

SOLOPRENEUR'S Toolkit



10 Simple, Stress-Busting, Sanity-Saving Tools

Dr. Lyssa Menard



“Do not wait; the time will never be 'just right.' Start where you stand, and work with whatever tools you may have at your command, and better tools will be found as you go along.”

George Herbert



PREFACE

It's Time. Your Turnaround Toolkit has Arrived!

Dear Fellow Solopreneur,

Whether you're brand new to business or you're a serial entrepreneur, you've likely experienced both the up and the down sides of running your own show.

The challenges of solopreneurship can often trump the joys of autonomy and independence. Solopreneurship dangles the carrot of freedom but you can wind up feeling shackled instead.

It doesn't have to be that way! I'm not saying transformation is easy, but lots of small shifts – what I call 15° shifts – can get you where you want to go with little pain or strain. This guide will start that fun and inspiring process.



In this guide, I'm going to show you:

- The '3 B's of Business Success' for solopreneurs – my 3 holy commandments of solopreneurship.
- My 10 best 15° shifts that will allow you to move from overwhelmed to owner of your realm.
- The #1 fastest way to get grounded when you're stressed out or overwhelmed.
- How to take care of your health when you have no free time.
- The fast, fun, and easy way to build a (free) team of trusted advisors.
- How to free up your time by determining what really matters and only doing that!



"If you keep doing what you've always done, you're going to keep getting what you've always gotten." – Anonymous

Let's turn your knowledge and expertise into an even bigger vision – one that includes a successful business and a full, healthy personal life. I guarantee you'll have the best possible solopreneurship experience if you put into practice the tools, tips, and techniques in the pages ahead.

To Your Success,
Lyssa Menard
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INTRODUCTION

In my business bible, there are **three commandments** that make all the difference between surviving and thriving for solopreneurs:

**Honor Thy Body
Honor Thy Brain
Honor Thy Business**

...in that order.

Chances are, your focus is squarely placed on the last of those commands – perhaps to the detriment of the other imperatives. Most solopreneurs, especially early on, seem to be in serious denial about their personal needs. It seems as if, in their zest for business success or worry about business failure, most solos forget that **without a well-tended body and mind there is no business.**



The Dream

Why did you chose the solopreneur life? Was it the sheer joy of being in charge of your destiny? Having 100% autonomy and independence leaves you free to make full use of your creativity, chose the clients you want to work with, and design a work schedule that syncs with your other responsibilities and preferences.

Being able to fully tap into your unique abilities allows you to contribute to others in a way that would be unlikely when working for someone else. As a solo, you're agile; you can quickly shift your attention, time and resources as needed (or, as desired) to take advantage of new opportunities. And, in theory, there's potential for unlimited income, time off, and utilization of your strengths.



The Reality

"In theory" is where most solopreneurs get hung up. It turns out that there's often a trade-off between income and free time. Focus on your creativity, strengths and vision often gives way to company "chores" – the stuff you don't like or want to do, but are stuck with because you are "the staff." If that's where you're at, it can be difficult to remember why owning your own company seemed like a good idea.

The Solopreneur's Toolkit

This little guide will help you begin to change all that. It's time to integrate body, brain, and business. Some people call that "balance" but that's not really what we're after. It's really work/life integration. The goal is to move toward that dream of freedom and free time and away from overwhelm.



That's where this toolkit comes in. The tools, tips, and tricks you'll find in the following pages are simple ways you can begin to live up to the 3 commandments.

Let's make your life easier while building the business of your dreams.



Commandment #1

Honor Thy Body



"Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live."

Jim Rohn



#1

Belly Breathing Makes Everything Better



*“When you own your breath, nobody
can steal your peace.”*

Anonymous



Pain Point

The stress and strain of everyday life as a solopreneur can take its toll on your body and mind. Muscle tension may stem from physical activity (think: slouching at the computer, sitting too long, standing too long, or heavy lifting) or mental activity (think: stress, worry, anxiety, frustration, or fear). No matter where it starts, if you don't release stress it continues to build till your body hurts and your mind goes on strike.

No matter where it starts, if you don't release stress it continues to build till your body hurts and your mind goes on strike.



Solution

Just breath. Kicking back with a beer, playing a video game, or web surfing can't fix this.

Instead, you can quickly and easily engage your body's built-in "relaxation response" – a physical state of deep rest that reduces the physiological symptoms of stress. The relaxation response results in decreased heart rate, blood pressure, rate of breathing, and muscle tension. A key way to activate it is with belly breath.

Incorporate this super stress-buster in your day – as often as needed. The beauty of this technique is (1) it works and (2) you can use it anywhere, any time, for any stressor.



User's Guide

Sit, stand, or lie down comfortably. Keep your spine straight, so there's plenty of room for belly breath. With one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest, inhale slowly and deeply through your nose so that your belly (not your chest) inflates.

Take long, slow, deep breaths that raise and lower your abdomen. Focus on the sound and feeling of your breath as you become more and more relaxed.

If you've got 5 minutes to give to your body, you'll be impressed with what belly breathing can do. Even if you've only got time for 3 deep, slow, calming breathes, the results are game changing.



#2

The Scientific 7-Minute Workout



“Physical fitness is not only one of the most important keys to a healthy body, it is the basis of dynamic and creative intellectual activity.”

