

SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS



August 2007

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Home-Based Business Burnout

5 Strategies to Avoid Hitting the Burnout Wall

I'm sure you've all heard the expression "going postal", which refers to someone who comes to the end of their rope regarding their work situation, and who turns viciously (and often violently) on their co-workers or the company they work for. This is most often the result of repeated and prolonged stress and burnout in this person's life, until they wake up one morning and decide they just can't take it any more. It may be hard to believe, but home-based business owners hit this burnout wall more often than you can imagine - only they don't have any co-workers to blast, and the company is their own - so they just keep absorbing the stress and stuffing it inside until they wake up one morning, unable to face turning on the computer, or making another phone call. Although it is common, it's not inevitable. There are things you can do to be proactive against burnout. When you feel yourself getting close to that wall - take measures to stop yourself before you hit it head-on. Here are some suggestions.

1. Create Life/Work Balance for Yourself

Life/work balance is a huge buzzword in employment these days. Anyone looking for work is considering how well a company provides it as a primary consideration in whether they want to work for that company. Employers also, are looking at ways to implement programs and strategies to provide work/life balance in order to increase employee retention. So, when you're your own boss, you are the one responsible for work/life balance. If your office is in your home, you need to set boundaries in terms of when you will and won't work. Turn off your email notifier if you're tempted to run into the office at 8 pm when you hear it. Close the office door when you finish at the end of the day as a physical reminder that you're in home mode now. Turn off your computer so its blue beams of light don't draw you into your office every half hour. Work is work, and home life is home life. Make sure you've made a clear separation between the two.

2. Take a Break

Chances are, when you're most stressed and burned out, you'll feel least able to take a break. But it's when you're feeling that kind of stress that you must do it in order to avoid a big meltdown. It may be just one day, or several, depending on your stress level, but taking time AWAY from your home office is critical to gaining perspective and letting off some steam. Set up an autoresponder on your email letting customers know that you are away for a specified length of time. That way they'll know exactly when they



can expect to hear back from you. Your business will survive. On your time away, make sure you take a complete mental break from the business. Do something that distracts you from thinking about it. Go for a drive. Walk along the beach. Meditate. Ponder life. Golf. Swim. Spend time with someone you love. Turn OFF your cell phone and pager, and do NOT take your laptop with you! In order to stave off burnout, your brain must have a complete break from the business and focus on something else. If you're heading toward burnout, you can't afford not to take some time off.

3. Evaluate Your Priorities

It's easy when you're heading toward burnout, to feel overwhelmed by everything that comes your way. Each demand seems of utmost importance, every task - daunting. Every phone call seems like an insurmountable obstacle, and every project - impossible to complete. At this point, the best thing you can do is sit down and evaluate (as objectively as possible) what is on your plate. Take each project, each "to do", and assess its importance and value. When you break it down, you'll find that not everything is as urgent as you imagine, and you can begin to reorder and prioritize what's in front of you. Maybe client X can wait a week to hear that presentation, but your financial forecasting comes to the front of the list as an urgent priority. You'll find things on your list that you can remove completely - things that you'd like to do but aren't necessary right now. When you take time to evaluate your priorities, it brings things into focus, and you'll be able to manage what comes your way much more easily.

4. Get organized

This may seem like a crazy thing to focus on when you're really stressed, but in fact - getting organized may greatly reduce your stress. How much stress are you under because things aren't where they should be, because you can't find things, because you're not managing your time well? How much time do you waste every day doing things that don't really move you toward your business goals? Clean off your desk, organize your files, rearrange your calendar, sort through your email. You'll be amazed at how much physical disarray and disorganization clutters up your mind and your ability to think clearly.

5. Mix up your routine

All of us have daily routines - things that must get done and an order in which they will get done. To avoid burnout, stir things up every once in a while. Break your routine. Do your tasks in a different order. Take a walk in the middle of the day. Invite a business associate out for coffee and brainstorm ideas. Do a puzzle on your lunch break. Walk to the post office (or ride your bike) instead of driving. Watch an interesting TV program. Take a client to lunch. These are all benefits of working from home - you can do whatever you want! Mixing up your daily routine - once a week or once a day - can give you the mental break you need to avoid that trapped burnout syndrome from taking over.

