

No Rest for the Weary? Taking Time Off as a One-Person Business

Are You a Slave to Your Business?

When we first become self-employed, we envision setting our own hours, taking long weekends off and setting aside several weeks for vacations. We feel for the less fortunate who work for someone else.

Then, one day we realize that we are working longer hours than we had hoped and we aren't taking the time off we thought we would because "who would do the work when I'm gone?" Instead of having the ultimate time freedom we anticipated, we feel imprisoned by our business.

Or, is Managing Time Off Just a Little Bit Elusive?

Maybe your case isn't as severe. You are able to take a day or two off here and there, but you have this sinking feeling that a longer break just wouldn't be a possibility for you. How would you pay the bills? Would you lose all your clients?

Creating a Plan in Advance

The key to taking time off is to create a plan in advance. In fact, you should be planning for time off when you initially create your business plan and each subsequent year's plan. If you structure your business around taking time off, you'll be able to manage your work flow around your schedule. If you wait for a good time to take a break, it will never come.

This is the "pay yourself first" method. The magic of paying yourself first is that everything else falls in place around it. If you pay yourself last, typically there's nothing left...

Put it in Writing

Many of us worry that our clients will be upset that we're taking time off. If it's written right into your contract that you will be taking time off here and there (the more specific, the better), it sets expectations with the client. We're all willing to be flexible when our expectations are set.

Arranging for Outside Help

If you are going to take a longer break, the time to look for help is now. Is there another professional you trust that might be able to fill in when you are gone if needed? Can you arrange to do the same for them? Strategic Alliances aren't just for marketing -- building relationships with others in your field can make it much easier to support your clients when you are gone without fear of losing them.

You can bill the client directly and pay your strategic partner for their work, or have the client work directly with them -- your choice.

Would Someone be Able to Call All Your Clients in an Emergency?

What if you are suddenly sick and unable to call your clients to notify them? Do you have a list of all your current clients and someone who could easily make the calls to let them know of your situation? Even if it's just a family member, make sure they know how to access your client list and be sure to keep it updated.

the solopreneur zone

the resource place for solo-entrepreneurs

Handling the Money

Is money your biggest concern in taking time off? What can you do now to create reserves to enable you to take time off? Since our income as Solopreneurs is often up and down, we should have a plan for the down times, even when we aren't on vacation. Another thing to consider: if you are taking a longer break, some of your business expenses will be lower when you are gone (long-distance charges, etc) which should ease the financial crunch.

Creating Your Plans:

Taking 1-2 Days Off

What's your plan for taking 1-2 days off? You probably don't need much in the way of external support, but you will want a strategy for notifying clients in advance.

Taking 1-2 Weeks Off

When taking 1-2 weeks off, you'll want to do a little more planning. Do you need coverage while you are gone? Will you be checking email, or could you create an auto-responder to let everyone know you are out? How will you make sure you don't have a pile of work waiting for you when you return?

Getting Sick

It's very tough to create a plan when you are sick, so you'll definitely want to plan for it in advance. How will you notify your clients? Do you have someone who can do your work in your absence? Are your files up to date so that someone else can fill in? Would you offer refunds of your fees if you are sick for a long period of time?

Taking Sabbaticals and Longer Breaks

Taking longer breaks requires a lot more planning, but they aren't impossible. Many of us love our work freedom, but admit that closing up shop for 6 months just seems impossible. You don't have to start back at square one if you choose to take a longer break from your business.

The key is to spend quality time in the planning stages. What are the biggest issues to tackle? Is money the biggest concern, or is it losing all of your clients? Are you fearful that you'll lose momentum and have to market your business as if it's brand new?

If you have a website and/or ezine, these tools can continue to keep in contact with your client base even when you aren't there. With technology, you can pre-schedule your newsletter to go out all on its own.

If you are concerned about phone calls and email, consider auto-responders and/or negotiate with an answering service for a lower rate since you will probably have lower call volume.

The bottom line? Anything is possible with a good plan...