John F. Kennedy



Pain Point

You know the physical and mental health benefits of exercise but would rather stick a hot poker in your eye than go to the gym. Or, perhaps you simply don't have the time.

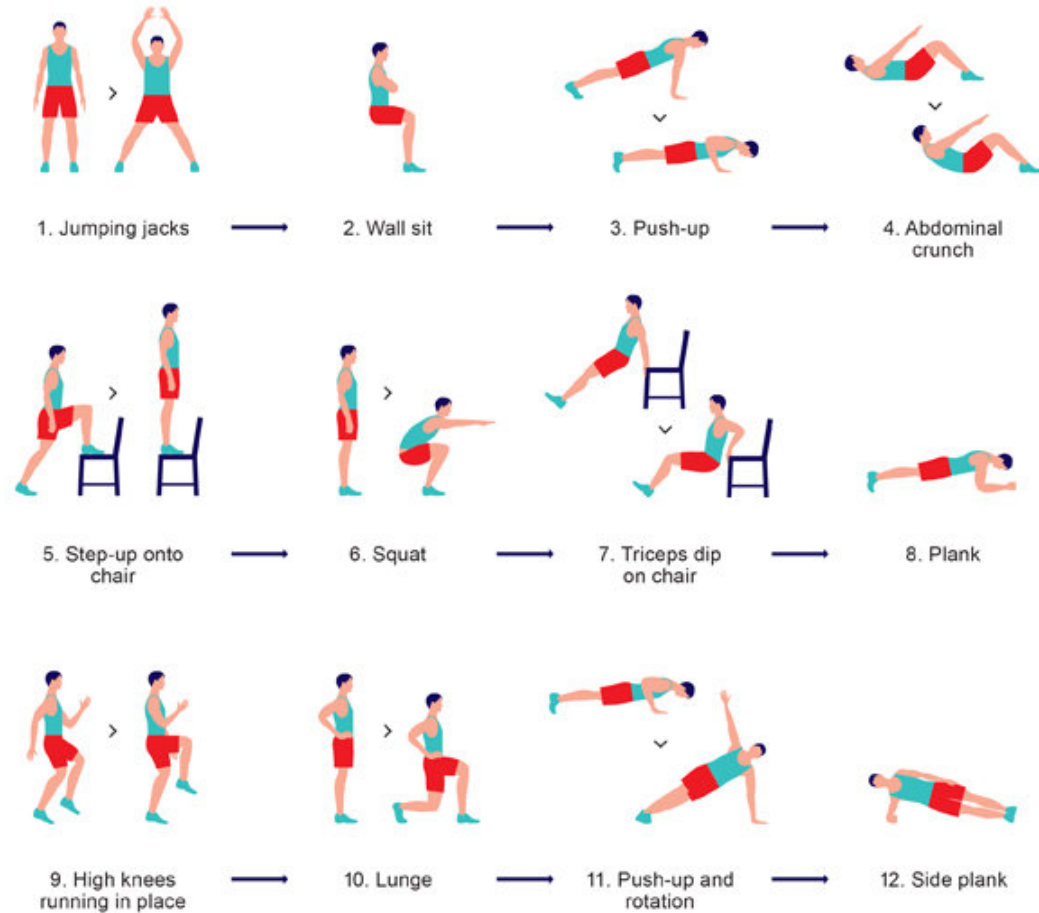


Solution

You can definitely find 7 minutes and muster up the willingness to do this straight-forward, research-supported exercise routine. Part of the beauty is that it requires little space and no equipment, so you can use it anywhere – in your living room, your office, or your hotel room.



User's Guide



Sources: Research/Circuit Training for Weight Loss: http://journals.lww.com/acsm-healthfitness/Fulltext/2013/05000/HIGH_INTENSITY_CIRCUIT_TRAINING_USING_BODY_WEIGHT_5.aspx Image: http://wellblogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/09/the-scientific-7-minute-workout/?utm_source=feedly&r=0



#3

Sleep Tight: Your Quick Fix Checklist



“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”

Wilson Mizener



Pain Point

Entrepreneurs of all sorts rarely get enough rest. Rather than go into a spiel on why that's a bad idea (and the plethora of research to prove it), let's get some mileage out of the sleep time you do have.

If you're the type who can fall asleep and stay asleep through a parade, skip this section. For the rest of you, frequent or even occasional insomnia can throw you off your game, interfere with your focus and decision making, and mess with your mood.



Solution

If you're suffering from insomnia, there's definitely hope. The vast majority of insomniacs can turn things around if they attend to particular guidelines. Collectively, these are referred to as "sleep hygiene" – the variety of habits and practices that are conducive to high quality sleep.

What follows is a handy dandy checklist to ensure that you get the best possible rest in the time you have. If you're having trouble sleeping, try to check as many boxes as possible. Change one variable at a time, to determine which issue is keeping you up at night. Then focus on keeping your habits and environment tuned to your personal sleep-related needs.



User's Guide

- ❑ Establish a regular sleep schedule. That means waking up and heading to bed at the same time seven days a week. This allows your system to fall into a regular rhythm that enhances the sleep cycle.
- ❑ Make sure the temperature in your bedroom is comfortable. Excessively warm or cold temperatures can interfere with sleep. This is subjective. The only “right” temperature is the one that works for you.
- ❑ Ensure that your bedroom is dark and quiet. Even noise that doesn't wake you can disturb the quality of your sleep.
- ❑ Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex. This provides powerful behavioral conditioning. Your brain becomes conditioned to prepare for sleep as soon as you enter the room.