Stress is inevitable, and home-based business owners have more than their fair share, but burnout isn't. Take some proactive steps to avoid hitting the wall and you won't end up in the hospital from some stress-induced illness - or worse - having to take weeks off to recover mentally and emotionally from the potentially devastating effects of burnout.

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Successfully Leading Your Team

If you work in your business with one employee or more - you are part of a team. While the dynamics of working a team - even a small one - can bring about a fantastic synergy that is not possible when one works alone, it also brings along challenges. Since none of us is perfect, we all bring to the team our own personal baggage, in addition to our creativity and productivity. This means that working on a team can be as difficult as it can be rewarding. Being responsible for leading your team means you need to know how to tap into the good stuff, and minimize the bad. How do you do that? Following are attributes of high performing teams. Take stock of how your team is doing in these areas. If there are gaps, perhaps it's time to do some teambuilding, or to reassess your team leadership. For each attribute there is a high performance challenge that gives you practical things to work on in terms of growing towards a more effective team.

High performance teams are committed to a collective vision

This point is critical to an effective high performance team. In fact, without this collective vision, synergy cannot exist. High performance teams are committed to a common purpose. They share similar values. They believe in the same things. If your company mission statement and corporate values are not demonstrated in a daily way - you will have difficulty fostering this collective vision. Successful companies whose teams are highly developed make mission and core values central to everything they do.

High performance challenge - do you have a stated mission and set of core values? If not, that's a vital component to success and you should make it a priority to create them. If you do, are they posted clearly where staff see them every day? Do you talk about them as part of your ongoing daily routine?

High performance teams thrive on competition

Not competition with each other - but with those outside the organization. High performance teams want their company to be the best - better than any other competitor, and this sense of competition bonds them together in working toward making it so. It means they'll help each other out in order to achieve those goals. They want to look good collectively and this helps them set aside personal biases and encourages them to help each other succeed. They want to be able to say "We're #1!"

High performance challenge - do you know where you are in terms of your competition and market share? Does your staff have a clear idea of how you're different from your competition? Do you have clarity about what it means to achieve success in comparison to your competition? Does your team know what it will take to get there?

High performance teams are goal-oriented

They know where they are, where they want to go, and how they're going to get there. They have individual goals, but they also have collective goals. They talk about how they can support each other individually, and work together to come up with strategies to achieve their corporate goals.

High performance challenge - do you encourage and facilitate personal goal-setting among your

staff ? Do you plan corporate goal-setting sessions where your team can identify goals? Do you post those goals someplace where they are visible to your staff every day? Does your team know and understand your goals for your business?



High performance teams are inclusive and self-motivated

They rely heavily on the differences represented on the team - rather than letting those differences tear them apart. They value different backgrounds, styles and opinions and welcome ideas from everyone. They also are highly motivated and don't need to be told what to do. If there is a weakness, it's that they sometimes need to be reigned in as their enthusiasm propels them forward too quickly.

High performance challenge - do you model inclusivity and encourage diversity in your workplace? Do you value ideas from everyone? Do you rely on different perspectives when planning or implementing programs? Do you provide freedom with strong leadership to your team?

High performance teams are supportive of each other

They recognize that each individual's success contributes to collective success. They are willing to be unselfish in order to help out a team member. They naturally mentor each other and demonstrate a strong commitment to one another. They celebrate in each other's successes without jealousy, and take on each other's struggles as their own.

High performance challenge - do you demonstrate a willingness to help others on the team? Do you acknowledge and affirm unselfish acts among your staff? Do you reward team players? Do you encourage your staff to let others know when they need help?

High performance teams take risks

They are confident, forward-thinking, and believe they can achieve what they set out to do. That doesn't mean everyone on the team individually is a risk-taker, but it does mean that when the group is collectively working towards a goal, they are collectively willing to take risks in order to achieve that goal.

