



FEATURE



## Put Your Business on Auto-Pilot

[By Alan Bayham]

If you're like many small to medium-sized business owners, you love what you do, but you may often feel "trapped" in your work. You want the business to continue after you retire, but because you have such a hands-on role in nearly every aspect of the company, you wonder how you'll ever be able to walk away. You dream of being able to take a month-long vacation, but you fear the business would suffer without you there every day. And while you love the financial rewards being a business owner affords, you wish you could reap those rewards without having to do all the work yourself.

The real problem for many business owners is not the inability to walk away from the office and leave work at work but rather a lack of formal business systems that would essentially automate their companies' processes. But since many business owners have always handled business issues themselves, they feel there's no need for systems. They believe that customers need personal interaction from them, and they have a hard time delegating tasks and responsibilities effectively.

However, by simply systemizing their businesses and by creating policies and procedures, business owners can break free from the chains that keep them tethered to their desks. They can then focus on business-building activities and personal interests rather than on day-to-day work.

While the exact systems, policies, and procedures you create will depend on the nature of your business, following are some guidelines to keep in mind when putting systems in place.

### 1. Set your priorities.

Often, business owners are so wrapped up in the day-to-day activities of their work that they lose sight of what they really should be doing in their leadership roles. Therefore, take a timeout, and ask yourself,

"How can I grow my business?" and "What activities are the most rewarding to me, both professionally and personally?" You'll likely realize that in order to grow your company and feel more personal satisfaction, you need to be spending your time on such things as networking for new business, building client relationships, planning the company's future growth, or simply enjoying some time away from the business. Once you realize what you should be doing on a regular basis, you can let go of the day-to-day tasks that your employees can easily start to take over.

### 2. Make a list of your current activities.

Next, keep a journal of how you're currently spending your time at work. What specific tasks are you doing? How much time are you spending on the technical aspects of what your company produces or offers? How much of a hands-on role are you taking? What percentage of your time are you spending on strategic activities? You'll likely find that you spend the majority of your time doing the same or similar tasks that you pay employees to do. Why? Because most small-business owners started as technicians in particular fields and then decided to open their own firms or businesses. So while they're skilled plumbers, graphic designers, computer programmers, etc. (and feel most comfortable in those roles), they lack

business-management and leadership training. For most small-business owners, evaluating on paper just how much time they spend doing technical tasks rather than business-building activities is a real eye opener.

### 3. Delegate effectively.

Delegate all tasks not related to the list of what you should be doing that you created in step one. But don't hand someone a task and say, "Do it." You need to delegate correctly. That means giving the person clear directions and being sure he or she understands what you want done, how much time it should take, how much money it should take, what processes you want the person to follow, and when the task is due. While you should make yourself available for questions, you should not have hands-on involvement with the task. Follow up with the person in writing, reiterating the agreed-to task and all the details of the task. When you complete this step, you will have systemized your first process!

### 4. Get everyone involved.

Putting processes in writing like this applies to everyone in the company. It needs to happen laterally as well as vertically. Think of it as creating an owner's manual for each position. Have each person list out all of



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the tasks his or her position is responsible for. Consider that someone in the payroll department would detail how to run payroll, how to pay the withholding taxes, how to process 401(k) deductions, etc. The goal is that if that person were out sick or suddenly quit, another person could pick up the process description sheet and perform the job. Every person, from the CEO to the janitor, needs to go through this process for every single aspect of his or her job.

One important point here: be sure the written processes are based upon job descriptions and not based upon people. You can't have systems based on what Mary or John does. It needs to be based upon the actual job description for John's position. That way, if/when John leaves the company, you don't have to find someone just like him to do the job (a virtually impossible task). You need to be able to replace people easily.

**5. Share the systems company wide.**

Once something is written down and systemized, put it into a policy-and-procedure manual. Also, have people cross-train for different positions so they

can step in when needed, even if it's just to help out during a crunch time. Finally, since all tasks are tied to specific job descriptions, also make sure they're tied to people's performance evaluations. That will ensure that tasks are done according to the prescribed system every time.

**Systemize Your Company's Success**

While the process of creating systems company wide may seem overwhelming, remember that you don't have to do it all at once. Systemizing your business is a long-range project, not something you can do in a week. Start by systemizing just one position, and then move onto another. Once you do have one thing systemized, be sure to reevaluate your system on an annual basis to see if you need to make changes based on new events, information, or regulations.

By taking the time to systemize your company, you'll have a more-efficient business and will be more effective in your leadership role. You'll actually have time to do things you enjoy that are important to the business. You'll be able to focus on things that will make your company more

successful and will be able to reap the profits from your business, even when you're not physically there. Begin the systemization process today, and you'll enjoy the rewards for years to come.



**About the Author**

Alan Bayham is a sought-after business coach and consultant and the president of Bayham Consulting, LLC. With a master's degree in organizational management, he is a licensed professional business coach with more than 30 years of experience in leadership, management, and marketing training. He has worked with companies ranging from small and medium-sized businesses to Fortune 500 companies. For more information, contact Alan at (504) 259-8682 or at [abayham@bayhamconsulting.com](mailto:abayham@bayhamconsulting.com).

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