- ❑ If you're lying awake for more than 15 minutes, get up, leave the bedroom, and do something. Choose an activity that isn't stimulating. Think carefully about what type of book to read, for instance (stay away from anything emotional)! When you start to feel drowsy, return to the bedroom to try again.



- ❑ Avoid long naps. Research suggests that brief catnaps (15 to 20 minutes) can provide benefits without interfering with nighttime sleep. That said, staying awake during the day will obviously lead to more fatigue in the evening and help you to fall asleep.



- ❑ Plan your food intake wisely. Hunger may disrupt your sleep, as will heading to bed stuffed. A light, carbohydrate snack (e.g., popcorn, fruit) may improve sleep, but have your last meal at least 3 hours prior to bedtime. Especially avoid greasy or heavy foods right before bed. Also avoid liquids in the evening to limit the need for toilet trips during the night.
- ❑ Exercise regularly. At the very least, commit to the Scientific 7-Minute Workout. If insomnia is an issue, though, try to engage in more strenuous, frequent, or extended exercise and make movement as big a part of your day as possible (e.g., take the stairs instead of the elevator, pace while talking on the phone, etc.). Exercise helps to initiate and deepen sleep. Just make sure that your exercise is completed at least 3 hours prior to bedtime, or you'll wind up energized instead of sleepy.
- ❑ Try not to smoke during the evening (or at all!). Nicotine is a stimulant and can impact sleep.



- ❑ Cut down on caffeine till you determine the quantity that's manageable without causing sleep disruption. Caffeine in any form (e.g., coffee, tea, soda, chocolate) can cause difficulty falling asleep, awakenings during the night, and shallow sleep. Certainly avoid caffeine past early afternoon.
- ❑ Avoid alcohol, especially in the evening. Though alcohol may feel relaxing, enhancing your ability to fall asleep, it's actually a stimulant and is likely to disrupt sleep during the night.
- ❑ Plan a relaxing wind-down, pre-bedtime ritual. Whether it's taking a bath, listening to music, or using formal relaxation strategies (such as deep breathing), this is another form of behavioral conditioning. Your brain comes to view your ritual as an early warning sign that sleep is nigh.



- ❑ Soothe your mind. If something is troubling you and likely to make you anxious, do your best to resolve it prior to bedtime. If that's not possible, spend a few minutes writing down your thoughts or making to do lists, if apropos. Rather than trying to suppress your concerns, you're making sure they're captured so you can relax now and address these issues in the morning.

Shut down electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime!!!



- ❑ Shut down all electronic devices at least an hour before bedtime! Any device with a bright screen (like tablets and cell phones) can interfere with your ability to fall asleep.



Commandment #2

Honor Thy Brain



“Our minds influence the key activity of the brain, which then influences everything; perception, cognition, thoughts and feelings, personal relationships; they're all a projection of you.”

Deepak Chopra



#4

Two Minute Mindfulness Meditation



"I think the one lesson I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention."

Diane Sawyer



Pain Point

It's often challenging for solopreneurs to feel totally present. Wearing many hats, with diverse responsibilities, makes it hard to focus and sustain attention. This often leads the solo to mentally jump ahead to future tasks instead of focusing on the here and now. The complaint I often hear is, "I'm missing my life." If your mind is on business when you're with family and on your personal life when you're working, you are, indeed, missing the present moment.

This issue can also explain why you might feel stuck if you're trying to make a lifestyle or behavioral change. Here's an example.



If you're trying to lose weight, have you ever noticed that a bag of candy/chips/french fries (pick your favorite problem food) makes it to your shopping cart, your home, or your mouth almost without your consciousness? How did that bag get in the cart? You know better! And then the frustration and self-recrimination begins.

Do you have any idea what triggered this event (because something did)? Wouldn't that be nice to know? It would obviously be beneficial to keep your attention on your goals and stay aware of factors that shake your resolve so you can prepare, avoid, or be ready to fight for what you really want. That's true for your entire life experience: both professional and personal. And that's what mindfulness can deliver.



Solution

No doubt, you've heard the term "mindfulness" bandied about. If you haven't, you've been hiding under a rock or – dare I say – working way too hard. Mindfulness is currently the "in" thing. One of my teachers, Jon Kabbat-Zinn, created Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), for instance, and backed it with decades of supportive research. He recently appeared on the news program "60 Minutes"...for the third time! It's in vogue.

As trendy as mindfulness is at the moment, many people have decided that they "can't do it." The truth is that you can – and you must – learn to be mindful if you want to fully live your life.



But don't worry. It doesn't require months or years of training. It doesn't even have to involve sitting quietly. It just requires willingness to practice regularly. The great news: it can be very brief practice done in conjunction with other activities.

The reward is heightened skills of attention and awareness.



User's Guide

Exercise: Brushing Your Teeth

When I teach mindfulness, this is often my first homework assignment, because it poses no burden. It takes up exactly zero extra time in your daily routine, yet you can practice multiple times a day. I recommend that you try this for a week.

