7 STEPS

TO ELIMINATE BUSINESS OWNER OVERWHELM

numberwise

7 Steps to Eliminate Business Owner Overwhelm

Are you feeling stressed out running your business? Overwhelmed no matter how many hours you work and how little you sleep? If so, you are not alone. According to a survey from The Alternative Board, 72% of small business owners feel overwhelmed by their roles and responsibilities. Seventy-two percent! You're not the only person asking how you can stop feeling so burdened .

While we don't know all the particulars of your business or what's taking the majority of your time and energy, we have advice to help put an end to the overwhelm. Keep in mind that the time, energy, and money you invest upfront in making changes to your business will free you up to do the things you are good at and the things you want to do. You don't have to tackle all of this at once. You can skip to the section that interests you the most right now. The rest of this guide will be here for you when you're ready.

1. **Clear the clutter (just hear us out!)**
2. **Make goals and plans**
3. **Delegate & train others to be your backup**
4. **Improve communication with your team**
5. **Simplify with software & tools**
6. **Outsource the tough stuff**
7. **Take time to de-stress & clear your mind**

Step 1

Start by simply clearing the clutter

You may not realize it, but clutter, disorganization, and straight-up mess around you can make you feel overwhelmed. Whether it's your supply closet, work desk, or your home (where, let's face it, many of our supply closets and desks are now), the disarray around us can increase our stress level, decrease our focus, and even affect relationships. If you're overwhelmed, the idea of cleaning and organizing may sound ridiculous. After all, you have deadlines for submitting payroll, yet there are no deadlines for laundry, dishes, or going through that forgotten pile of papers in the corner. But, hear us out!

▼ According to the Harvard Business Review, **physical environments significantly influence our cognition, emotions, and behavior,** affecting our decision-making and relationships with others. **(Source: Harvard Business Review)**

▼ **Princeton University** researchers found the visual cortex can be overwhelmed by task-irrelevant objects, making it harder to focus and complete tasks efficiently. **(Via Work Life Parent)**

▼ In a study published in the **Journal of Consumer Research**, participants were directed to sit in a room with a clean workspace or one that was cluttered. **After moving to a separate room** they were asked to work on an unsolvable geometry puzzle. Those who sat in a clean workspace spent over 60% longer trying to solve the unsolvable, than those who were subjected to the clutter (and gave up sooner). **(Source: Your Training Edge)**

> **"The shortest way to do many things is to do only one thing at a time."**
> **-Mozart**
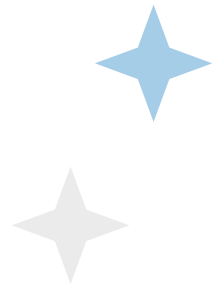
Convinced?

Okay, now take a few deep breaths. We have some inspiration (and ideas) for you. We hope you have Netflix.

- ▼ **Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things**

- ▼ **Tidying Up with Marie Kondo**

- ▼ **Get Organized with The Home Edit**

Start small tip:

Set a timer for 5 minutes and start decluttering your workspace. It could be clearing your desk (or dining table) or cleaning up a pile of stuff on the other side of the room that's visible from your workspace. Play your favorite channel on a music-streaming app like Pandora or Spotify to make this task more enjoyable.

Step 2

Make goals and plans

That old adage may sound corny, but it's true; those who fail to plan, plan to fail. So let's dive into the how of setting goals and strategic planning.

When someone asks you what your business goals are, "increasing profit" or "making more money" might come to mind. But, those goals are WAY too vague. If you want high-quality goals, they have to be SMART. SMART goals are:

▼ **Specific -** exactly how much do you want to increase profit?

▼ **Measurable -** how can you track your progress? Growth in revenue or website traffic are pretty straightforward to measure, but less tangible things like customer or employee satisfaction can still be measured using surveys and evaluations.

▼ **Attainable -** are the goals you have in mind realistic? While it's great to aim high, setting a goal of 3000% growth isn't very realistic if your profits only grew 7% last year, and unrealistic goals are easily abandoned.

▼ **Relevant -** this one should be common sense, but make sure your goals are in line with the vision, mission, and core competencies of your business. Haven't figured out all of that stuff yet? Don't stress. Just make sure the goals you are setting are moving your business closer to what and where you want it to be.

▼ **Time-bound -** set deadlines for your goals. Are you aiming to grow your team by 3 people in the next 3 months, increase profit by 10% in 6 months, or open a new location in 12 months?

For more on SMART goals, check out **this video** from Andy, Founder of Numberwise.

Here are questions you can ask yourself as you brainstorm potential goals for your business:

▼ **What do I ultimately want to accomplish?**

▼ **If I could wave a magic wand and make my wildest dreams for the business come true, what would that look like?**

▼ **What do I want MY role in the business to be in a year, or in five years?**

▼ **What am I most passionate about in the business? Are there goals I can set in line with my passion?**

Once you've brainstormed a number of possible goals, narrow it down to a few you feel are most important to focus on. Write them out and make sure they're SMART goals. Once your goals are selected, you can work on a tentative plan or strategy to achieve those goals. While the plan may change over time, start with ideas of how you can achieve your goals and list out the first couple of steps that need to be taken (take heart, the plan doesn't have to fall entirely on your shoulders).

