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## Is Your Business Demanding Too Much?

**An all-consuming focus on your business can wreak havoc on your health and your emotional balance.**

By: Aliza Sherman | 02/22/2009



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Any entrepreneur knows that starting a business to have more "freedom" is an illusion. A business can be a burden, a shackle and a drain on all your resources. When I started and ran my internet company, I always paid myself last. Soon my personal finances were suffering. Credit card bills weren't getting paid. My rent was late. I began to resent the fact that all my hard work wasn't paying off.

According to Jennifer Brown, president and founder of [Jennifer Brown Consulting](#), a workplace consulting firm in New York City, "Knowledge is power when it comes to your company's finances. If you are outsourcing your company finances, you need to know what is going on.

"Now is the time to make sure you know what money's coming in and, just as important, what's going out," Brown says. "Are there certain expenses you maintained in the boom times that can be economized? Do you have the right people performing the right tasks, where everyone is as efficient and productive as she can be?"

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I had turned company finances over to someone else, then walked away. By not learning about cash flow, I quickly became a victim of my own ignorance.

Leslie H. Vander Baan, owner and operator of [AutoConsign.com](#) in North Carolina, was drained mentally and emotionally by her company.

Says Vander Baan, "Every ounce of stamina and endurance was required to get the business going. I burned so much energy I simply did not have a lot left to give to my spouse or my friends. I felt very disconnected because of the personal strain I had put on myself to succeed."

After Vander Baan, 30, started to "short circuit," she knew she had to make changes. Her mental exhaustion was affecting her physically and emotionally, and she was disconnecting from friends.

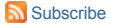
Vander Baan's first step on the road to recovery was to address the guilt she felt when she wasn't working.

"I always knew I got some of my best ideas and sources of inspiration when I was having fun away from the business, so I had to get over feeling guilty about being away," she says.

She also made time for yoga class to de-stress. She reconnected with friends, making time to see them.

Looking back, she realizes that she made similar mistakes when starting her first company. Next time, she says, she will build in more flexible timelines so she doesn't agonize when things take longer to happen than anticipated. Right now, her company is poised to surpass half a million in revenue, and she makes a point of having fun and staying active to keep up her energy for any business challenge that comes along.

"I'm also aware of letting go one commitment when you take on another," she says. "I didn't do this



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while working on getting two businesses off the ground. I still served on the board of a nonprofit and volunteered to appear at association functions, all while working six days a week. It was too much to do at one time."

For Patti Hone, working on her business took a drastic toll on her health. The fortysomething president and creative director of [As You Like It Marketing & Communications Inc.](#) says starting her business was an all-consuming process 11 years ago.

"I started with nothing and had to find not only clients, but also staff and resources to maintain and grow the business," Hone says. "I worked around the clock and never said no to any demands my clients put upon me. I felt that with a new business, I had to take whatever work I could get."

Over the next 10 years, Hone put on a lot of weight and dealt with several health problems. After looking at family photos and asking herself, "Do I really look like that?" she realized that something had to give. She had to make time for her own well-being.

Tests revealed that her metabolism had shut down from skipping meals and not eating properly as she ran from one appointment to another. She renewed her gym membership and set a goal of working out three to four times a week.

It took Hone eight months to take off the weight. She lost 60 pounds and has kept it off for two years.

Brown, the workplace consultant, emphasizes the need to maintain a level of physical activity, even when you are in the throes of starting a new business.

"No entrepreneur is worth anything to her organization if she is constantly in panic mode. It has been shown that exercise reduces stress in body but also in mind," advises Brown.

Entrepreneurs tend to be workaholics with the ability to focus in front of a laptop for 12 hours at a time, Brown says. "This is bad for your body, and may lead to mental inefficiency as well. Mix up your days," she advises. "Schedule some meetings periodically, vary the technology, vary the kinds of people you network with, make sure to see friends, even during the day."

Brown also suggests opening up to others you trust.

For me, reconnecting with my friends after years of isolation led me to identify a new business partner for my current business. Financially savvy, she takes charge of many of the company's finances. She also takes the time to educate me every step of the way and doesn't let me shirk my responsibility to be aware of and engaged in the company's financials.

The greatest lesson to avoid that unending vortex of business demands is to ask for help and turn to others. Without the support of family, friends and trusted colleagues, I don't think I'd have any balance in my life. I still struggle to pull myself away from my work each day, but I have others reminding me constantly of the need for balance. Without them, my business might be success, but the costs would be too great.

*Aliza Sherman is a producer, entrepreneur and author of [Powertools for Women in Business](#), as well as co-founder of [MotherhoodLater ... Than Sooner](#). Links to her work can be found at [www.mediaegg.com](#).*

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