The instructions for this exercise are about as simple as you can get. Every time you brush your teeth, focus only on the experience of brushing your teeth. Turn off your music, TV, or podcast, shut the bathroom door, and let others know that you're off the grid for these 2-3 minutes. If your mind wanders – and it often will – just gently and non-judgmentally return it to the experience of brushing.



Pay attention to sensations first. How does the toothpaste feel and taste? Is there a minty smell? Or another aroma? How does the brushing sound? What does the toothbrush feel like in your hand? Is it cold to the touch? Does it vibrate? If so, how does that feel in your hand and your mouth? There are countless ways to experience this simple process that you do often without awareness. These questions just provide a jumpstart.

Note that there is no need to contemplate questions such as the ones above. I'm often asked for context, so I'm providing some ideas for you in the previous paragraph. But, the assignment is to focus your attention on the experience of brushing your teeth and, if you're able to do that without any inner dialogue, that's even better. That way, you are truly in the moment.



Take note of your reactions to this experience every time you engage. Did you feel resistant to this kind of focus? Did it produce any particular physical or emotional reaction? Get very specific.

One of the beautiful things about this practice is that you'll discover where your mind goes when it's distracted and what types of thoughts and feelings arise when you chose where your mind is rather than let it run the show.

Notice that, WITHOUT ADDING ANY EXTRA TIME-CONSUMING ACTIVITY to your day, you've now practiced mindfulness.



Notice that, without adding any extra time-consuming activity to your day, you've now practiced mindfulness for up to 9 minutes (depending on how frequently you brush your teeth and for how long). Neat. You are now officially a mindful person.

If you like this experience, expand it to include other brief activities like showering, preparing coffee, or watering the plants. Bringing your presence to these activities is both a practice and a respite from the “noise” of the daily grind.



#5

Take Charge of Your Thoughts



“There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.”

William Shakespeare



Pain Point

Do your thoughts sometimes run like an internal ticker tape, akin to what you'd see on a stock market trading floor? A never ending stream of thoughts accompanies most of us through life. Even if you don't focus on these thoughts, they impact you beneath the surface. Since your thoughts are always with you, their quality – what and how you think – is an essential component of who you are. If your thoughts tend toward the negative, it's costing you in multiple ways.

Thoughts impact our physical and mental health in some explicit ways. For instance, anxious thoughts or worry – a staple in the life of most solopreneurs – often result in insomnia.



Those who live with a running dialogue that's self-critical, judgmental, and negative tend to feel less confident, report lower energy, and accomplish less than those who have a positive mental framework. Similarly, even the finest actors describe times when they could not slip into their role due to thoughts that crowded out their creativity and focus. If an expert in putting on a persona can falter due to disruptive thoughts, imagine what a challenge the average non-actor faces in self-presentation if his thoughts go off and running.

Most people feel that their thoughts control them, versus the other way around. If that's been your experience, take heart. With some education and training, you can create a total turn-around!



Solution

Fact: You are what you think.

Corollary: You have a choice about what you think.

If you can embrace both of those ideas, you've landed on the holy grail of happiness. Not because you should choose and attend to only happy thoughts – that would be delusional. Instead, happiness results from choosing thoughts that help you rather than harm you in every situation – good, bad, and indifferent.

I can't teach you the whole 9 yards of thought adjustment in a “tips and tricks” guide, but I can get you on the road to change. All it takes is the “AIM” 3 step change process.



User's Guide

AIM

Step 1: Acknowledge that your thought patterns could use an upgrade.

If you're still reading, you're a third the way there. You know your thoughts are hanging you up, at least at times, and want to take charge. Awesome! Onwards.

Step 2: Inform yourself about negative thought patterns so that you recognize them when they rear their ugly heads.

I call negative thought patterns “*dragons*.” Our thoughts are often as off-base as ancient myths, but they can seem so real in the moment. A touch of truth (“I lost that bid”) turns into a monster (“I should never have started this business”) that is rarely real.



These are the dragons you need to meet and recognize in order to change negative patterns.



- ❑ **All the world's a dragon:** You think in extremes and don't find yourself (or others or circumstances) in the gray area in-between. You'll often notice this in your language. "She always disappoints me." "He never picks me up on time."
- ❑ **Everyone's a dragon (no one is a knight):** Likewise, a lost sale means you're a bad salesperson or your business is destined for failure.
- ❑ **Dragons rule:** A single negative detail becomes your entire focus, and contaminates the entire situation. If your mind goes blank for a minute during a presentation, you obsess that every witness now knows you're incompetent and you discount everything positive about the presentation.



- ❑ **Dragons are out to get me:** You believe that you know what others are thinking or that you can predict the future. You are certain of your thoughts without gathering unbiased information and you draw conclusions that are negative.
- ❑ **Dragons are giants (and knights are tiny):** You exaggerate the negatives of a situation or minimize the positives in a way that makes you feel bad unnecessarily. For instance, you're 5 minutes late for an appointment and assume that the person meeting you will base their opinion of you on this alone.
- ❑ **There shouldn't be dragons:** You are convinced that your world view is the "right" perspective and impose it on others (e.g., "Joe should pay his bill immediately." Maybe Joe's "rule" is that bills are due within 30 days!). You may also impose unfair "shoulds" on yourself as in, "I should win every bid."



