How I Stopped Hustling and Started Succeeding

I’m an entrepreneur with a few profitable online businesses in the fitness industry. I also work on a strict 9-to-5 schedule to ensure that I spend plenty of time with my family. Considering that many of us work 80-hour weeks to avoid the restraints of the regular 40-hour work weeks, I know this may sound blasphemous.

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It took me a long time to realize that “hustling” every day didn’t get me to where I wanted to be any faster. So, I stopped the hustle, prioritized the most important areas of work and spent my spare time on things that make me happy. The result? More success in business and a higher quality of life.

Let me go back a little. Years ago, I was a full-time personal trainer who had built a nice training business for himself. If a client ever canceled, I’d send a few texts and emails, and within moments the spot would be filled. I could charge $97 per hour, and still, clients were knocking down my door. Not only that, I was earning a commission from referring my overload of clients to other trainers and enjoying a small salary from managing the staff of trainers at Body & Soul Fitness, a boutique training studio in Toronto.

It was every personal trainer’s dream, and I thought, at the time, that it was mine also.

I was young and felt invincible, as cash seemed to flow like a never-ending chocolate fountain. Secretly, I was physically exhausted and spiritually broken. Emotional bankruptcy for a fat bank account — what a trade-off.

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Looking back now, it’s not hard to see why. For years, I had hustled 14-hour days, nearly every day, to train and attract clients. There was no time for anything else. The friends I talked to were my fellow trainers and clients. Girlfriend? Ha, not a chance. The thought was that once I’d gotten my business together — once I made some unspecified amount of money — things would be better. If I work hard now, no matter how smart, things would automatically right themselves, and I’d be a happy dude and everything would be perfect.

I wanted a family and knew that I didn’t want to be “that” dad who was never around. The friend who couldn’t make it out to a long-time friend’s charity run. The husband who couldn’t come home in time to sit on the couch with a good book, legs entangled with his significant other in their own quaint but endearing embrace.

That wasn’t the life I wanted to lead. I had decided that, and I would not return to that loveless, friendless, life-less life, no matter how much money it gave me. Without knowing it, I dove deep into entrepreneurship back in 2009, before entrepreneurship was cool, and formed what would one day become the one of the largest collaborative blogs in the world for personal trainers, theptdc.com — but let’s not get ahead of ourselves. It was an inauspicious start.

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As entrepreneurs with so many hats to wear and fires to put out, it’s all too easy to get pulled in multiple directions and lose sight of what’s truly important and what’s not. It took me too long to figure that out, but despite the throes of my initial struggles, I am now able to strike the right balance that allows me to optimize my business and maximize

time with my family. It starts and ends with the most important skill any entrepreneur can acquire: better decision-making.

To help me make better decisions how to spend my time, I developed a number of “cognitive filters.” These filters are objective questions that I ask myself to help guide me whenever I am presented with a new demand on my time, energy and money. These filters help me say yes or, more importantly, become confident in saying no.

Hopefully, these filters will help you cut distractions from your life, too.

Filter 1: “Will this truly impact my business, personal life or society?”

I say no to almost all speaking gigs even if they are willing to pay me many thousands of dollars. The money won’t impact my business, it’ll hurt my personal life, and me speaking at another entrepreneur or fitness event won’t do anything for the greater good.

On a similar note, I’m happy to take an afternoon to speak to a local college or Skype in to a university class.

Filter 2: “Am I acting emotionally or irrationally right now?”

I won’t ever say yes to anything in the moment. No matter what, I take a step back, count to 10 and ask myself honestly this question. Through this lens, I’m able to remove myself from the situation briefly, so that I can better view it as an outsider looking in and assess more logically.

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Filter 3: “Will this change anything that I do?”

We have too much data and too many stats, and they all paralyze us.

When contemplating acquiring more data, ask yourself whether the desired results will change anything you do. But, beware: over-testing simply leads to procrastination and begets inaction. If you’re new to business, you don’t need the distraction that data provide. You need to spend your time building a better product, improving your service and getting better at whatever it is that you do.

Filter 4: “Will this allow me to more present in my work or with the ones that I love?”

Knowing when to say no is the most important business asset I have.

If something won’t help me produce better work, reach more or spend more time with loved ones, I say no. By following these things, I’ve been able to build a successful, sustainable business that allows me to be happy, focused and productive.

Today, I get to travel around the world with my wife and now seven-month toddler in tow, while running several successful online businesses, including the world’s first certification course for online personal trainers. I take one-and-half-hour lunches (by the waterfront if weather allows!) and make it a point to stop work by 5:30 p.m. to be home with family. Every single day.

This means that when I work I do truly *focused* work and block out all other things are merely distractions. Identifying what is worth your time and energy is not easy for anyone to do. But, instead of relying on the hundreds of articles on productivity and apps to shorten or optimize your “to-do” list, try asking these questions to filter out what’s needed and what’s not, and see how that stops you from hustling all the time with busywork.

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