High performance challenge - Do you allow people to take risks, without punishing them if things don't turn out well? Do you encourage others on your team to look at risk as a positive thing - as long as it's calculated and well thought-out?

How does your team measure up in each of these areas? Remember, a high performance team doesn't spring up over night, and as a business owner, it's your job to do what you can to work towards establishing a high performance team. At least it is if you want to be successful!

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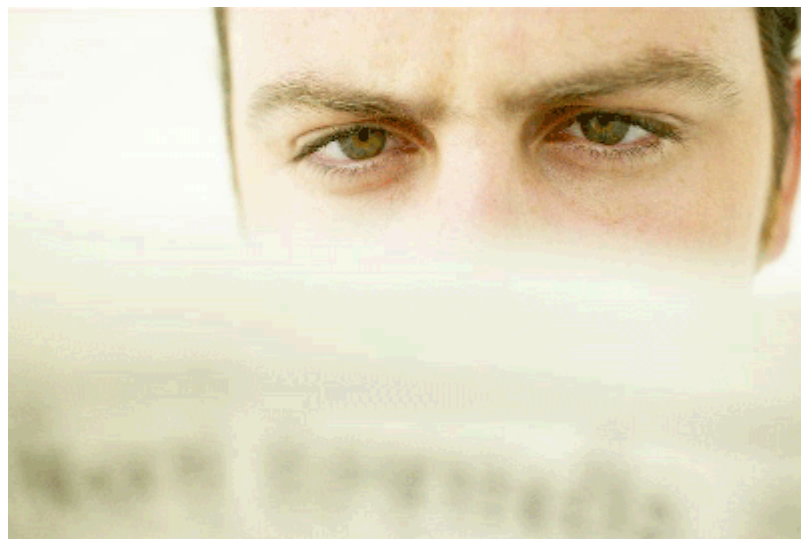
The Best Form of FREE Marketing for Your Business You'll Ever Find

The Art of Writing Articles to Promote Your Business

Some things never change. People have always loved getting things for free. You can't however, run a successful business by giving things away. Your goal is to make money. But what if you could do both at the same time? What if you could give your customers something for FREE, and that something in turn moved them to buy from you? The best of both worlds you say? YES! And it's easy! If you do it right - it will set you apart from your competitors. It costs you close to nothing, but your customers will feel they're getting an added benefit from your company. And that's good for business. The secret to providing something for nothing? Writing articles for your customers!

You'd be amazed how successful this can be. One of the best things you can give away for free is your expertise. Customers come to a mechanic shop because they don't have the expertise to fix their car on their own. They take their good clothes to a dry cleaner because they don't know how (or don't have time) to do it themselves. They hire a caterer because they can't cook gourmet meals for their guests. They hire a landscaper because they don't know the first thing about turning their mess of a yard into a garden.

You may not realize it, but you have a wealth of knowledge that you could share with your customers. If you provide them with free information that makes their lives easier, better, more convenient, or less expensive, your credibility goes through the roof, and who do you think they'll buy from when they



need that expertise? If you did this once a month - all you'd have to do is come up with 12 ways to enhance the lives of your customers. Think about all the things you know, and how you can share that information with them. Write a brief (no more than 2 pages) article. "How To's" are very popular, as are "Five Ways to . . ." ; "10 Tips for . . ."

Print your article and purchase a clear plastic magazine stand to set in your reception area, with a sign on it saying "FREE - Take One".

