



"You must develop others so they can take on tasks that you primarily handle," says Morgan.

## Are You Running Your Business or Is It Running You?

### Take Control Before You Lose Control

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*This MTD exclusive is provided by Jeff Morgan, the executive director of TEN (Training and Education Network), including the DSP (Dealer Strategic Planning) 20 Group*

Ever wish you had more time? We all have before - whether we've been up against a tight deadline or were thinking about spending extra time with someone. And often, we wish we had more time to spend after it's too late.

When faced with this, the conclusion that many people come to is that they just need to do a better job at time management. Well, I'm about to break that bubble.

The truth is that you cannot manage time! It will continue to march forward at the same, steady pace that it always has - and always will. You have absolutely no power or control over it.

The only thing that you have power or control over when it comes to time is what you do with it. So while you cannot manage time, you can - and must - manage yourself.

This is especially true when running a business.

You probably have heard some version of “You need to work more on your business, as opposed to just in your business.” That sounds good. But as you already know, that’s hard to do.

Sometimes we have great plans and ideas to move our business forward. However, before we know it, we are caught up in our “everyday” and in the minutiae of the business - only to realize that our ideas never came to life. And even if you tried, it simply “got lost.”

When this happens, you must realize that you are no longer running your business. Instead, the business is running you. This is a prescription for disaster.

Sometimes when this happens, your business may still be performing well financially. This gives you even more of an excuse as to why it is OK to allow those great ideas to vanish.

“We’re knocking it out of the park right now and can barely keep up. We’re in a great place!” we tell ourselves.

Well, to quote Will Rogers, “Even if you are on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” This may be the most prophetic statement ever made when it comes to business.

The reality is that it’s very easy to let stagnation happen. You have a lot going on in your business. There are moments when it may seem that you are juggling more balls than you can handle. You have questions coming at you from employees and customers.

You have issues to deal with regarding inventory, equipment, vehicles and people. At times, it can seem that you are simply trying to keep your head above water.

But here is the bigger issue. Until you learn to better handle this, it will never change. You will be stuck in this perpetual loop - the never-ending whirlpool of stuff.

This is why I mentioned earlier that you must learn to better manage yourself. It starts with personal accountability. Just as you would hold an employee accountable for doing their job, you must do the same for yourself.

As an owner or manager, part of your job is to lead the business to success, both for today and into the future. Today is what it is. But the future is completely dependent on your willingness and ability to plan, forecast, adjust and change.

With this in mind, the first thing you need to do is hold yourself accountable for setting time aside every week to look at - and plan for - the future. It does not have to be several days at a time. Perhaps you set aside one morning each week to spend a few hours “working on” your business. This means that you are not to be pulled away from this task.

Your team must know that this is a time when you are unavailable. Only a serious emergency can peel you away. Because daily business does not stop, you need to have delegated certain authority and tasks to others in your business in order to accomplish this. This seems to be the biggest obstacle for many business owners.

Too often, leaders feel that only they can do it properly or that they are the only ones who can handle certain situations. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You must develop others so they can take on tasks that you primarily handle.

This will take time and there will be mistakes along the way, but it will be worth it. I have often said that the best leaders are the ones who don't have to be there because they have developed others to carry forward in their absence.

Once you have delegated authority to others and have set aside the time you need each week to “work on” your business, you need to decide what to focus on.

Allow yourself to be critical of your business. Look at what is working well and where you have opportunities to improve. Be honest with yourself. Realize that “good” can be a limiter to becoming “great.”

Maybe your business is doing OK in a specific area, but you know there is an opportunity to be better. Do not be afraid to admit this. In fact, recognize that your future success is dependent on these types of improvements.

Now that you have identified and listed out your opportunities, you need to prioritize that list. I like to use this analogy: “You can only eat an elephant one bite at a time. Just make sure the first bite tastes so good that you want to go back for more.”

In other words, go after the things that will have the biggest and best effect on your business first. Go through your list and rank items or ideas based on their value to the business. Put your most critical items first. Then list those things that are still important, but not as critical at the moment. Finally, add the items that you feel you need to do, but not before you have implemented the other items.

You cannot do everything at once, so start with just a few items at the top of the list. Focus on two or three that you can drive effectively. If you try any more than that, you will likely not get any done as you will become overwhelmed. You may not think that will happen, but remember - you still have the rest of your business to run.

As you look to develop plans, make sure they are doable. I once worked with an executive who told me that he based his plans according to three key criteria, which I still remember and use to this day. Whatever you do, he said, make sure your plan is “realistic, sustainable and executable.”

If it is not realistic, you are wasting your time. If it is not something that can be sustained, it will not create long-term value. If you do not have the ability to execute the plan, it is simply a dream. Once your plan fits all three of those criteria, you are ready to put it in place.

Make sure your plans are clear and detailed in what you want to accomplish and exactly how you are going to do it. When any of these are unclear, you run the risk of the people in your business interpreting your plans differently and acting upon them differently. Do not leave any doubt as to what everyone’s role is. Meet with your team and outline everything to everyone. This ensures that not only do individuals know what they should be doing, but they know what others are doing, as well. This creates layers of accountability that can help lead to success.

Once your plan is launched, you must report back to everyone regularly on how they are performing. It will likely be a struggle at the beginning, because any change often is. Even if things start off well, if left alone, people will often fall back into old habits or ways of doing things. You need them to develop new habits. And this takes time -often at least three months of constant focus.

That is why you must continue to evaluate and report on progress regularly. You must keep this top of mind with your team, as well, if you want them to do so.

Once you have taken the time to build and execute solid plans to improve your business, you will see results.

Additionally, you will also feel that you have more control over where your business is going and you will feel more confident in your ability to steer it to where you want it to go.

This all starts and ends with you holding yourself accountable. If you let yourself get washed away in the everyday tides of business, you will eventually drown. Do not let this happen.

Only by forcing yourself to step away regularly from the “day-to-day” - to focus and develop plans to improve your business - will you achieve the levels of success that you want. This is a non-negotiable that you must do for yourself and your business.

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