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Got Growth?

Want vacation time? Learn to delegate

Either you did a lousy job hiring, or you have a good staff: Use them

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You wake up early and go in to work. You're usually first to arrive, and you like it that way - it is the only time you can get any real work done. As the clock ticks and the sun rises, staff starts arriving and phones begin to ring. It won't be long before someone walks in to your office with a problem they need solved, and that's when your day will end.

When you go home that evening, a different thought pops into your head: "When will this get easier? When will I be able to have a more normal life?"

The corner you feel painted into is a familiar place for small-business owners. Your success is obvious, your pain is hidden, yet it can feel like prison. J. Paul Getty once said, "If you get up early, work late, and pay your taxes, you will get ahead -- if you strike oil." The job of the small-business owner is a difficult one, a road that most are not suited for. But you made it, you succeeded and built something you are proud of. You just want a break, some relief from the pressure of the daily grind.

Problem is, how do you take a break without the business falling apart?

The First Lesson

No good business depends on one person for success. Even though you built it, you are just one person and cannot shoulder the load by yourself. You need to change the way you manage and lead. You have staff; you are the person who hired them, and now it is time to put them to work. I can hear the complaints as I write - "They don't have the knowledge, they don't have the expertise, it's not their business and they won't have the dedication. Who is in here first thing in the morning getting work done, who solves the problems all day long? Me! How can I put that responsibility on their shoulders and expect the business to

survive?"

You clearly have a dilemma, a valid one, and what you might not recognize is that you are trying to have your cake and eat it, too. Either you did a lousy job of hiring people, or you have great staff. If you did a lousy job of hiring your staff, you know how to fix that. If you have great staff, you'd better start trusting them.

Untapped Gold Mine

Quality people need to be challenged. They won't tolerate being unchallenged or treated like they aren't competent for very long. It's your job to put your staff to work. I don't mean the mechanical components of your business; I mean the strategic ones, such as creating ideas and putting them into action, as well as giving your employees the responsibility to make decisions and the authority to act on them.

Use your staff and listen to them. They have good ideas and know more about what is going on than you might think. Who has more contact with your customers than your staff? Who knows more about what is going on in the market than your staff? After all, they do have a life outside work. They go to the grocery store, take vacations and talk to other parents. Their friends and neighbors know where they work and what they do. If you want to know what's really happening, talk to your staff.

When I was running my small business, one of my greatest fears was what might happen if I trusted an employee and they cost me my business due to inexperience or lack of knowledge. After many years of struggling through the day and not having a life, I finally realized the responsibility for their success rested squarely on my shoulders. The only reason my staff needed me to solve their problems was because I refused to give them the opportunity and ability to do it themselves.

It was my job to be sure we hired the best and brightest, to create an environment where those kinds of people wanted to work, to teach them what they needed to know and to help them become emotionally invested in the business. They needed to take ownership before I could trust them to do the things I needed them to do.

A Chance to Shine

Kinko's founder Paul Orfalea was not good in school, but he was well-known for listening whenever an employee wanted to share an idea or a solution to a problem. However, if they came to him looking for help, he would turn them away, refusing to let their problems be dumped on his desk.

Most small-business owners today take pride in the fact they can solve any problem or come

up with a good idea to accomplish any goal. But stop hogging all the air in the room and give your staff a chance to shine. When Orfalea was interviewed in 2004, he said, "If I find a great idea, I work on it at the beginning, then bring other people in to make things work. Actually, I've always been good at getting out of work."

If you are feeling trapped by your business, there is a way out. Learn how to delegate and mentor your staff, trust that you have made good hiring decisions and make your staff a part of the business. It will be a win, win, win for you, your staff and your customers.

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