Few people can resist that! And if

you give them something that will provide value, save money, or show them how to do something better - they'll see you as the expert. Lost for ideas? Here are just a few:

- * A car dealership - 5 Things You MUST Know Before Buying a Used Car
- * A coffee shop - What's in the Grind? Knowing Which Blend is Right for You
- * An auto mechanic - 5 Tune-Up Things You Can Do Yourself
- * A dentist - How to Boost Your Brushing for More Effective Cavity Control
- * A lawyer - 7 Things to Consider Before Writing Your Will
- * A movie rental store - This Month in Review
- * A computer shop - 10 Ways to Maintain Your Computer at Home

- * A dry cleaner - How to Make Your Dry Cleaning Last Longer
- * A scrapbook consultant - Creative Ways to Feature Events
- * A hairdresser - 6 Ways to Minimize Sun Damage to Your Hair This Summer
- * A furniture store - How to Feature Your Furniture
- * A photography shop - 5 Tips on Taking Better Outdoor Photos
- * A garden shop or landscape company - Taking Care of Perennials - 4 Things You Should Know
- * A thrift store - Tips on Finding the REAL Second Hand Deals
- * A restaurant - Restaurant Zed's Recipe of the Month
- * A window covering store - How to Keep Your Drapes Dust-Free
- * A Bed and Breakfast - The 10 Things You Must See While in Town

The potential ideas are endless. Just think about what you know, that your customer may not. Then write it down, and share it with them. Are you feeling stymied because you're not a writer? Don't worry - you can hire a copywriter for a reasonable rate to write about what you know. As long as the information's there, it doesn't take much for a freelance writer to synthesize it. And, it will be money well spent.

You'll find your customers coming in every month just to get the newest article. They'll tell you how your tips or ideas saved them money, time, or impacted their life in a positive way. The more times they come back, the more likely they are to buy from you, and to tell their friends about you. Become known as an expert in your field by providing free tips to your customers, and you'll beat the competition hands down.

One final idea - keep your back issues in a binder or folder as you finish each month. You'll probably find people coming back and asking for a particular article they missed, or that they want to share with a friend. And it's a great thing to have in your waiting area for people to flip through while they wait.

Try it - what have you got to lose? The time it takes you to throw a few ideas onto a piece of paper will be well spent in terms of how much your customers will appreciate the free advice. And you'll appreciate the free advertising it provides for your business as people are buzzing about your articles!

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What's Holding You Back?

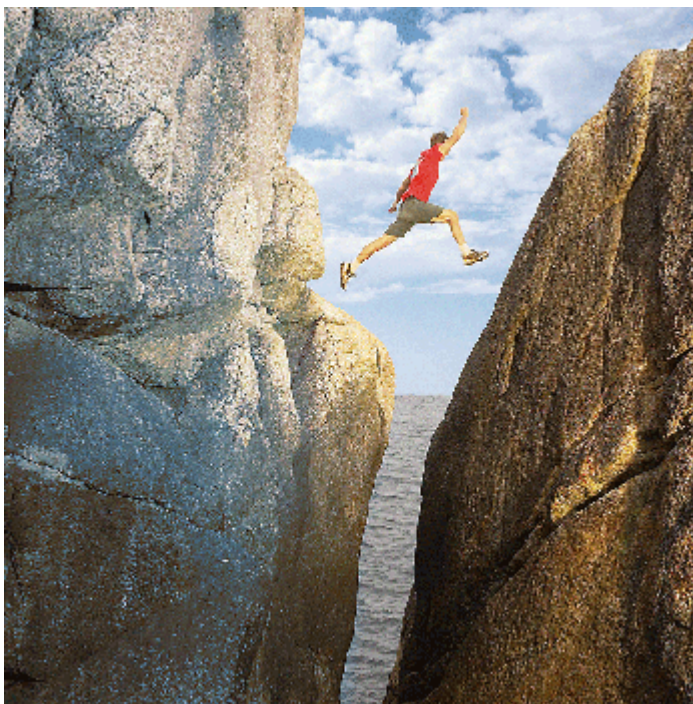
Conquering Fear and Moving Forward

We recently celebrated our daughter, Chelsea, getting her driver's license. This is not an unusual occurrence - thousands of parents experience this every day. What made our celebration so significant, was that this was her fourth attempt over a two year period. It's not unusual to hear of kids failing their first try, but it is highly unusual for someone to repeat the test four times. The first time she took the test, she encountered an unusual circumstance - something she hadn't anticipated and which the drivers book didn't cover. She got flustered and made a bad decision. Fail number 1. The second time she took it, a guy on a bike darted out in front of her when she had the right-of-way and the instructor had to intervene and tell her to stop. He explained that even though she was totally in the right and if an accident had occurred it would have been the cyclist's fault - because he had to tell her what to do - it was an automatic fail - number 2. The third time she took the test, she was so stressed out and fearful about what unusual things could happen, in addition to a severe lack of confidence, that she was failed for being too cautious. Fail number 3. It has taken her six months to try again, and this time - she passed with flying colours and only two demerits!

