

Personal Discipline and the Home-Based Business Owner

By Elena Fawkner

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Allow me to let you in on a little secret you're probably already wise to anyway. As often as not, the inspiration for article topics comes from struggles with my own personal demons. Writing about them is my way of giving myself a good talking to (a.k.a. kick in the rear end). And so it is with this one - the personal discipline demon.

It wasn't always like this. There was a time when I could and would happily sit at my computer for hours at a stretch. Doing this, doing that. Reading email, reading e-books, doing research for articles, writing the next issue of AHBBBO. It used to be fun, something to do in my off-time. A break from the grind, if you will. But now that it's my official job two or three days a week it's not so much fun as it is work.

So, what's changed? Quite simply, my online business has gone from something I always **wanted** to do to something I **have** to do. And that, alas, is my demon. As soon as I **have** to do something, I start playing the same mind-games that I played back in school when I wouldn't start an assignment until the absolute last minute. I told myself it was because I worked well on deadlines. What it really was, of course, was procrastination. With a capital P.

Does any of this sound familiar? If not, perhaps you're just one very focused, very self-disciplined individual. Good for you. Now go away.

Or maybe you just haven't been doing this for long enough

yet. You can stay. Think it won't happen to you? Maybe not. But if you're reading this at work when you really should be doing something else, like what they pay you for, you may just want to entertain the teensiest possibility that it might.

So, for those of us mere mortals with actual lives and who start businesses out of our homes for quality of life reasons, you'd better get a handle on this demon and quick about it too. Because if you don't, it will slowly but surely bring about the end of life as you know it and you'll be back to the 9 to 5 grind at your J.O.B. before you can even *think* about turning on *The Young and the Restless*. (Just for background noise, of course.)

OK, so, enough about what can happen and why and on to what you can do to make sure you get to keep the best of all possible worlds. Here are six tips for getting the job done:

1. SET A SCHEDULE

If you approach your business with the attitude that you can do whatever you want, whenever you want, guess what happens? You do whatever you want, whenever you want. And the stuff that needs to be done but which you don't particularly feel like doing doesn't get done. Ever.

Lesson #1 - there's no such thing as being able to do what you want whenever you want all the time. It's a fact of life that sometimes we have to do that which we would prefer not to do. The best you can hope for with your own business is to choose the time for doing.

So, instead of seeing your days as a big, blank canvas, ready for you to paint as and when you feel like it, decide which hours of the day you are going to allocate to working in your business. And stick to it. Of course, the huge advantage you have in running your own business over working at your J.O.B. is that you get to choose what those hours shall be. Want to start at 6 am and finish at 2 pm? No problem. Want to start at noon and finish at 8? Go for it. But do it.

And when it comes to scheduling, don't fall into the trap of thinking that just because you live where you work you have to work seven days a week. Be sure to schedule some entirely work-free days. That's MY big lesson from the past few months. I was making the mistake of working at my J.O.B. for three days and then working the four days I was home in my business. Got to the point where I was sick to death of it. All of it. So I started taking weekends off. Much, much better. I'm actually starting to enjoy working

again.

2. DO WHAT HAS TO BE DONE, NOT WHAT YOU'D RATHER BE DOING

It's all very well to set a work schedule and stick to it, it's quite another to spend that time doing what has to be done rather than what you'd rather be doing. Sure, we'd ALL prefer to read and respond to email than write the next chapter of our e-book. Reading and responding to email is easy. Writing is hard! But reading and responding to email won't grow your business. Creating new product lines will.

3. ALLOCATE ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO CONCENTRATION LEVEL REQUIRED

Following on from the previous point, if you're spending the first three hours of your peak concentration time reading and responding to email rather than writing the next chapter of your book, you're doing the right things at the wrong time. Yes, you do need to read and respond to your email but it's not an intellectually demanding task. Do it when your brain is winding down, not when it's at its sharpest. Do the hard work when your brain is at its best.

4. KEEP DISTRACTIONS TO A MINIMUM

Doing the right things at the right time is all for nought if you're going to be interrupted every ten minutes. Turn OFF the email program that chimes every time you get new mail. Most likely it's NOT a new order and, even if it is, it will still be there at the time of your next allocated email check.

Similarly, let the answering machine answer your private phone. Get a second line installed to be used exclusively for your business. And let the machine get THAT when you're not working. Maintaining separate worlds as much as possible is the best way to avoid burnout.

5. BE FLEXIBLE BUT ACCOUNTABLE

The best-laid plans of mice and men and all that mean that you need to be flexible in response to an unanticipated change in your schedule. If something comes up that needs your attention when you had intended to be working, by all means attend to it. Just make up the time later on. It's swings and roundabouts. It all comes out in the wash.

6. CARROTS WORK BETTER THAN STICKS

Finally, my favorite tactic. Reward yourself for getting the job done. Nothing motivates me more to finish a set project than the knowledge that when I do, I have full permission to

curl up on the couch with a good book for a couple of hours.

Give yourself an incentive to get whatever it is done. Then you can truly enjoy the best of both worlds. You can relax and enjoy whatever your reward is, free of the guilt that comes with knowing very well you should be doing something else, and with the certain knowledge that you've taken care of business first.

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