



The Sticky Challenge

Identifying Dollar-Productive Activities In Your Business

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The Sticky Challenge: Identifying Dollar-Productive Activities In Your Business

By Daniel Ramsey

Let's do a simple but effective exercise to determine how you and your employees are spending your time.

There are 3,600 seconds in an hour, and 28,800 seconds in a full eight-hour workday. As Robert has pointed out, wealthy people become so because they understand *leverage*. The practice you are about to undertake will determine the leverage you have within your company and/or your day-to-day activities. If you were to go to a doctor and say, "Hey, doctor. I'm not feeling well," the doctor's first step would be to find a diagnosis. This exercise is a kind of diagnostic tool for your business; it will help you evaluate what you and your team, however large or small it is, are focused on. It will help you break down what your day looks like and will enable you to see where you can buy back some time. We call this "time freedom": the temporal space you need to strategize and think.

Many of our clients are surprised when they see the results of this exercise. Using leverage correctly is a tricky skill and some people never master it. A common stumbling block is that there are tasks that you want done in a particular way—what you think of as the *right way*. However, this mindset is dangerous because there isn't enough time in the day to truly have a hand in everything. The key is to do only the tasks that will impact your business goals.

We call this exercise The Sticky Challenge. It is easy to undertake; you and/or your company can use this tool to do a full leverage inventory in just one week. The concept is simple: You will record every single one of your actions on a separate sticky note throughout the day. You might write, "I made a phone call to a client," "I grabbed some food," or "I had a sales meeting." At the end of the investigation period, you will sit down and categorize your activities into three different areas:

1. Dollar-productive activities
2. Non-dollar-productive activities
3. Legacy vs. non-legacy activities

| \$ PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES | NON \$ PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES | |
|--|---|----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Networking Events > Sales Presentations > Negotiating with Clients & Vendors > Prospecting for new clients > Work Your Referral Network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Building out a Talent Mgmt. System > Building a Referral Program > Building out CRM > Creating Standard & Procedures | LEGACY NON-LEGACY |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Meeting Prep > Administrative Tasks > Payroll > Running and Monitoring the Legacy Programs | |

The concept of what is dollar productive is fairly obvious. Legacy vs. non-legacy might strike you as a subtler distinction. A legacy task is anything that gives you leverage inside your business; setting up of a legacy task like building out a CRM or a referral program is the ultimate gift because it creates time freedom. Non-legacy tasks are more routine with a short-lived impact.

Codie’s Sticky Challenge Experience



My good friend Codie, whom we have a coaching relationship with, came to a point in her business when she wanted a new road to travel down. She was putting in up to 80-hour weeks every week (when we did an analysis together, the average was 77). Although her business was doing well, she was exhausted. I suggested that Codie begin with seeing if she could earn some time freedom by doing The Sticky Challenge and I explained the concept to her. She said, “Okay, Daniel, you’re a little crazy, but I’ll see what happens.”

Codie accepted the challenge, and what a revelation she had! She couldn’t believe how much of her day was spent on non-dollar-productive and non-legacy activities. “Holy moly,” she said. “I’m not sure what I should be learning from this, but now I can see my whole days laid out clearly and plainly in front of me.” This was what one of her daily sticky arrays would look like:

With the information we gathered from The Sticky Challenge, we were able to give Codie some clarity around what she should change. Codie's next step was to find out whom she needed to hire so she could spend closer to 80% of her time scaling her business. She subsequently hired several people, so she could stop doing the more low-level sales. We also needed to restructure her team and reorganize their responsibilities. Though she would have to spend some money and time in the hiring process, we knew (from experience) that she would see a quick enough increase in sales and profits to make it more than worthwhile.

Wise Effort

In today's business world, we like to think that our strategies are all fresh and new, but the truth is many illustrious historical figures performed the same kind of time analysis like the The Sticky Challenge. Founding Father Thomas Jefferson's daily calendar, for example, is fascinating. He had affirmations in the morning, had time for thinking, journaled, and organized tasks in a "what I need to do to succeed" list. Success for Jefferson was not just getting a lot of things done, and it shouldn't be for you either. Success is crossing the finish line of a business outcome you are striving for, or buying more time back, or making more of an impact on the world. You will find that putting a leverage framework around your day is massively empowering.

The Sticky Challenge was actually the brain child of a client of ours, Lisa Archer. Lisa runs twelve offices across the country and isn't able to spend a lot of time with her direct reports, since she isn't sitting in an office with them most of the time. She came up with this method to help everyone realize what they are up to in order to give them opportunities to see how they can provide maximum value. It was so effective that we adopted it too.