What made the difference? We realized that what was holding her back after 3 failed attempts - was fear. She was so fearful that she'd experience another failure, that she was paralyzed from trying again. She wanted that license so badly - and was suffering a severe lack of independence because of not having that freedom, yet every time it came to arranging for another test, she'd stall or make excuses. It almost seemed as if the more desperate and frustrated she got about not having her license, the more fearful she became about trying again. So we talked to her about fear. We told her that until the thing that she desired (getting her license) became greater than her fear (of failure), she would not succeed. It made her realize that until that moment, her fear had been greater than her desire. When she was faced with that fact - her desire suddenly rose a few notches - just enough so that it tipped the scale in favour of defeating the fear. That doesn't mean she still wasn't nervous or anxious when she went in for that fourth test, but somehow there was a steely resolve that she was not going to let the fear defeat her. If she failed - she failed, but it would not be because of the fear. There was quite a celebration when she called me from the testing site and told me that this time, she had been successful.

So what does this little anecdote have to do with you as a small business owner? Plenty! I'll bet if you were honest, there are a lot of things in your business that you avoid because of the fear of failure. Along with that comes the fear of financial ruin, and a fear that results in a lack of confidence that you can do it. Fear of failure manifests itself in the following ways.

1. **Putting Things Off** - Chelsea continually put off scheduling another test because she was afraid to try again. What comes across your desk that you consistently push away to deal with "another day"?
2. **Paralysis** - when fear takes hold, paralysis sets in. You not only put things off - you actually can't imagine even taking that step. It sends you into panic and anxiety. What stresses you out? The thought of launching that new product, hiring an extra staff person, calling that big client? If there are things that send you into a panic - look at whether fear is holding you back.
3. **Irrational Reasoning** - fear of failure causes you to think things like "I'll never . . .", "I can't . . .", "I always do . . .", "There's no way I'll . . .". You see things as grimmer than they are, and you suffer from a lack of confidence to move forward. The irrational things you think feel very real, and you convince yourself that they are true. Chelsea actually talked herself into believing she was incapable of passing the test. Completely untrue, but very real to her. To what things are you routinely saying "no - it's not possible, can't be done, etc?" It may be worth taking a look to see if that no is based in reality or fear.



What do you do when you realize fear has gripped you? How do you get to the point where the

"desire" grows greater than the fear? Here are a few steps you can take to tip those scales the way Chelsea did.

1. **Admit it** - there's power in admitting your fear. In fact, when Chelsea realized how powerful her fear was, she immediately found an inner strength to move beyond it. Okay, so you're the boss and the successful entrepreneur - it doesn't make you any less successful or powerful to admit that you've got fear. In fact, healthy fear contributes to success. The sooner you admit it, the sooner you can get on to strategies to defeat it.
2. **Check it Out** - look at those irrational thoughts and do some fact-finding. Is your fear reasonable based on the FACTS? Are there adjustments you can make to your plan that minimize the risk so you can reasonably project success? What the worst thing that could happen? Could you survive that if it did? What is the best possible outcome? Is the risk worth that potential outcome? Honestly answering these questions will help you to move from paralysis to cautious confidence.
3. **Remove its Power** - take the things you've discovered and use them to move forward. Use the facts to make wise decisions, use the fear to steer you clear of danger, and get on with it. When you identify and evaluate your fear, you remove its power and its hold over you. Look toward the great results you anticipate and focus on those, rather than the unlikely possibility of failure.

