



Growing The Right Way

Effective Ideas for Small Business Owners

By David Handler

The Art of Genius Time

Many franchisors host annual conferences for their franchisees, often in tourist areas like Orlando, Washington, D.C. or Las Vegas. These are excellent opportunities to network with peers, attend educational sessions and simply get away from their businesses for a few days of much needed R&R. I am occasionally asked to present a keynote or conduct a workshop at these events, and in the past month I attended three different ones, providing me the opportunity to have engaging conversations with franchisees about the challenges they face.

Based on their input, the economy continues to head in the right direction. In these organizations – all in the service industry – sales trended upward during the first half of the year. However, the business climate is considerably different than just a few years ago, with greater competition and higher customer expectations. As a small business owner, your success depends on maximizing your daily productivity, so you can focus more on the big picture of growing your business and less on the many things that eat away at your day.

“Genius Time” is what you, as the owner, do that brings the most value to your business. It is those high-impact activities – and only the three or four most important things – that lead to your peak performance. For example, Genius Time could be networking, client relations, employee motivation and/or providing continuing education. There are many other things that could make up your personal Genius Time, and know this...dedicating yourself to Genius Time will lead your entire organization to better results.

Many of the small business owners, franchisees and franchisors we work with struggle with Genius Time. They live in a world of crisis management – trapped by a never-ending stream of tasks that keeps them in a state of “stuck” – seldom able to grow beyond their current level. There are many reasons this happens, from lack of awareness about how they actually spend their day, to the never-ending challenges of interruption after interruption after interruption. Instead of developing systems and training their employees, which are the keys to creating more time for thinking proactively, many business owners spend their days reacting to situations and putting out fires.

Having determined your personal Genius Time, keep track during the next week of how you actually spend your working days. Note things like how often you check e-mail, handle incoming telephone calls or work on personal matters. List all of the interruptions that distract you...from employees, to customers, to your cell phone ringing. Be sure to note all of the successful moments you spend focusing on your Genius Time.

At the end of the week, identify where you’re placing your priorities. Use a yellow highlighter to mark all of your Genius Time work. Then put a red circle around those “time wasters” that cut into your productivity and review all of the other ways you spent time during your work day. Finally, add up the hours you spent performing Genius Time, “time wasters” and “other” activities. This will allow you to determine what percentage of your working hours you actually spent on Genius Time.

This exercise serves two important purposes. First, by simply forcing yourself to track how you spend your time during that week, you’ll automatically focus on Genius Time activities. After all, you want to wind up with more yellow highlighter marks than red circles! Second, in reviewing your notes, it will become clear that there are many minutes, hours, days where the most important things that will determine the future of your business are being overwhelmed by other activities. Once you become aware of the hours lost in crisis management, you’ll be able to redirect yourself toward more effective endeavors.

One of the interesting people I met at a franchise convention was a recently retired Army veteran and new franchisee. On 9/11, he told me he was sitting 100 feet from where the plane hit the Pentagon. He and another member of the military crawled to safety through smoke so thick they weren’t sure which direction they were heading.

He said the reason he chose a franchise was because working the system is the closest thing he could find to the life he lived and loved the previous 20 years. “In the military, we spent our days taking the plan and working it, with the goal of maximum productivity and results,” he said. “Tell me what the most valuable use of my time is and I’ll prioritize that every day.” This American Hero pursuing the American Dream truly understands the importance of Genius Time.

After you finish reading this article, spend 30 minutes thinking about your own Genius Time. Here are some questions to help you get started:

- What do you spend most of your work time doing?
- What things in your business can you and you alone handle?
- What are the most important roles you perform?
- Which areas of your company are not getting the attention they need?
- How often do you plan what you want to get done each day? Week? Month?
- Why do you think things get in the way of executing your priorities?

For a complimentary “Genius Time Tracker Sheet” to log how you spend your days, send an e-mail to coach@successhandler.com with “Time Tracker” in the subject line.

Tomball resident David Handler, The Coach, is the founder of Success Handler, LLC (www.successhandler.com), and specializes in helping business leaders, franchisees and franchisors achieve their dreams. He understands the challenges of running a business, because he’s been there – as a business owner, trainer, corporate leader, and in a franchisee and franchisor environment. For a complimentary copy of David’s list – “11 Things Business Owners Can Do To Increase Genius Time” – send an e-mail to coach@successhandler.com.