My Business Became My Prison. This Is How I Broke Free.

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My family got in the car without me and headed to vacation in the mountains while I was stuck working my business. I had just lost a few key employees, and there was no way my restaurant was going to make it through the weekend without me. I would like to say that this was the only time my family left without me on vacation, but it isn't. I thought of my kids playing without me and my wife feeling like second fiddle to my company again. What was I building? It felt a lot like a prison when I got into business for freedom.

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We set out to build empires, but sometimes build prisons instead. At first, they look the same. But, over time, the difference is obvious. Don't make the mistake of locking yourself up in your business. There can be freedom with a few key principles.

1. Keep the end in mind.

Before we begin anything, we really should think about what we want the end to look like. Picturing what the end product will be keeps us on track. When we go on a road trip and we don't know how to get there, we plug the address into our phones. Without that end point, there is no way to navigate our way. It is the same thing with your company. With an end point, you

will know what to focus on and what to cut. I wanted more freedom of time in my business and, in turn, I have not taken some business opportunities because chains are sometimes dressed as opportunities. Start with your end in mind to navigate your business to freedom.

2. Have the right people.

Investing in people who will lead is crucial to freedom in business. We often train people on how to do tasks and finish projects, but real freedom won't come that way. Staff need to know the heartbeat of the business – why you do what you do. When our employees understand and own the DNA, they are able to make higher level thinking decisions and impart the culture like wildfire. Giving your team the reigns of decision making will allow you to take your control freak hands off of the day-to-day. Invest in people, and create culture-loving leaders to gain more freedom.

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3. Build the right systems.

If systems aren't in place, your company will struggle. Often in small business, the company is successful because of you and your presence in the company. If you are going to have a life, you need to have systems in place. A whole network of systems won't happen overnight, but with time, you can create a system for anything. What are the reports you need to check on each week? What problems come up consistently, and how can there be a framework for the future? By taking the time to develop structured systems, we can easily see the health of the organization and raise its efficiency. Freedom comes through systems.

4. Time or money?

When we remove ourselves from as much of the day-to-day functions as possible, we need to look at how much we are pulling out of the company for ourselves. Freedom of time may come at the cost of your take home pay. When I transitioned out of working in my business so much, I needed to take home less so that I could pay someone to work the hours I wasn't there. Over time, the business started to make more money and I could raise my pay, but in the beginning that wasn't the case. If we really want freedom, we need to be willing to bring home less and pay others to do the work. If your budget at home is too tight today-to-day

reduce your take home pay, save this one for last, and clean up your home budget. Freedom comes when we elevate our minutes over dollars.

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If you use these principles as a guide, you will have the freedom you desire. If you forget even one principle, the bars to the prison cell will start to form. Freedom won't happen overnight, but with time and focus, you can run your business instead of it running you.

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