- ❑ **Dragons are bad:** You deal with your distress by labeling yourself or another person in a way that is negative and distressing. Rather than thinking, “I don’t like being late and am unhappy that I was,” you think, “I’m such a bad person.”
- ❑ **Dragons shoot flames because I make them mad:** In light of a negative event, you decide that you are totally responsible, despite the fact that you were actually not at all responsible or only one contributor.



Step 3: Master a mindful mental state by catching yourself in the moment and challenging those wayward thoughts.

If your ticker tape is running and making you feel bad, it's time to test for dragons. Asking yourself a few key questions will help you think things through from a different angle. Ask yourself some or all of the questions below to help you turn your dragon into a firefly. You'll identify the element of truth in your thoughts, but rob them of their power to rule you.

- What is the evidence (for/against?)
- Is this ALWAYS TRUE?
- What are the odds (percentage) of this really happening or being true?
- What alternative thoughts/views are there?
- What is the very worst that can happen? Why is it bad?



- What logical errors am I making? (thinking errors)
- What are the effects (advantages/disadvantages) of thinking this way?
- Am I looking at the whole picture?
- Am I being fully objective?
- What would I tell a friend with this same thought in this same situation?
- So what? Is it really awful? Can I really not stand it?

Note:

We live in a time when instantaneous results are expected. That ain't gonna happen here. That said, if you get to know your dragons, notice when they magically appear, and learn to challenge them, they will shrink over time, till they fly off to where they belong – in the category of “myth” rather than “reality.”



#6

Quick Conflict Crusher



“It’s not hard to make decisions once you know what your values are.”

Roy E Disney



Pain Point

As a solopreneur, you're faced with countless decisions – large and small – that rest squarely on your shoulders. That can feel lonely at times and isolation can lead to poor decisions or – worse yet – no decisions at all.

The biggest decisions you'll make (whether to take an idea and run with it, expand, fold, outsource, or hire) typically require a multi-method approach. But solos get stuck on smaller, less earth-shattering decisions as well. This often has something to do with faulty thought processes – the “*dragons*” discussed above.



Whether you're suffering from information overload or an information glut, you can wind up feeling stuck when you really need to move along.

There's rarely enough information to make you feel safe in choosing. Sometimes, there are so many variables, it's easy to lose focus. Whether you're suffering from information overload or an information glut, you can wind up feeling stuck when you really need to move along. There's got to be a better way.



Solution

Often, there is a much better, and simpler, way to make a decision. For any productivity issue, creating structure can be very helpful. That would include setting a deadline, creating accountability, ensuring clarity regarding goals, and reflecting on outcomes.

Because indecision can become or create a productivity problem, decision making is often amenable to the same approach. Enter the 7-Step Decision Making Process.



User's Guide

The 7-Step Decision Making Process

- 1.** Set a deadline, enter it into your calendar, and announce your timeline to anyone who'll listen.
- 2.** Write down the desired outcomes. Break it down to it's bare essentials.
- 3.** Ditch options that can't deliver on your desired outcomes, even if they have some advantages.
- 4.** Consider each option and ask yourself these two critical questions.
 - a.** Is this consistent with my goals?
 - b.** Does this honor my values?



5. Settle on the option that is most consistent with your goals and values.
6. Before taking action, dive into "The Rule of 3's."
 - a. Imagine that you've chosen the option you settled on in step 5. How do you feel?
 - b. Ask yourself how you will feel about that decision in 3 days, 3 months, and 3 years.
7. If you're happy with the Rule of 3's results, follow through. If not, return to step 4 and run through the process again

Note:

There are 7 steps, but this is meant to be a fairly quick process. Do not belabor any of these steps – that's called procrastination.



Commandment #3

Honor Thy Business



“Small business isn’t for the faint of heart. It’s for the brave, the patient and the persistent. It’s for the overcomer.”

Unknown



#7

Post-It Project Management



“Think of many things; do one.”

Portuguese Proverb



Pain Point

If you're not overwhelmed by your 'To Do' list, you're not a solopreneur. It really does feel like a requirement. But "overwhelmed" is not a useful state of mind. It breeds procrastination (otherwise known as avoidance) and brain fog.

Many solos find that there's a saturation point where the more you have to do the less you get done. You need to manage your overwhelm.



Solution

Instead of making a long, unrealistic 'To Do' list that inevitably leaves you feeling disappointed, chose a method that tracks your list but, simultaneously, leaves you feeling – and being – successful. The most important factor here is forward motion. That will both chip away at your list and leave you feeling positive and motivated.

Post-it project management has many facets. Right now, let's focus on your 'To Do' list, and how to make that hum.



User's Guide

This 3-step formula is simple and straight forward. Don't let that fool you, though. The oft-quoted approach to problem solving, Occam's Razor, proposes that the simplest solution for a problem is usually the correct one. This is simple. And it works.

Occam's Razor proposes that the simplest solution for a problem is usually the correct one. Post-it PM is simple...and it works!

Step 1:

Every week, pick 3 items from your master 'To Do' list and write them on a post-it. This ditty is this week's 'To Do' list. Make sure that one item is fairly easy and quick. Take care of that item first. Crossing something off your list is a surprisingly powerful motivator.