To those around me, I seem like a natural at finding the best possible use of my time, but I wasn't always that way. Luckily, my grandma was a good model for me. Once I asked her if she could bring me along with her on a job one day, so I could see how she made money. I was nine, so she wasn't keen on bringing me, but she indulged me. I was curious but clueless and she chose to enlighten me. There were worse things I could be doing.

When we arrived at the first client's house, she gave me a broom and told me to clean the garage. Then she left to clean the inside. I looked around and I saw what I deemed a disaster: sawdust, oil, boxes, spiders, and bicycle parts. The concrete was cracked and there was even something funky on the walls. I knew I would have to wipe those walls down. So, I did what I thought I should. I started in one five-by-five corner and over the course of an hour, I cleaned it perfectly.

When Grandma came back, she said, "What are you doing?" "I'm cleaning the garage like you said," I answered. A resigned sigh escaped her. She grabbed a broom, and in less than five minutes, she swept the entire garage, went and got the trashcan and threw it on the ground and swept all the debris in. She ripped up all the boxes and shoved everything she could into that trash can and set it by the curb. Then she looked up and said, "What have you been doing for the last hour?"

Grandma was the first person to teach me all about what my wife calls “wise effort.” We all need a plan around managing our days at work, and until you stop to analyze what you are doing, you will never be able to make one. What The Sticky Challenge does is gets you out of the corner of the garage and looking at the big picture, spiders and all.

Drill Down to Just Your Unique Skillset

As you do this challenge, think about how your daily activities relate to what your superpowers are. Ask yourself, “What am I uniquely skilled at doing?” Ideally, your organization will include people with a variety of talents and you will be mostly doing what you are best at. There are a lot of business books on the market these days about how finding your unique talents and homing in on them is a practice that garners success. You should take them seriously. If you have the right systems within your business, you can work toward spending 70 or 80% of your time doing the things that only you are uniquely skilled to do—everything else gets leveraged away.

Every business needs a talent management system that once inputted, creates predictable results. It might include a sales system, a marketing system, a human resources system, or even a system for ordering snacks and coffee within a business. Once all these systems are in place, they give you leverage. One of the reasons everyone loves Amazon is because there is leverage in the Amazon system. When you buy on Amazon, you don't have to go to a store. You don't have to spend much time on the site, and you don't even have to get out your credit card. You click one button and the thing you want shows up the next day. That is a highly effective system. If you create highly effective systems in your business, you too are as likely to succeed at a higher level than your competitors because such systems enable growth.

Creating a system inside your business is a legacy task: It is non-dollar-productive in the short term but is beneficial in terms of future potential. You may want to hire someone to do this piece for you. Your reservation will likely be that you can't afford to hire someone to do these things because you aren't making the revenue to pay them. The flip side of that is that if you start spending more time focusing on your dollar-productive activities, you will produce those dollars! It can be a difficult mental leap to make, especially for those in the early and middle stages of the roadmap. I know many people—business veterans—who have chosen to start businesses without ever doing any of the legacy or non-legacy tasks. These are people who already understand leverage and the concept of staying within your strength zone. They are happy to delegate that entire side of the business. There is no one pattern that fits all businesses but having an awareness of what categories your activities fall in, within the context of your talent areas, will breed success.

Many people can't let go of the non-dollar-productive side of their business because they are stuck in the “I want it done my way” mindset. After you complete The Sticky Challenge, I guarantee that won't be you. Instead, you will be taking the first step toward becoming laser-focused on what will make your business grow.

Scale Accelerator:

Take your previous year's federal tax filings, look at your Adjusted Gross Income, and divide that by 52. Then divide that by your average hourly workweek. This number represents the baseline hourly rate of financial value you create for yourself.

$$\frac{\text{Adjusted Gross Income}}{52} = \frac{\text{Weekly Income}}{\text{Weekly Hours Worked}} = \text{Hourly Rate}$$

Devote a week (or several weeks) to The Sticky Challenge, making an inventory of your activities and charting them into the categories above. This will give you a clear picture of what you are putting your energy and talents into. Review your hourly rate and then reflect on whom you can hire to give you the time freedom that you need to scale.

Scale Framework:

VirtualProfessionals.com/Sticky will take you to a downloadable quick guide to The Sticky Challenge. Use it as an easy way to discover your companies leverage framework.

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