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Tuesday, March 13, 2012

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**SMALL BUSINESS**

## GETTING AHEAD: Time management -- Prioritizing to -do list can help limit stress

By AMY ANN STOESSEL  
 4:30 am, March 12, 2012

Sometimes it seems there simply are not enough hours in the day.



Time management can be an acquired skill, but experts say with enough planning and thought it's possible to inject a bit of sanity into the 1,440 minutes that make up one's day.

Ultimately, it's a matter of strategizing and priority setting that can put an end to the tug-of-war that can develop between competing interests for one's time.

Artist Barbara Bloom, owner of Parma-based Images In Bloom, knows that push-and-pull feeling well, experiencing it late last year as she and her husband

transitioned into having a home-based business.

"When you work full-time for someone else, you have a routine ... when you're home that changes to a casual feel," she said.

Images In Bloom took root after the Blooms each were downsized from their jobs. Ms. Bloom specializes in hand-dyed silk scarves and other handmade goods, including handbags created out of plastic grocery bags. Mr. Bloom makes soap products, all of which are sold online, at local specialty shops and at craft shows.

Ms. Bloom, who has a master's degree in public administration, said she has started to try to plan out the week a little more, list all the things that need to be done and prioritize them. She also tries to schedule out tasks for certain times of the week.

"If you don't have those goals, often those goals keep moving out," she said.

Painesville-based business coach Larry N. Lamphier agrees with the concept of prioritizing. In fact, he subscribes to the teachings of Stephen R. Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," who uses the concept of a time-management matrix.

The matrix has four quadrants, with urgent and not urgent columns intersecting with important and not important rows.

Basically, Mr. Lamphier explained, every task in one's day falls into one of these quadrants — important/urgent; important/not urgent; not important/urgent; or not important/not urgent. Time management is a matter of figuring out what activities fall into what quadrants and setting aside blocks of time for each category.

As part of the process, it is essential to determine time-wasters and to identify one's "rocks," Mr. Lamphier said, those activities — personal or professional — that are most important and non-negotiable.

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"The biggest challenge people are having today is getting rid of their smart phones," Mr. Lamphier said "It's effecting people emotionally. ... It forces people into a reactionary mode."

Erin M. Nunn, director of career services and internships at Lake Erie College, stressed that time management ultimately comes down to a lot of organization and planning ahead.

She suggests taking a week to track exactly how one's time is spent, and utilizing tools like monthly calendars and reminders on smart phones.

"Sometimes people just get caught up in their day," she said.

Of course, both Ms. Nunn and Mr. Lamphier acknowledged that the process of time management is a task that might eat up some time itself.

"You didn't develop your current time management system overnight," Mr. Lamphier said. "You need to work at it."

And that's exactly what Ms. Bloom is continuing to do as her business continues to develop. "Probably my biggest wish is every day I could be a little more consistent," she said.

But, as a business owner, she's also come to realize that flexibility is just as important: "Don't be so doggedly determined to stick to your goals that you miss opportunities."

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