Step 2:

Take a snapshot of your post-it, and use it for accountability. Share it with your mastermind coaching group or upload it to Instagram. Or at least stick it where you'll see it often. Get accountability in any way that feels right, depending on privacy issues and your need for external motivators.

Step 3:

Start each day by picking 3 actions to take that will further your progress on your weekly 'To Do' list. Make sure that these tasks are actionable and within your sphere of control. "Get Joe to finish his estimate" is probably not a good choice, though "Contact Joe to emphasize my deadline for his estimate and determine his ETA" is. Again, try to select one fairly quick and easy task to get your daily jump start.



#8

Develop Your 'To Don't' List



“One reason so few of us achieve what we truly want is that we never direct our focus; we never concentrate our power.”

Tony Robbins



“Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you.”

Oprah Winfrey



Pain Point

Do you find that your 'To Do' list is overwhelming or just plain intimidating? It's easy to get to that point when we're not careful about what we include. The 'To Don't' list is the best complement to Post-It project management and can also reduce a solopreneur's overwhelm.



Solution

If you can sort out what really needs to be on which list (To Do or To Don't), you will free up resources (your time, energy, and motivation) to focus on the things that really matter. That's why it's really another facet of Post-it project management.

Before you launch into this, it's important to internalize the Pareto Principle (also known as the 80–20 rule). The Pareto Principle basically states that, for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. It's oft-quoted in the field of economics, but it has been demonstrated in a large variety of circumstances.

Pareto was an Italian economist who made the initial observation that 80% of Italy's land was owned by 20% of the



population. He then carried out surveys in a variety of other countries. The surprising finding was that a similar distribution applied. A 1992 United Nations report similarly showed that the richest 20% of the world's population controlled 82.7% of the world's income.

This rule is particularly relevant to entrepreneurs, as research has demonstrated its impact on everything from company profits (80% of a company's profits come from 20% of its customers) to product choice (80% of a company's sales come from 20% of its products).

80-20 Rule: You have the power to improve profits (& pleasure) by focusing on the 20% of activities that deliver. 'To Don't' list the rest!



Why is this so important? Well, it shows that you have the power to improve profits by focusing on the 20% of activities/products/customers that deliver. It also means that many of the things you least like to do can effectively be crossed off your 'To Do' list permanently.

Of course, you do need to assess the key metrics in your business to determine your critical 20%. But, to the extent that you can do this, you will vastly improve the efficiency of your output and enhance your lifestyle and the pleasure you derive from your business.

Put more simply, **by following the 80-20 rule, you might just get your life back!**



User's Guide

Step 1:

Divide a sheet of paper into 4 columns.

Step 2:

In the far left column, list the items on your master 'To Do' list.

Step 3:

Go through each item on your list, deciding if it:

- relies upon you and only you can deliver (**ME**)
- is in the purview of your business but could, theoretically, be done by others (**US**)
- could be outsourced to a human or software (**THEM**)
- fits in the 80% block of your unique 80-20 rule and is therefore unnecessary (**DITCH**)



In the second column, write in your assessment next to each item.

Step 4:

Transfer everything marked as **DITCH** to column 3 – your brand spankin' new 'To Don't" list. Keep this list handy so you can remind yourself where each task belongs the next time you're tempted to invest time in that way.

Step 5:

Transfer everything marked as **THEM** to column 4. Work on off-loading these items so they stop sucking up your time. Explore apps, software, free labor (e.g. family), and cheap labor (e.g. Virtual Assistants in the Philippines). Work on this list slowly, so you don't overwhelm yourself with research. Just remember, every item outsourced is a chunk of time you reclaim.



#9

Build Your Board of Directors



“Colleagues are a wonderful thing - but mentors, that's where the real work gets done.”

Juno Diaz



Pain Point

As a solopreneur, you have no boss and no staff. In some ways, that's the good news. But it also means that you have no team to bounce ideas off of, no directional guidance when you're feeling like a boat without a rudder, and no source of inspiration when your enthusiasm flags. That can be lonely and, for many solos, can lead to feelings of overwhelm and impact your mood. If nothing else, it's another stressor.

Worse yet, it can result in poor decision making. Issues get caught before they become problems when there's more than one set of eyes on a scenario. Without that human resource, it's easy to miss something that would be obvious to someone with distance or a different skill set. What's a solo to do?



Solution

I wish I could remember who originally put this idea in my head because it's the single best tool I've used in my business and personal life. Unless you're some silicon valley, uber-funded, tech whiz, backed by a venture capital firm, you probably don't have a board of directors. My suggestion: get one...fast.

Being a solopreneur doesn't mean you have to go it alone. Counter-intuitive, perhaps, but true. Wouldn't it be nice to have a group of people to tap into when you have questions, need to make decisions, or just want some support? You need a team of folks committed to being your resource. It's good medicine for feelings of isolation and overwhelm and provides the business benefits of working with a team.



Certainly, you'll be conscious of your board's time (and salary). But know that mentorship is very meaningful to the mentor as well as the mentee.

The relationship is bi-directional. Most people like to help others, feel complemented by such an invitation, and are gratified by making use of their hard-won wisdom.

Mentorship is meaningful to the mentor as well as the mentee. Most people enjoy helping by making use of their hard-won wisdom.



