

# HOW TO FOCUS AT WORK

By Debbie Williams

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SLOW DOWN AND FOCUS - it's my mantra of late, and I've placed a sign on top of my computer monitor to remind me to take it easy. I know, it's just adds more clutter to my desktop, but if I don't remind myself to take the time to be thorough, pay attention to the details, and enjoy what I'm doing, I'll rush through the task at hand to tackle the next item on my to-do-list.

Does this sound like anything you do on a regular basis? Maybe you are one of those rare people who can pace yourself, taking the time to dot every i and cross every t, but many of us rush through the day just trying to do enough to get by.

Perhaps you've learned the hard way, after a harsh reprimand from your partner, or a bad evaluation from a client, that your work is sloppy or incomplete. Or maybe you're trying to do so much in so little time, that you and your work are suffering from the frenzy. Why not just take it easy, slow down, and focus on the task at hand? Believe me, that stack of papers will not disappear while you are working on one project, and your to-do-list will still be there when you're done. How do you start to change the pace? Here are a few ways that you can make your lives just a little bit easier:

## **Anything Worth Doing is Worth Doing Well**

Was that your mother talking, or a famous author? It's true that it gives us tremendous satisfaction to do a good job on a project, whether it's designing a website that flows well, or writing a proposal that has your clients begging for your services. Yes, sometimes you can get so hung up on only producing quality work that you become a procrastinator, but do try to find a happy medium in the amount of work that you do for yourself and others.

If you're trying to build your client base, you may find yourself tempted to sell simple products, inexpensive to produce with high profits. That's good e-commerce, but only if the product is really good. (Granted, it doesn't have to be your best product, but it does have to be really good.)

A good example of this is my tips booklet, written two years ago. I realized I needed a product to sell to capitalize on the newfound web traffic coming to my site. So I expanded my paper management and home office organizing articles into a booklet, and tried to sell it on my website. Crash! I not only produced a product that was of poor quality, and published in a hurry, but it wasn't even in my area of expertise. Yes, I sold out - my readers found me out real quick - they saw right through me. The few who did buy the booklet didn't recommend it to their friends (word of mouth advertising only works if you have a great product). And most didn't buy the booklet, so it didn't sell many copies.

I could have quit writing altogether, and continued as a hobbyist. But my passion for writing, coupled with the continuous flow of reader feedback encouraged me to follow my passion, and write what I know. Now my articles, columns, and books are topics that I know about firsthand and enjoy - trying to organize work & family and balancing it all.

### **Make A List And Check It Twice**

Much of the hectic pace we set for ourselves each day is out of fear of forgetting that all-important thing, or not getting everything done that needs doing. If you're a list-maker or need visual cues to remind you what to do and where to go, then use a planner or calendar in your home or office. Write it down, assign a priority to it, and move on.

This goes for those of you who work at home, are full-time parents, or are retired. You may not think what you have to do is important enough to merit a to-do-list, but it sure beats waking up at 2 am wondering if you remembered to check the links on your new web page, or had your assistant proofread the latest proposal before it was FedEx'd to your client. Rest assured, it's the best way I know of to put your mind at ease.

### **Write On!**

More than a to-do- list, and one stop short of boring your spouse to death about minute details of your business, is the practice of journaling. This little marvel has saved many a partnership in the office and at home.

Some of my clients write down critiques of their work so that they can refer back to them and learn from the experience. Others write gratitude journals, trying to find just two or three pleasant things that have happened to them during the course of their day. Still others put their thoughts, dreams, goals, and frustrations into words on paper.

It's the process not the product in this instance that 's important. Whatever you choose to put into your journal, make it count. Write it down, reread it, and move on. Don't dwell on what you can't change.

Somehow the act of writing down your actions makes you accountable for it, and you are your own worst critic. So if you messed up your proposal to a new client, use your notes as a means of trouble-shooting. Determine what went wrong and how you can avoid it in the future. And if you can't figure out the solution on your own, call a colleague or brainstorm with your business network to help you figure out ways to make a positive change.

In summary, by writing down your action list, prioritizing the tasks in order of importance, making notes, and producing quality products, you will find yourself with more time in the day to focus on expanding your business and streamlining it into the company you want it to be. Your customer complaints will diminish as you continue to provide them with quality products and services, you'll create an effective system of task management, and will find yourself moving from the role of firefighter to creative genius. I encourage you to spend your time working on your corporate vision, not reacting to negative responses from unhappy customers. The choice is yours, and if you're ready for the change, I'll be happy to lend you my sign.