Everyone knows that risk is an element of running a business, but each of us has fears that stem from a variety of places in our past experiences. Chelsea learned an important lesson about fear that she isn't soon going to forget. What will you do to grow your desire for success, and diminish your fear of failure?

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Sales Strategies that Really Work

What makes someone a good salesperson? Think about sales experiences you've had where you were completely satisfied with both the purchase and the sales process, and compare it to experiences where you walked away unsatisfied, or chose not to buy. What was the difference? I'd venture a guess that it's all about the person you were dealing with when you made your purchase. How do your customers feel about working with you? Do they experience a pleasant, thorough, honest exchange that leaves them feeling satisfied with the sales process . . . and eventually to making a purchase? Making sales isn't complicated - but it does require skill. Although successful sales people are committed to learning all the time, there are a few age-old, time-tested strategies that are worth repeating from time to time. These strategies will help you remember some of the basic, important tenets of selling. If you haven't thought about them in a while, dust them off and try them again!

What you really sell is feelings

Historically, sales were about products. If your product was better than the next guy's, you made the sale. But as more and more options were available and more competition arose - selling had to be about more than the product. The sales process moved to an emphasis on benefits - how will this product benefit the customer - was the sales professional's approach. More recently, the approach has been to look at the problem the customer is facing, and to offer a solution. While all three of these are a necessary part of the sales process, it's important to remember that on some level, all purchases are made from an emotional base. Often, the emotions are subconscious and the customer doesn't even know why they are hesitant to buy - or why they feel good about buying. If you can tap into what

your customer's emotional motivators are, you will almost always make the sale. Imagine that Mrs. Jones is wavering on purchasing that fancy new refrigerator. You discover that she is feeling guilty about replacing her old one because it's still works fine and she can't justify spending that much money when she has a perfectly good refrigerator at home. No matter how hard you push the product, benefits or solutions, if you don't address the emotion she is feeling, you won't make the sale. Encouraging her to sell her old refrigerator and put the money she makes toward the new one, or letting her know that her old fridge is less energy-efficient than the new ones and is in fact costing her money, or focusing on the fact that newer fridges are more environmentally friendly - all may address the emotion she is feeling. Once you get over that hurdle, you're well on your way to closing the sale.

Seek the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth

Do you want to know what your customers are really thinking? What they really want? If you ask, they'll tell you. You have nothing to lose by getting it all out on the table. The more information you have about what they want (and don't want), the better you'll be able to handle the objections and prepare a solution that really addresses their needs.

Make the transition easy

If your sale involves transferring your customer's account from a previous vendor to your business, it may be the emotions around the transfer that prevent the customer from saying yes. Many people feel a sense of loyalty to businesses they've worked with and can't bear the thought of telling them they're going somewhere else. If you offer to handle all the details regarding the switchover of accounts, it may remove a significant barrier for them.

It's not about who you know, it's about what people know about you

Your reputation is the cornerstone of your sales business. You can be very well-connected in your community; you can know a lot of people; you can have a lot of contacts; you can attend a lot of events; but if what people know about you is that you're sloppy, don't follow through, and can't be counted on to do what you say, your sales record will reflect that. Remember how important it is to have integrity in this business - perhaps more than many others - because people start out mistrusting you. You need to prove that you have integrity and will go to the wall for your customers. There's nothing like that to keep them coming back and telling their friends about you.

There's no substitute for genuine care

If your customers really feel like you care about them; care about what's important to them; care about growing their business, or helping to improve their lives - they will not only buy from you, they'll be loyal to you. You can't fake this. People know when you are being false, and it will hurt you in the long run. If they sense that all you care about is the money, they'll go somewhere else. It's easy to get so wrapped up in meeting our quotas and closing the deals, that we forget the point. While quotas and targets are a vital and important part of the process, you need to remember that in the end, you're working with people who have lives and needs and values and problems that are more important to them than anything you're trying to sell. Care about them first, sell second. You'll win every time.

Take a moment to evaluate how you're doing in these five areas. If you're neglecting any one of them,



it may be showing up in your sales records. Apply these simple strategies and you'll quickly notice positive results.

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