

3 Ways Context Switching Can Boost Your Team's Productivity

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

Fifteen years ago, Paul Graham of startup accelerator Y Combinator published his “Maker’s Schedule, Manager’s Schedule” essay outlining the different ways computer programmers and bosses use time. Those in a maker’s role – including Graham, a programmer himself – “prefer to use time in units of half a day at least” because they “can’t write or program well in units of an hour,” he explained.

By contrast, managers have meetings galore, so “by default you change what you’re doing every hour.”

The patterns still hold true. As president and CEO of Marketcircle, a software company specializing in CRM solutions, I’ve watched the makers I employ excel when given long stretches to create and contemplate while the managers flourish, toggling between meetings and subject matters.

Where do I fit? Although I’m a programmer too, as the head of my company, I must spend time not just producing for my business (in maker’s mode) but also running its day-to-day business (in manager’s mode). If you’re also a small business owner and operator, maybe you can relate.

Context switching is taxing, but when done with intention, it can boost business growth. Here are three reasons why.

Related: [Microsoft Is Set to Cut Jobs as Big Tech Layoffs Surge Into the New Year](#)

Do what you love, but better

Some say, “Do what you love, and you’ll never work a day in your life.” That quip rarely holds true for owner-operators. Yes, most of us love our business, but ensuring it continues to generate value is hard work – and feels like it. To maintain momentum, we need to regularly switch between maker and manager modes while accepting that we won’t necessarily feel equally at home in both.

Over the years, I’ve noticed how many founding CEOs and presidents get stuck in maker’s mode. After all, we established our business on the premise of selling something we are passionate about making or providing. Not only has that production process proven profitable enough for starting up, but it’s our personal comfort zone. So naturally, it feels right to nurture our passion by working *on* the business.

Starting a company ipso facto means that we are working *on* the business. However, we must also find the time, space and long-term vision to carry out work *in* the business. This entails accounting, bookkeeping, performance reviews, hiring and firing, among other administrative activities that makers may not necessarily be good at but are necessary. Executing these managerial tasks allows us to refine processes and strategize future directions that enable improvements and innovations for the next project or the next customer. That’s precisely what leads to better business.

Related: Law School Taught Me a Lot – But Not How to Run a Business. Here Are 3 Lessons I Learned the Hard Way

Fine-tune time management

Do you reserve certain times in the day for certain activities? Ever journal before the workday begins? Are you a member of an entrepreneurs’ group? Even if you don’t label

your schedule as that of a maker-versus manager, there's a good chance you instinctively leverage such categories.

Answering yes to the above questions myself, I can confirm such methods are a forcing function for time management between on-the-business and in-the-business work. Time blocking, for example, ensures that before a new launch, the producer in me has an uninterrupted window to fix bugs and update documentation. The method equally empowers the president in me to evaluate how business is going and the next steps, whether I come to that through self-reflection or peer discussion.

That said, the time spent in one mode versus another is seldom 50/50. In fact, the ratio is itself dynamic, demanding continuous fine-tuning. In the company's early days or during a period of pivot, we're likely to devote the majority of our hours to producing. But as the organization grows its staff, there are simply more people and projects to preside over – so the two hours we once spent working on the business each week might need to multiply to two afternoons.

Prevent burnout, build resilience

As a small business owner, it's easy to overwork. Some research shows that entrepreneurs are more susceptible to burnout, while other studies suggest we might have built-in protection against it despite all the work. Either way, we want to ward off that feeling of doing the same thing over and over with no time to breathe.

One antidote to burnout is to embrace the two mindsets that come with being an owner-operator. In my experience, the very act of shapeshifting between maker's and manager's responsibilities allows me to let off steam. This puts me in a healthier mental state, which builds resilience for when I hit plateaus and am tempted to stay in one zone to avoid the pain of the other.

Moreover, each role informs the other. When producing, sometimes I overfocus on recurring problems, so I can't see the forest for the trees. Manager's mode lets me zoom out, reminding me of the greater goals my work contributes to and giving me ideas to avoid snafus. Conversely, sometimes I get carried away with vision-boarding and worrying about the what-ifs. Maker's mode puts me back in touch with concrete solutions to expand profits and prospects.

Context switching is an inevitable part of a small business owner's work. Sometimes, we do it multiple times a day, or as the company becomes more sophisticated, we might alternate schedules every few weeks. Regardless, being intentional about when, why, and how we engage our maker's mode and manager's mode can help us achieve personal resilience and business growth.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/3-ways-context-switching-can-boost-your-business/484380>