Chapter from: DOUBLE YOUR PROFITS - STEP 12

**A SENSE OF URGENCY**

There are virtually no important management tasks that take six months to complete. Yet how many Task Forces, consultants, or committees are given that long or longer to do their job (or worse, to come up with “a plan,” but to actually *do* nothing)? How many heads of small businesses *know* the things that need to be done that are truly important to the future of their businesses, but take many months or years to get them because they’re “just too busy?”

The first thing I do in the morning of every work day is divide everything I have to do that day into three lists. The first list includes anything that brings in new business (i.e. raises revenue) or eliminates costs. (These are the only two ways you can create profit equals revenue minus cost.) The second list includes things I have to do to “maintain” existing business or keep an existing internal operating system running. The third list includes all the things that someone expects or wants me to do, but which really add no value to the bottom line.

I *never* start on my second list until I’ve done everything on my first list, and *never* start on my third list until I’ve done everything on my second list. I *always* get everything on my first list done before noon that day, when my mind is most alert and my mood most constructive. I always get everything on my second list done by mid-afternoon. Sometimes I finish my third list, and sometimes I decide I’ve had enough, and I go home.

This sequence, by the way, is the *opposite* of the normal human tendency. The most important tasks (i.e. list 1) are usually the hardest to conceptualize and implement, so the tendency is to procrastinate and do the less threatening, less critical tasks (list 3) first: Hence the business person who is always “too busy” to do the most important things.

You have to make sure that the most important things are completed with the most urgency, but there’s more to creating a sense of urgency. You must insist on a culture that says nothing important takes more than a few minutes or a day or a week, or a month if it’s truly complex, to complete. *Always* set deadlines in the very near term: If you stick to this, people always will meet the deadlines, not by working all night but by eliminating non-value producing tasks from their schedules. That is the *real* benefit of tight deadlines. My philosophy is to *always keep resources very scarce,* because that is the only way to force people to soul-search about which tasks are truly value-producing and which are not. The opposite is also true: Give people more time, and as the very true cliché goes, time spent on a task will always expand to the time allowed.

Never call a meeting to discuss: only call a meeting to decide. Never, or rarely, accept “let me think about it and call you back” as an answer: What more are they going to know later to make the decision that they don’t already know now? Make the decision *now*, so that “later” they can make another decision or achieve something else and therefore be twice as productive.

A stubborn impatience to do things now is a powerful producer of profit. It also engenders an enormous respect from those in your organization. No one respects procrastinators, and everyone admires “doers.” Every time I’m in one of our offices I ask people to do more things: You’d think they’d dread seeing me. The truth is quite the contrary. Person after person has told me that when I’m away from the office, things are uninspiring, but when I come in my *sense of urgency* and the way that I project it is contagious and exhilarating and makes them truly charged up about their own jobs.

Create and maintain a strong sense of urgency in your business, and it will pay you back a thousand times over in the increased focus and productivity of everyone in the organization.