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PLANNING

MAKING A BETTER TO-DO LIST



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LIFE LESSONS for BUSINESS OWNERS

I'll admit it – I love “to-do” lists. I've been known to cover my computer monitor in sticky notes with “to-do” items. I always keep a journal with me so I can jot down ideas that come up during meetings, and I start my weekends by making a list of all the chores I want to do around the house. I keep a magnetized notepad on my refrigerator so I can keep a separate list for the grocery store, and I'm quite proud of my ability to draw a perfectly square checkbox on all of my lists.

But for all the satisfaction I get from checking items off of my list, I also know that this simple accountability tool has one primary shortfall: It's too easy to add items to a to-do list without context. Just putting something on a list doesn't mean it's important or that it should be a priority. If a list grows too long, it can become overwhelming and leave you asking, “Where do I start when all my to-do items look the same?” My recommendation? Put your calendar to use to keep yourself more accountable, productive and efficient.

Here are four questions to ask yourself when you're making your next list:

Does it have to happen right away?

Seems simple, but it's easy to make a list where everything looks like it's equally important. That's rarely the case. Ask yourself what really must get done in a given week and add only those items to your list. That will keep you from getting overwhelmed and make your list more focused. If you want, create a list of “on deck” tasks that you can add to a weekly list later and look to accomplish in the coming weeks or months.

How long will it take?

For all of your lists, think about the amount of time it will take to complete the task and use that information to determine the priority. Based when you have available time in any given week, a two-hour task may need to take precedence over one that will take only fifteen minutes – or vice versa.



What's my deadline?

Once you've established how long it will take to complete a given task, move the items from your list to your online calendar in the form of a event, with the start and stop time on a specific date. There are many benefits of moving to-do list items to your calendar: First, you're blocking time to focus on the item. Second, you're giving yourself a specific window to complete the task or as much of as you can. Next, you're prioritizing the item based on where you place it on your calendar. And finally, you're forcing yourself to decide if the task is really something you're going to do. If something else comes up and you can't work on the task at the designated time, you have to decide to move the calendar item to another block of time or not do it at all.

Do I need to do it myself?

If you're independent-minded like I am, your first instinct might be to take on your entire list by yourself. After all, if you want a job done, do it yourself, right? Not so much. You're likely surrounded by friends, family and colleagues with talents that you don't have. Take stock of the people around you and think of the ways you can enlist their talents to help you with anything that you're trying to do. Not only will things likely move faster, you're bound to get a better result and will have accountability to others along the way.

This process can work with everything from office task lists to grocery lists and to all other projects and chores. And you can even schedule your trip to the grocery store by creating a calendar event for a designated date and time. Keep your list of what you need to buy in your checklist app or even in the comments field of the calendar event, both of which offer the bonus of accessing your list from your phone, tablet or computer.

Once you have these steps in place, you'll be on track to completing all the tasks on your plate, and you'll enjoy the satisfaction of placing a checkmark next to your to-do items.

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THE PETRA EXPERIENCE

The Petra Experience is like a Mental Marathon of focused effort to create a specific set of priorities and a planned process to achieve them... as a team.

Looking to change your business life - forever?

The daily grind of growing a business is tough... it doesn't have to be that way. We work from our own business experiences while focusing on your business – as coach and an accountability partner. We implement the Petra Process in a way that ensures it “sticks” then we stay engaged to keep you on your path to success and less frustration. We don't want this to be just another thing you start – then it gets ignored and finally dies... let's stop that cycle in your business. The Petra Program 'clarifies' what is most important to be done – by whom, by when – **AND** creates an accountability structure to ensure **IT GETS DONE.**

*Rob Simons is an entrepreneur coach with business coaching firm Petra.
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