User's Guide

Creating a board of directors is easier and cheaper than it sounds. In fact, it works best when it costs you nothing at all. Follow these simple steps:

- 1.** Make a list of everyone you know who you genuinely trust. These are people who you respect, are reliable, and have your best interests at heart. They do not need to be close friends or associates and they can be family. A parent who also owns a business or a sibling who knows how to calm you fast when you're frenzied are fabulous. Don't limit yourself.
- 2.** Go back through your list and put an asterisk next to anyone who has something you need. What that skill or quality will be is unique to your particular situation, so think broadly. To



get started, consider these skill sets:

- a.** general business (e.g., tax or bookkeeping knowledge)
 - b.** specific business (e.g., technical skills applicable to your line of work),
 - c.** technological (e.g., computer savvy or skilled with on-line marketing)
 - d.** motivational (e.g., can get you fired up when you're feeling tired or overwhelmed)
 - e.** supportive (e.g., a good ear when you're stressed out and need to unload).
- 3.** Send out a brief email to the folks you've identified and invite them to be on your board. Let them know that you love your life as a solopreneur, give them a status on your business and future direction, and let them know that you're seeking advisors – people who know you and can be trusted to supply honest feedback. Feel free to use some of my exact text when I “hired” my most recent board:



"From time to time, I'll ask for some relatively quick feedback that's either quite general or very specific to your expertise, with the understanding that you won't always be able to respond. This is a pressure-free position, commensurate with the pay :)"

I'd love to have you on my "board of directors." Would you be willing?

Please don't feel uncomfortable about opting out if you don't have the bandwidth or interest right now. Also consider this: if you want to develop your own team of advisors, I would be happy to sign up!"

4. Graciously respond to those who decline and gratefully respond to those who accept.



5. Give your new board a relatively quick, fun assignment to get them warmed up. I recommend the following:

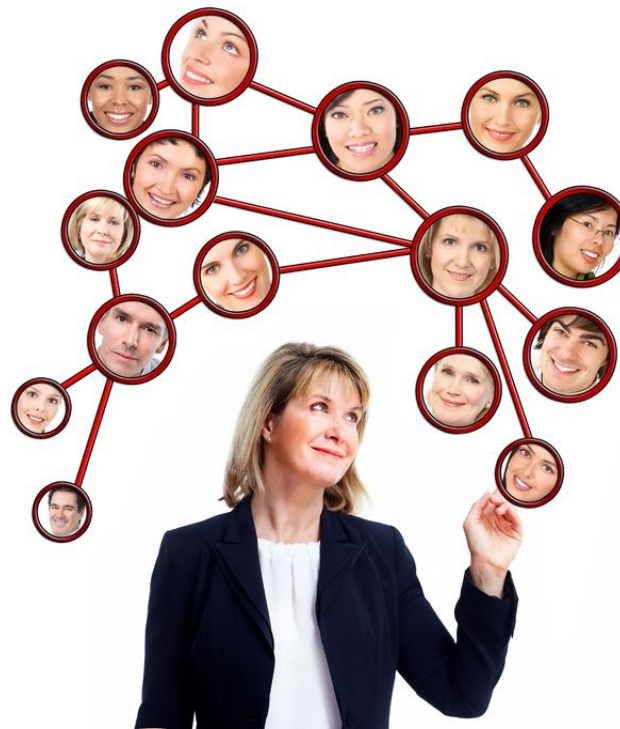
"As a first step, I'd like to gain a better understanding about how I'm perceived by others. To this end, I've attached a list of descriptors. Your mission - should you chose to accept it - is to pick the 5 words that best describe me (in your opinion) and rank order them. They're all positive, so don't worry about insulting me!"

This input will create warm vibes all around, while providing you with data that is always useful, sometimes surprising, and frequently warm and fuzzy.



6. Most likely, you'll notice some gaps in your board. As you meet new people, either face to face or through social media, consider asking them to join.

Get yourself a board of directors. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.



#10

Call in the Cavalry



“As soon as you open your mind to doing things differently, the doors of opportunity practically fly off their hinges.”

Jay Abraham



Pain Point

We've covered some of the challenges faced by solopreneurs – especially when it comes to lacking a team of worker bees. You might be solo expressly because you don't want employees. Or, you might lack a team because your funds are lacking. Either way, you no doubt are spending time and energy engaged in tasks that are not your forte or appropriate for your pay grade.

Maybe you could generate revenue by spending 2 hours creating a new product or preparing a webinar that will draw new clients. If, instead, you spend that time filing or trying to set up a wireless device when you hate administrative work and dealing with technology, that's just not ideal. You don't have any choice. Or do you?



Solution

As we've already covered, it's important to ditch and delegate tasks in your areas of weakness so you can focus on your strengths. It's time to call in the cavalry. Ask for help! No excuses.

In the same way you built your board of directors, you can assemble an outsourced team – even if you're on the barest of budgets. If you have funds to hire, that's great. If not, don't despair. There are creative solutions.

You can assemble an outsourced team – even if you're on the barest of budgets. There are creative solutions.



User's Guide

I'm not going to go into the plethora of inexpensive outsourcing options here, as many of you are well aware of what's available. That said, do let me know if you need that info and we can get you all set up. You'll find all my contact information at the end of this guide.

