

Take Control of Your Calendar with Mental Health Weeks

Category: Time Management

As I work with business owners, we often talk about accomplishing their personal vision of taking more time off, and there are any number of things that make this difficult. The biggest challenge lies in organizing the business to be able to function without you, but there are some simple things you can do that will make it much more likely to happen.

The best way to increase the chance of being able to take time off is to schedule it in your calendar at the beginning of the year before it starts to fill up with things that are driven by 'the tyranny of the urgent'. You don't have to have anything particular in mind like a planned vacation, and you can always come back and fill in the details later. The point is that if you block out time early on, you can pick out the dates that work best for you, avoid any commitments that you already have, and reserve time for what you want to do.

The very best way to start is to go into your calendar at the beginning of the year and block out the 'extra' week in each quarter for yourself. This is particularly easy to do if you have a business where the flow means that you should be able to get your work done in a four-week period, but it can be done in any business.

What I do is to identify when those weeks exist (which happens at the end of any five-week month) and block them out as what I call 'mental health weeks'. That's not to say that I have anything specific in mind but I instruct my assistant not to schedule things then without reference to me. Even if some meetings do creep in, I end up with a light week when I can have some 'me' time to work on those important aspects of my business that can otherwise get overlooked.

One other thing I also do to get myself some thinking time, is to schedule the first Friday of every month as a '50,000-foot Friday'. This is a day when I'll try to wall myself off from the outside world and not take any meetings or phone calls or answer any emails - change my voicemail and set an away email message so people know not to expect a reply.

Having carved out a day like this, I can then get into a pattern of thought where I'm looking at my business from 50,000 feet. It is a great opportunity once a month to be strategic, to 'think the big thought'. I take things on my To Do List that require concentrated thought and focus only on doing them. These are things that I may not otherwise get to, and I find this one day a month to be simply invaluable.

Neither of these always work out, but by carving out the time, I give myself a fighting chance. Most of the time I succeed in getting some time for myself to accomplish some things that are in that 'important but not urgent' category, things that can so easily be overlooked or pushed aside.