

The Moonlighting Time Crunch and How To Beat It

By Elena Fawkner

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If you're in the paid workforce and toying with the idea of starting a home business so that one magic day you can tell your boss what you REALLY think of him or her, you have a rough patch to get through first. The time crunch that comes with running your business on the side in your already non-existent spare time while you continue working in your job until the business is generating enough of an income to allow you to quit.

It's tough being a moonlighter, as many of you reading this know only too well. Here are some ideas to help you beat the time crunch.

WHERE DOES THE TIME GO?

Before you can begin planning how to make the most effective use of your time, understand where it goes.

An activity log is a good way of identifying black holes that can be turned into productive time. Keep a log for a typical week. Just write down everything you do for that week. Be sure to include everything: getting ready for work, eating meals, taking breaks, travelling to and from work, grocery shopping, telephone calls, faxes, emails, casual chats, work activities, reading, making meals, watching TV, whatever.

IDENTIFY TIME WASTERS AND NUKE 'EM

Your activity log will identify, in excruciating detail, exactly how much time you are squandering each week ... valuable

time that you could be putting to productive use in a home business. You may find that you're spending 16 hours a week watching TV, for example. That's two whole business days right there.

So identify those time wasters and kill them off. A time waster is any thing that doesn't make a worthwhile contribution (proportionate to the time you spend on it) to your work, your business or your personal wellbeing. If it doesn't make a contribution to one of these three areas, dump it or delegate it.

ON THE JOB

The more efficient you are on the job, the more easily you will be able to free up work time for business-related activities. You can't be too obvious about it, of course, but so long as you're on top of your work responsibilities, you can buy yourself some time to take care of some of your business-related activities.

Paradoxically, studies have shown that moonlighters who 'cheat' by squeezing in business activities alongside their work activities are often more effective in their day jobs because they work harder than they normally would to keep from getting caught. One word of caution, though. It's generally a BAD idea to choose for your business something that competes with your employer's business. Such an arrangement is rife with conflicts.

SCHEDULE YOUR TIME

If you've followed the above steps, you should by now have a reasonably good idea of how much time you have available to you and what activities are going to serve your business, work and personal needs.

Now it's time to schedule everything you need to accomplish. You may choose to do this on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, it's up to you. I recommend though that you start out by creating daily "to do" lists until you get used to the discipline of managing your time effectively.

Make a list of everything you would like to accomplish today. This includes business, work and personal. Now prioritize those activities in order of necessity, importance and urgency. When thinking about priorities, make sure that if you run out of time today, what doesn't get done is something that can wait until tomorrow.

In addition to scheduling your activities, allocate realistic time periods within which to complete them. By setting a time limit for these tasks, you will force yourself to lift your pace to

get them done in the time allotted which in turn will force you to become more productive. It will also help you discipline yourself not to allow distractions to get in the way.

When scheduling, work with your effectiveness level as much as you can. Schedule important tasks that require creativity and clear-thinking for your most alert period of the day. Routine or mundane tasks can be slotted into low energy/low concentration periods.

Also, try and maintain and influence your energy levels with diet and rest. A high carbohydrate breakfast will keep the brain supplied with sugars for the early part of the day. But by mid-morning, you may experience a sugar slump so get into the habit of having a mid-morning snack to avoid this. A banana will do the trick. Some people swear by protein (such as an egg) at breakfast to delay the energy dip. Experiment until you find what works best for you.

Still on the subject of diet, if you want to have a productive afternoon avoid large lunches because they divert blood from the brain and to digestion. If you've ever felt like taking a nap after lunch, that's why. Also, don't drink alcohol at lunchtime because it's a sedative. All you'll want to do is go to sleep. Not very conducive to a productive afternoon's work.

BE RESULTS-FOCUSED

Focus on results, not on being busy. You are, I'm sure, familiar with the Pareto Principle, also known as the 80/20 rule. The Pareto Principle says that 80% of unfocused effort generates only 20% of results and the remaining 80% of results are achieved with only 20% of effort. Focus on the results you are wanting to achieve and look for ways to work more efficiently.

MANAGE DISTRACTIONS

No doubt your activity log revealed an amazing amount of time taken up with distractions. Distractions can take many forms but let's look at three major ones: email, telephone calls and casual visitors.

= Email

Check your non-work (i.e. non-job) email only once or twice a day and deal with each item only once. That means reading it, responding to it, filing it for later review or trashing it. Don't leave it sitting in your inbox once you've opened it or you'll forget what it is and waste time rereading it probably several times over.

= Telephone Calls

Be disciplined with telephone calls. Have an agenda before dialing and stick to it. Be clear in your own mind the purpose of your call and the outcome you want. It's also a good idea to schedule "telephone time" if you can manage it. This is an hour or so every day when you make and return phone calls.

= Casual Visitors

Discourage chatty drop-in visitors by getting up from your desk, continuing to appear busy, not having convenient visitors' chairs (drape your coat over them or pile them up with papers) or by saying something like, "Joe can I get back to you on whatever it is once I'm done here? I'm under the gun."

LEARN TO SAY NO

Get out of the habit of feeling bad about declining requests from people to take on tasks that will erode even further the precious little time you have available. Now, if it's your boss and what you're being asked to do falls within your job description, you obviously have no choice, but do you really need to be on yet another committee?

USE DEAD TIME PRODUCTIVELY

Time spent waiting for an appointment or when you're travelling can be put to productive use. Use that 15 minutes you're waiting in the doctor's surgery to sketch out some article ideas, write some classified ads or answer email. Same thing when you're travelling. If you're travelling by air, try and get a seat that will allow you to work. That may mean an emergency exit or a bulkhead seat, for example. Any seat that will allow you to work on your laptop comfortably is worth the effort.

GET UP EARLIER

This one is a no-brainer. If you get up just one hour earlier each day, you effectively create another 365 hours a year. That's more than 45 working days. You could create a brand new website in only 10 working days. You could write the outline of a novel in the same time period. At least think about it.

IMPROVE READING TECHNIQUES

Consider learning how to speed read to save time on your business reading. Alternatively, learning more effective reading strategies to extract the required information most efficiently is another time saver.

These are just a few ideas to get you thinking about how you can save time and create time in your day. By putting these principles to work and constantly testing your activities against the yardstick "does this make a worthwhile contribution to my work, business or personal wellbeing?", you will quickly develop a radar for time wasters and begin to eliminate them from your life. By simplifying your life in this way you will be amazed at how much more you are able to accomplish in the time available to you and your dream of giving up your day job for your own full-time business will become a reality much sooner than you would have ever thought possible.

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