Family business leaders continually lament the fact that there are simply not enough hours in the day to do all of things they want to do in their businesses and, perhaps more importantly, in their personal lives. Today, the demands of business are such that you could work 24 hours a day every day and still not get all things done to make your business run more efficiently and effectively. Family business members often ask what they can do to improve their personal effectiveness both at work and at home.

It’s helpful to distinguish between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency can be quickly and clearly defined as doing things right. Effectiveness is doing right things right. Family business owners all too often find themselves doing jobs that could and should be done by other people on the payroll. When an accounts payable clerk is out sick, it may be the owner of the business who fills that slot. The same holds true for a superintendent who is out on vacation or a salesman who is out on disability. Because they are capable of doing virtually any job in the organization, FBO’s often do, and by so doing they inadvertently reduce themselves to the role of “utility player.”

Many family business owners suffer from a modern malady called “Urgency Addiction” or “Hurry Sickness.” While they bemoan the fact that they can’t seem to get a moment’s peace, their cell phones are continually ringing and their pagers and email are constantly pulling at them to attend to urgent matters. They make themselves completely accessible to anyone in the organization, all customers, all vendors, as well as friends and acquaintances. In other words, by making themselves wholly accessible, they are pulled in twenty or thirty different directions every single business day which prevents them from focusing on the one or two things that they could and should do on any day. The addiction part comes in when family business leaders begin to crave continual contact with others and depend on the role of being the “go to guy” whenever there is a problem large or small. Continued focus on the urgent precludes focus on things that are truly important over time.

In order to increase one’s personal effectiveness, it is helpful to subscribe to the four D’s: 1) Do it; 2) Delegate it; 3) Dump it; or 4) Delay it. The four D’s are especially helpful with simple, common, routine tasks and email or paper handling. A cardinal rule of the four D’s is: touch paper or simple assignments only once. For example, if you elect to do it, that means execute the item to be done right away. Don’t file it, don’t put it in a pile on your desk, don’t put it on a pile on the floor near your chair so it will be in plain view. Do it now.
Delegate it means pass the assignment along to someone else on your staff. A good question to ask is: can this assignment be more easily or more effectively done by someone else on the payroll (likely someone who makes a great deal less money than you and can do the task much more inexpensively than you)?

Dump it means exactly that – throw the paper or assignment away. How many family business owners have stacks and stacks of trade journals and periodicals they intend to read but never get to? If something has been sitting on your floor or desk for more than sixty days and you haven’t gotten to it yet, get rid of it. You won’t ever get to it, and the guilt and anguish of having that pile stare you in the face every day takes a toll over time. Do yourself a favor and clean up the stacks of mess that you’ve accumulated which make you feel guilty because you’ve never created time to get to them.

Delay it means that the item is something of importance, but you can’t get to it right now. If the item is truly important enough to demand your personal attention, schedule a time when you intend to do the project. Make an appointment in your appointment book, Day Timer, Palm Pilot, etc. where you’ll set aside an hour or more to do the task at hand. Sometimes it helps to do tasks very early in the morning before anyone else gets to the office and the phone doesn’t interrupt. Perhaps one day per week you could come in at 6:30 a.m. instead of 8:30 and create two free hours for pushing through your important items which have been delayed.

It also helps to work from a clean desk. Studies show that people who work with messy desks spend 1.5 hours per day being distracted by the items in their field of vision or searching for items which have been shoved into the wrong pile. This statistic means that 7.5 hours a week for a busy family business executive are wasted because of the failure to demand efficiency and effectiveness of themselves.

Last, but certainly not least, all family business leaders should have a personal mission as well as a corporate mission. It’s impossible for someone to tell what’s truly important in their life if they don’t have a sense of personal mission which coincides with their corporate mission. If you haven’t invested the time in yourself to carefully reflect on your personal mission in life, you can’t hope to be as personally effective as you’d like to be. The same holds true for your company.

The cost of inefficiency, waste, misunderstood priorities, and focus on irrelevant tasks costs the typical family business anywhere from tens of thousands to tens of millions of dollars per year.
Improving Personal Effectiveness

In a time of economic recession, shouldn’t you do all you can to be as personally effective as possible to improve your bottom line? A small investment in improving your personal effectiveness will pay huge rewards over time for you in the areas of money, time, reduced tension, and improved business family harmony.

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