

HOW-TO



Improve your work/life balance

BY JASON CUPP

At some point in their careers, most business owners have to take a hard look in the mirror and address their work/life balance. When I ran my own landscape company, I was a statistic on the work side of the balance—working 70 to 80 hours a week, sometimes seven days a week, including early mornings and late nights. It affected my sleep, health and the success of my company, but hindsight is 20/20.

A lack of an appropriate work/life balance hinders the health of your business. Everything can be at risk—including culture, efficiency, energy and profitability. The solution starts with the owner, CEO or upper management. It comes down to 10 simple, easily executable strategies:

1 MANAGE YOUR TIME. Divide your day into blocks of time to execute tasks. If there are three blocks per day, only work two. I used 7 a.m. to noon, noon to 5 p.m., and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. For example, if I had an evening meeting, I'd likely work noon to 10 p.m. and take the morning off.

2 WORK FROM HOME. Working from home can be efficient. Most days, I'd work from home in the morning and go into the office after a lunch meeting. Mornings were project based, and afternoons were client and team based.

3 HIRE YOUR WEAKNESSES. It might pay off to invest in your office team, including an executive assistant for yourself. My assistant was my left arm,

so to speak, and was an integral part of my business strategy to help with sales appointments, time management, accountability and executing tasks.

4 RESIST WEEKEND WORK. Although weekends are necessary in peak sales and operations times, such as spring, fall and winter events, they also should be held as sacred time off. We often had crews running on Saturday because of weather, but we split Saturdays among our managers, so each one only had to work one out of every six or eight Saturdays.

5 RETREAT. It's amazing what a clear mind can do for you when planning and running your business day to day. Several times a year for a few days, I'd retreat by myself to think, reflect, rest and strategize. I was offline during this time, other than an emergency. It refreshed me to be more focused when I was in the office.

6 VACATION. It's difficult, but make it happen. Take a few days here and there; then try to take an entire week. Pick a time when business is slower. If you work on building your team, you'll be surprised how well things will run in your absence. Avoid the staycation. Otherwise, if the office is, say, 20 minutes away, you might trek in to work on a few things.

7 UNPLUG. We're slaves to our iPhones, laptops, social media and the Internet. Unplug a few hours a day. Try to schedule time for phone calls rather than just answering your phone on a whim. It might cost you 45 minutes when you don't have that much time to give.

8 SCHEDULE. Use your schedule to accomplish tasks. Big client

contract you need to write? Schedule it. Need to review your financials? Schedule it. Blocking off time to accomplish tasks allowed my day to be less free flowing, and I accomplished more quicker.

9 JOIN A PEER GROUP. Consider meeting regularly with a peer group to provide accountability and serve as a sounding board for the challenges of running a business. None of mine were in the Green Industry; they were local and served as lead generators.

10 INVEST IN YOURSELF. Most business owners spend a lot of time investing in their teams and ignore themselves. Hitting the gym, networking at a local charity, donating your time to a worthwhile cause or scheduling a massage are all things that are investments in you, which is OK. An investment in ourselves re-energizes our business minds and our bodies.

I hope these tips help you regain control of your work/life balance struggle. Don't stop with you. Chances are everyone in your organization can benefit from a company culture that values individuals' time, so consider the investment. The effect could be tenfold when your employees are afforded the same luxury of focusing on themselves rather than work every second of the day. The results—in company culture and the bottom line—will be dramatic. **LM**

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