best, most powerful use of that most valuable resource in your company...Your time.

To start with, just use the hour to think, sit and think, or walk and think, drink coffee and think, think with a piece of paper and pen or think in the park. Think strategy, think future, think big picture, think plans, think about where you want the business to be in a year, in 5 years...?

From here there is no limit to the projects you could turn your mind to: The coming recession and how to manage around that; Your marketing challenges; Your tendering processes; Innovation; Business Plan; etc

And I want you to treat this hour as absolute holy writ, come hail rain or shine...Tuesday morning from 10 to 11 you are not contactable, by anyone for anything...

Janes little steps

Back to Jane; Jane is actually a client of mine, and *JW Solutions* is her recruitment business. Jane found the obstacles, the tree in her path and she started with "Little Step 1". Jane asked her PA for assistance. She explained to her assistant what she

needed to do and that on Thursday morning every week, from 9 to 10 she would no longer be available for anyone except her husband or kids, and she asked her PA to help her manage that, and not to allow her to slip anything in her diary or answer any phone calls.

The first three weeks were tough but then Jane started getting into the habit. Things started to change for Jane, it was as if a weight was being lifted off her shoulder, and she started becoming clear about the things that needed doing in her business to move it forward. Now, a year and a half later, she has altered her approach and takes an hour and a half from 9 to 10.30 3 times a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and her business has increased its turnover by 30% in the same time. Jane truly appreciates the unique value and beauty of her time and her brain, and I believe her husband is much happier too.

Further Reading:

- The “E-Myth revisited” and other books in the series, by Michael Gerber
- The “One Minute Manager” series, by Ken Blanchard et al
- “Small Giants”, by Bo Burlingham
- “Secrets of small business owners exposed”, by Dale Beaumont
- “The Elves and the Shoemaker”, by the Grimm brothers

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