Start small tip:

Start small tip: Grab a pen and piece of paper and write down 'What's My Greatest Superpower?' Then answer it. It can be the first thing that comes to mind, or a few things you know you rock at (even if they're not work-related).

Step 3

Delegate & train others to be your backup

You're probably reading about eliminating business owner overwhelm because you have **way more on your to-do list** than you can wrap your mind around. That's what makes delegating absolutely essential. You are only one person and there are only so many hours you can work in a day and remain sane, well-rested, and (hopefully) in good health. If you feel like your to-do list is **endless**, start with reframing what you think MUST be done. If you wrote out your entire to-do list in order of priority, it's likely that only the first 5 - 10 would actually be essential.

Are you wearing too many hats? Most entrepreneurs feel this way, spending a tremendous amount of time doing admin work. Delegate as much as possible. Trust your team to do the jobs you hired (and trained) them to do. Micromanaging doesn't help anyone.

Would your business operations continue if you had to step away for a day, a week, or a month? **Check out the Numberwise blog post on how to Own Your Business; Don't Work for It**, which offers tips to make your business need you less. One tip from this post is to create an **ideal organization chart** for your business. There's no 'standard' org chart – industries and companies all differ. But at the very least, you need to consider three key areas of your business: sales, operations, and finance.

1. **Who is going to bring the customers in the door?**

2. **Who is going to deliver the product or service?**

3. **Who is going to make sure you're actually making money?**

Once the org chart is complete, add the names of the people who are currently holding each position. This process might seem silly at first, with you putting your own name in multiple boxes. But, that's the point. The next step is to start getting your name out of some of those boxes. You might start with a task that you find is an area of weakness. You love creating new products, but you hate doing the books. If that's the case, then you should focus on outsourcing that task to a professional (more on that in step 6!).

For your ongoing tasks that you do not want to delegate, create documentation (referred to as standard operating procedures or SOPs) on what you do and how you do it. Make sure your management team or backup person has access to this documentation in the event of an emergency that prevents you from working, such as a sudden illness or injury.
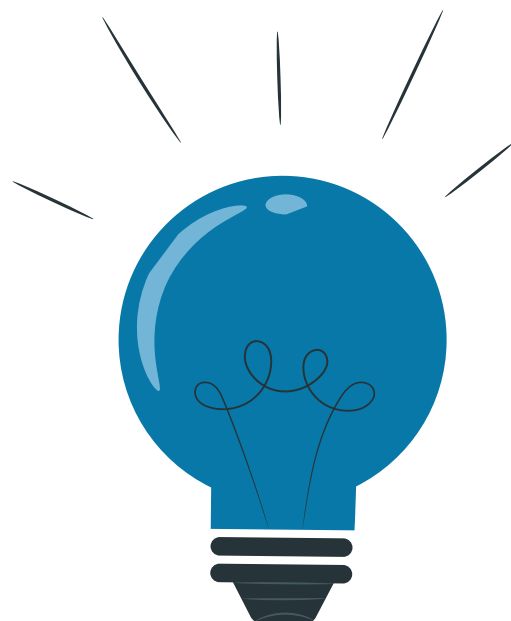
"The art of delegation is one of the key skills any entrepreneur must master."
-Richard Branson

Start small tip:

Write down one task for your business that you always dread working on. It could be something extremely time-consuming, monotonous, or simply not your thing. Then write down your **ideal way** to get this task off your plate (training a current employee, hiring a new one, or outsourcing it entirely). Then take a moment to **imagine** doing something relaxing while someone else is taking care of something you always hated doing. Seriously, close your eyes and imagine this. Isn't that a wonderful feeling?

When you're ready for the next step, go read **that blog post** we told you about.

Step 4

Improve communication with your team

We know; working on communication may seem like just a task to add to your to-do list (which is already too long!). But, if you're an overwhelmed business owner, improving communication with your employees can reap **huge benefits**. Internal communications are vitally important for **employee satisfaction**, operational **efficiency**, and even your **bottom line**. Clear and proactive communication can also reduce questions, confusion, and uncertainty.

▼   Less confusion from your employees = fewer questions

▼   Fewer questions = fewer interruptions for you

▼   Fewer interruptions = better focus and productivity while you're working

▼   Better focus and productivity = **reducing your feeling of overwhelm**

Think back to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when you received a slew of emails about how (some) businesses were responding. Businesses that acted quickly and communicated changes internally saved time (not having to answer as many one-off employee questions) and likely earned themselves goodwill. While the start of the pandemic was a stressful time, employees who quickly learned how their job would be affected knew how to prepare better and faced less uncertainty than employees of a company with little to no communication.

Don't wait for a huge change to start communicating. Regular communication prevents many issues and benefits everyone in a company.

