

Ask SCORE

I own a very successful small commercial printing business. I've been at it almost five years, have lived, eaten and slept the business since the start, and think I'm beginning to experience burnout. What can I do restore some sanity to my life?

“Be careful what you wish for; you may just get it.” That adage certainly applies to owning a small business. Being your own boss has many rewards, but success usually requires a lot of hard work and long hours that can take a toll on your emotional health. The result is burnout, a condition that also has mental and physical consequences.

You can safeguard your well-being by taking some time off to rest and refocus. But there's a problem. Many business owners are afraid to leave, even for a short period. They fear that something will go wrong or they'll miss out on that next big opportunity. With so much to do, how can an entrepreneur ever relax?

According to a survey conducted by American Express, 40% of the smallest business owners—those with less than \$200,000 in annual revenues—plan no vacation time whatsoever in any given year. And even those who do schedule a break never really get away. One of every three link vacation time to a business trip and half will check in with the office at least once a day, if not several times.

According to the AmEx survey, these are the vacation-blocking concerns cited most often by business owners:

- There is no other competent person to leave in charge and others will make the wrong decisions.
- An important client or customer will not receive appropriate service.
- The business will miss a new opportunity.
- An operational breakdown will occur without anyone to solve the problem.

Despite these concerns, you can schedule a refreshing getaway with some careful advance planning. For example, draw up a list of worst-case scenarios and brief those in charge on the possibilities and chief concerns of each customer. Tell key clients or customers in advance of any extended time away you are planning. Introduce your stand-ins and express your confidence in their ability to handle any issues that may arise.

Delegating responsibility is a good idea even if you already build vacation time into your schedule. If you're suddenly faced with a huge workload or an emergency that requires your absence, you'll have the confidence of knowing your staff can handle these important tasks. That gives you the freedom to step out and back in without your business missing a beat.

This column is brought to you by the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of SCORE, with more than 65 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business counseling and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit www.score-manchester.org for information on counseling, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.

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