

Learning To Let Go

By Ramona Creel

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If you have the entrepreneurial spirit (which clearly you have!), you probably have a tendency toward being a control freak. I know the feeling well -- "No one can do it as well as me, so I'll just do it all!" While this may seem to be more efficient than trying to bring someone else in to help out, it's actually more time-consuming in the long run.

See if this scenario is familiar -- you find that you can't see as many clients as you would like, because you have to spend at least one day each week catching up on paperwork. You spend nearly 6 hours that day on administrative work -- filing, writing letters, sending out mailings to clients, and staying on top of your bookkeeping. You feel efficient, because at least you get it done. But is it really work that YOU need to do? Most of the time-consuming, labor-intensive administrative duties that accompany business ownership don't have to be done by the head of the company. Filing? Anyone could do that, provided they understand how your system is set up. Bookkeeping? Mailings? Same thing. We just don't think to hand these duties over to someone else because we feel we have to do it all --- it's our business, so it's our responsibility.

WHAT'S THE OPTION?

There is almost no reason to hire permanent staff members anymore. You may not realize that you can hire freelance contract employees to handle many of these administrative tasks. "Virtual office assistants" can tackle any task -- from mass mailings to database management to document preparation -- without ever setting foot in your office. Other administrative outsourcing professionals will take care of standard office duties onsite -- such as filing and bill-paying.

And you can find freelancers to take on just about any other non-administrative project you can think of -- designing your website, writing a business plan, sending out press releases, you name it. Finally, many professionals you work with already may be able to help you with some of your concerns. Your CPA may offer bookkeeping services at a reduced rate. Your printer might be able to handle your graphic design needs. And you could talk your attorney about looking over your business plan. It never hurts to ask.

WHY HIRE SOMEONE ELSE?

So you say, "What's the point in hiring someone? If I'm going to have to pay them to do the work, I might as well do it myself!" Not always true. The problem occurs when you begin spending your time on issues that could be done by someone else for less money. What is your hourly rate? Let's pretend that you earn \$50 an hour. Now ask yourself how much your "administrative days" are

costing you. If you normally work a 6-hour day, you could be making an additional \$300 each week if you spent that time seeing clients.

If you were to hire an administrative assistant to come in for 6 hours a week, at \$25 an hour (a very reasonable rate for such services), it would only cost you \$150 a week. You still net an additional \$150 a week -- that's an extra \$7200 a year, if you work a standard 48-week year like most people do. And it is quite likely that -- being the skilled professional that her or she is -- an administrative assistant could complete the work in less time than you can. Best of all, you only hire them when you need them -- so if you have a slow week, you cut back on their hours. Looks like a win-win situation to me!

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

As you are working your way through all those action items this week, create a "not-to-do list". For every item you come across, ask yourself if it has to be done by you. Your list might include making follow-up phone calls, updating your contact database, entering all of your expenses into Quickbooks, and sending out a mass mailing to all of your clients -- those jobs could very easily be taken on by someone else.

Once you've decided that you aren't integral to the process, ask yourself who could do it for you. Could be an administrative assistant, web developer, accountant, or the teenager next door -- and if you don't already have connections with professionals who can take over these responsibilities for you, start asking around. Talk to clients, colleagues, and other professionals that you know -- someone is bound to have a few suggestions for you. Try to come up with at least one name for each job on your list. The last step is to contact those folks and start negotiating a deal. By the end of this next month, you should be able to clear at least a few tasks from your plate.

GET YOUR PROCESSES DOWN

The key to letting someone else take over a portion of your work is not just handing them a job, but giving them the tools to do the job right. I'll give you an example of how I managed to free up four full days a month with the help of a virtual office assistant. I looked around my office and realized that I was spending an awful lot of time publishing my online newsletter -- a service which I consider incredibly valuable to my clients, but which doesn't directly earn me any money. So I spoke with a friend of mine -- who has worked on websites before -- about giving her these tasks to do. I decided that I still wanted to be in charge of selecting the content for my newsletters, but that Jackie should take over formatting the pages on the web. The most important preparation was setting down the exact procedures she would follow to complete the newsletter each month -- step by detailed step.

This was a bit time-consuming on the front end, but it has saved us both countless hours over the past 6 months that Jackie has been doing my website. Now that she knows what to do and how to do it (without asking me!), she almost works on automatic pilot. And all I have to do is e-mail her my content and wait for the message that my newsletter is complete. And because we hammered out all of the details up front, I know I can count on a consistent, quality, professional job each month. Best of all, Jackie's rate is less than half of mine, so I can spend those days working with clients and still come out ahead! So what projects are you ready to outsource?

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Ramona Creel is a Professional Organizer and the founder of OnlineOrganizing.com -- a web-based one-stop shop offering everything that you need to get organized at home or at work. At OnlineOrganizing.com, you may get a referral to an organizer near you, shop for the latest

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