Here are some ideas on what and when you should be communicating with your team:

▼ Share your vision and mission with the whole team. According to IBM, 72% of employees don't have a full understanding of their company's strategy.

▼ Provide clear, specific feedback and compliments. Instead of just telling someone "great job" on an assignment, tell them what exactly was remarkable so they have a better idea of how to repeat it or where their strengths are.

▼ Encourage employee feedback and ideas and designate regular time to listen, like a weekly or monthly 1 on 1 meeting.

▼ For more tips, check out 20 easy ways to improve communication in the workplace from **justworks.com**.

Start small tip:

Schedule a short, casual meeting with one employee. If you're in the same office or town, grab a cup of coffee or go for a walk. If they work remotely in a different area, try a coffee-over-Zoom meeting. The objective is to see how they're doing, if they are hitting any walls in their role, etc. Avoid asking them a ton of questions that make it feel like an evaluation or test - it should be a friendly, open ended chat where you are mostly listening. Remember: communication is a two-way street. Making sure employees feel heard is a great start to improving this area of your business that will in turn reduce your overwhelm.

Important note: When you send your employee a calendar invite, include a note letting them know you simply want to hear how they're doing and what's on their mind - questions, concerns, triumphs, etc. Some employees fear the worst if they get a calendar invite from the boss with no explanation for the meeting - so always include a note in meeting invitations.

Step 5

Simplify with software & tools

At Numberwise, we love embracing technology that makes our lives easier. There are countless tools and types of software a business can employ to save time, effort, and help meet goals.

Check out this Numberwise **blog post** for a few of our most-loved tools, platforms, and software to save you time and simplify your work.

▼   Xero accounting software

▼   Gusto payroll, benefits, onboarding & HR platform

▼   Slack for organizational messaging (organizable by topic, reducing email exchanges)

▼   Meeting scheduling tools like Calendly or Doodle polls for large groups

▼   Breevy auto-text filler

▼   You can also explore automation tools to help with other mundane, but essential, tasks (like replying to common questions in Facebook Messenger, sending welcome emails to people that subscribe to your email newsletter, and more).

Step 6

Outsource the tough stuff

If it's too much for you or your team to manage, consider outsourcing the tough stuff - whether it's time-consuming, outside of your skillset, or you just find it extremely boring. Software may make certain jobs easier, but there's no substitute for an expert.

Once again, remember that an investment in outsourcing can not only save you time and help ease the overwhelm, but also free you up to do the things you are good at and enjoy. Outsourcing to a specialist also takes the time and cost of training off your plate. You get expert support for less than the cost of an in-house employee at the same level, who'd need to be trained in your way of working.

Some functions you may consider outsourcing:

▼ **Accounting** - payroll, weekly or monthly bookkeeping, invoicing, accounts payable, reporting, forecasting

▼ **Human Resources** - onboarding, ensuring workplaces laws are met, managing employee reviews, and more

▼ **Marketing** - depending on your industry, this may include identifying leads for your sales team, writing press releases, managing online advertising, optimizing your website and managing communications with existing customers

Step 7

Take time to de-stress & clear your mind

Stress can affect not only your physical health but your cognitive functioning as well. Making operational changes can certainly cut down on the feeling of overwhelm. But to truly eliminate business owner overwhelm and improve your business, you need to make time for relaxation.

Self-care isn't just for other people. You **need** to take great care of yourself as a business owner. Here are a few practical ideas to help you do that

▼ **Start small.** Make a daily habit to do something relaxing during the workday. Go for a walk after lunch, listen to music for part of the day while you work, or even set a timer and focus on slow, deep breathing for 1 minute.

▼ **Look after your mind.** While meditation may not sound like the most exciting activity, Deepak Chopra, Oprah Winfrey, Kristen Bell, Clint Eastwood, and many other celebrities, CEOs and pro athletes practice daily meditation and praise its benefits.

▼ **Take a personal day or two to relax and unwind.** Or better yet, plan a full vacation (AND a personal day). This may feel impossible upon first reading this guide. But if you're following every step in the guide, and making the necessary changes to your operations, this will become a possibility!

Start small tip:

Check out a short meditation video on YouTube and give it your full attention. We love this **5 minute meditation video with John Davisi**.

Fun fact: samurai, in their training as elite warriors, studied poetry, calligraphy, painting, and meditation along with their physical training for combat. Having a singular focus is not necessarily the best way to achieve goals.

The Bottom Line

You may have felt overwhelmed and in "survival mode" for a long time with your business, but **you can make changes**, eliminate business-owner overwhelm, and move your business, and life, in the direction you want to go. Don't be discouraged by this long list of tips; take one step at a time! If your workspace is so cluttered you don't know where to start, pick up one item, figure out where it needs to be, put it there, then pick up the next item and repeat. If you think you're too busy to train others to take over tasks you handle, pick a single task to begin with and train your designated employee on that one task. When you take projects one small step at a time, they are less daunting!

We're certain you can stop running your business in overwhelm-mode and run your business with greater clarity, efficiency, and even enjoyment! You've got this.

> **"Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can."**
> **-Arthur Ashe**

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