

Finding the Time

by Linda Leigh Francis

Many builders and remodelers complain about having so much work that they have no time to market their business. Their sales chart looks like an outline of the Alps, with peaks of plenty followed by valleys of want. When they start running out of work, they begin to market frantically, which creates lots of work, which results in no time to market, which — you get the picture.

When I teach my class for small business owners on how to run a business more effectively, I tell my students that they can't afford to do everything themselves. I hit the point home when I have them track their week in 15-minute intervals on a timesheet. It's a real pain for them to do but a real eye-opener, too.

Spend It Wisely

One owner, a remodeler I'll call Steve, found that he was averaging 10 hours per week performing tasks that a laborer could easily do, such as delivering materials, running errands, gassing vehicles, cleaning up job sites, and so on. I asked Steve if it would make sense to hire an employee to do this lower-skilled work so he could concentrate exclusively on the tasks in his owner's job description, which included marketing every week.

He replied that he couldn't afford to hire a laborer because of the peaks and valleys of his sales. But a simplified accounting showed him that he was paying himself a total of \$28 per hour, or \$280 per week, to do the work of someone he might pay \$7 per hour. With this assessment in hand, he could see that hiring a worker would actually make him money. The \$280 that he

was paying himself would pay for a full-time minimum-wage employee, who could perform the 10 hours of menial tasks with 30 working hours a week left to spare. The time Steve recouped from running errands could be used for marketing. With consistent marketing on a steady basis, his business peaks and valleys would flatten out, resulting in higher profitability.

Effective Delegation

For a cost-effective remedy, a business owner and his or her team have to learn how to effectively delegate routine tasks down the chain of command.


Involve the team. We took the analysis of Steve's work habits one step further. Whenever Steve or an employee in his company performed work that someone else could do at a lower wage, the business was losing money. So he took a closer look at his company's personnel to determine who else was performing work that could be done by someone at a lower wage and found many instances. For example, his lead carpenter was running errands, and his estimator was delivering materials. Instead, both of these jobs could have been handled by an apprentice or laborer.

Effective delegation involves a number of requirements, both common and unique to each company and its personnel. As a business owner, you must:

- Pick the right person for the job. Make sure that delegated tasks fit in with their other job responsibilities.
- Be clear about your expectations: Who? What? Where? When? Why?
- Secure an employee's commitment to getting the job done. Don't accept, "Oh, sure." Have them look you in the eye and say, "Yes, I'll get it done."

- Set frequent follow-up dates to check on job progress and evaluate their handle on the newly assigned tasks. Fewer check-ins will be needed as a person's skills increase.
- Let people approach the job their way. Differently doesn't necessarily mean wrong.
- Celebrate employees' successes when they get the job done right. Acknowledge their contribution, both publicly and privately. You might give them a personal "thank you" and recognize their effort at a staff meeting.
- Continue to delegate additional tasks as employees grow into their new roles.

Steve began to delegate such jobs as handling special orders, scheduling trade contractors and materials, and producing change orders. He found that his employees had wanted more responsibility. In fact, delegating responsibility proved to be a great way to affirm their value, trustworthiness, and importance to him and to the success of his company. Instead of looking like peaks and valleys, his sales chart has evened out to rolling hills. He now keeps two full-time laborers busy and has become more profitable.

Owning a business is hard work, and there's no way around the fact that, at times, owners end up working too many hours. But, by appropriately delegating tasks, an owner can concentrate on his or her job, spending time on tasks that will ensure that the business is successful. 

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