Right now, I want to address more creative options. It's time to really think out of the box. Can your neighbor's 15-year-old computer whiz kid serve as your on-call information services guru? For the price of a pizza, you can probably get help from a kid who needs the little bit of money you can provide and loves working on your kind of problem. Everybody wins.



Can your 12-year-old niece or your best buddy help you decorate your newsletter...or your lobby? Again, people who love you will likely step up – at least on occasion and especially if a bit of money (or beer) is involved.

You might also consider engaging in a service trade. I was blessed with a free weekly massage, provided by a genius with healing hands, throughout my grad school years. How? I made a trade. I built her computer database and provided support when she had problems or needed additions. For me, this was trivial – I had the skill and, because it was easy and quick for me but impossible for her, it was the perfect deal for both of us.

The point is this: **there is no reason to do this alone.** You're only limited by your creativity and willingness to try unusual problem-solving approaches.



Bonus: Process Makes Perfect



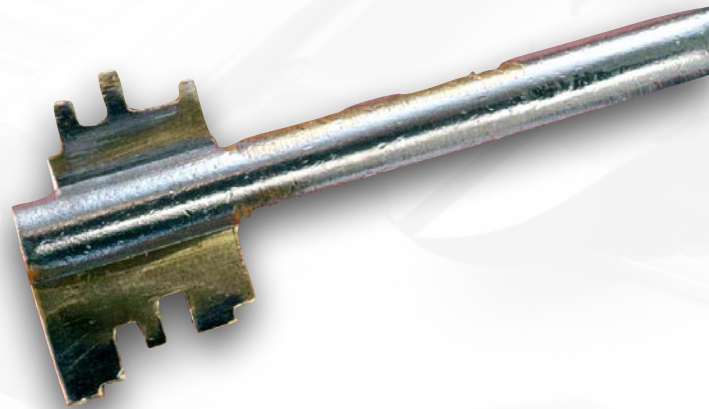
“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.”

Charles Mingus



I feel the need to jump on my soapbox. If I'm going to preach, I figured I'd add this spiel as a bonus. Don't worry – this has nothing to do with religion or politics. It's not controversial. It will completely make sense to you but, if you're like most of my new clients you will, sadly, resist putting this into action. It's a shame, as this is the key to reducing your overwhelm and creating a more balanced life.

So fair warning: Ignore this at your peril.



Pain Point

The battle cry of the solopreneur: ***"There's never enough time!!!"***

Solution

Ummmm...find a way to create more time???

The answer is automation and you get there by documenting your business processes and, if possible, using software or outsourcing to save you lots of time and money.

This is the most frequent activity I engage in with my clients and the action that produces the most profound results. That's why I really wanted to share it with you before I sign off.



User's Guide

If you want to create time, you first have to *spend* a little extra time on a critical activity: defining and automating your business processes.

It is critical to define every process in your business (and, I'd add, in your personal life as well). For our purposes here, think of a process as any specific, repetitive task that involves more than one step. This might include monthly billing, accounts receivable, shipping, following up on client leads, or inputting contact information, to name just a few.

Your goal is for everything that's a repeatable task to be scripted – systematized and standardized. This allows you to build an automated engine to run those processes.



“Automation” may require software or machinery, but often simply refers to humans engaging in the same task but in a clear, step-by-step manner that requires little brain power and is relatively error free.

Automating processes will create time and allow you to scale your business without that growth running you into the ground.

Think about this: if every task is documented so that, really, anyone with the skills can sit down and do the task efficiently and accurately, following step-by-step instructions, you've got a very robust system. If you're doing the task yourself, it's that much quicker for having it documented. It requires zero thought and you can use your brain power for something worthy of you, your mind, and your creativity.



If you're outsourcing, this documentation will ensure that your people are equipped to perform each task effectively and efficiently – with minimal hit on your time. This way, you ditch bottlenecks and you move on repetitive activities rapidly so that you can spend your time moving your company forward.

Automating processes will create time and allow you to scale your business without that growth running you into the ground.

Suddenly you've got what you want – a lot more time on your hands for your life and your company's growth, Say buh-bye to overwhelm. If you do this right, every process you standardize will further your ability to scale. It will help you get the most from your outsourcers and, if you do hire at some point, it will help them on-board fast.



Yes, this takes some time up front. It is so worthwhile, though. You'll reap the benefits on a daily basis.



Author Bio



Dr. Lyssa Menard is a **Business Coach, Clinical Health Psychologist, and Assistant Professor** of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science at Northwestern University.

She specializes in **empowering motivated business owners, executives, and other high-achievers to work, live, love, feel, and look better by taking charge of their stressors, anxiety, and business operations.** Under her care, overwhelmed, overcommitted, or anxious high achievers learn to get unstuck, take control, and regain “flow.”

Known for her expertise in the personal and professional change management challenges facing business owners and executives, she has been invited to address the *American Psychological Association* and many companies throughout the U.S. Lyssa has been quoted in *The New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Prevention Magazine*, *WebMD*, *CareerBuilder* and many other prominent publications. She has appeared on *CNN*, *NBC News*, and *ABC News*.



Contact

If you've found this guide useful, **CLICK ON ANY LINK BELOW** to receive a complementary **Stress Buster Strategy Session**. Let's have a chat and figure out how to help you thrive!



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