

Welcome to the

Take Action Now System™

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Stepping Into Big, LLC



The Take Action Now System™

Big ideas are often overwhelming both in number and in scope, so you need a way to make them more manageable. The process for doing so is straightforward:

1. Identify the right things to do.
2. Do them.

Ah, if only it were that simple!

The reality is that, in this Age of Information, you're bombarded with possibilities for building your business. Decision making feels more complex than ever, and time seems to be in ever shorter supply.

Enter the Take Action Now System™.

This deceptively simple, five-step system will both energize and calm you, since it provides a reliable framework for dealing with the myriad activities you "could" do to grow your business. Rather than continue to overwhelm yourself with "coulds", you'll start to confidently say NO to activities that don't serve you and YES to ones that propel you forward.

You'll Take Action with the following steps:

1. Clear the decks.
2. Decide how to decide.
3. Separate the wheat from the chaff.
4. Make sure your business wheel runs smoothly.
5. Chunk down, down, down...

So let's get started.

The Take Action Now System™ Step 1:

Clear the Decks

One of the biggest obstacles to productivity and success is clutter, both mental and physical. If you're a typical small-business owner, chances are excellent that you have piles of paper, random sticky notes, and a large collection of unused business resources (also known as "shelfware") scattered around your office. How can you possibly be productive and successful in the midst of all those things clamoring for your attention? The obvious answer is, You can't.

So how do you go about getting a handle on all those things you "mean to get around to"? The answer is to do a brain dump by getting all of those swirling thoughts/options/ideas/To Do's **out** of your head and **onto** paper.

If you've never done one of these before, be prepared. I can pretty much guarantee you'll have one of two reactions, and possibly both of them simultaneously:

- "Oh, good grief, I'll never get all that done!" and...
- "What was I thinking??"

To do your first successful and effective brain dump, here's what you'll need:

- a notebook to write in, preferably one that's small enough for you to carry with you (if you're a big fan of tablet computers, you can certainly make your list on your tablet)
- a complete lack of judgment (for right now) about whether you think any given activity is important enough to be put on the list
- an awareness of tasks that you've been putting off, saying "*I've got to get around to that*"
- a timer that you can set for 10 - 15 minutes

That's all it takes to start clearing the decks. Here's how it will work:

- set your timer and commit to staying tightly focused on this brain dump until the timer goes off
- create two separate brain dump pages: one for business activities and one for personal (because you know and I know that an entrepreneur's professional and personal lives are closely intertwined)

- look around your office for ideas or To Do items you've listed on sticky notes or random pieces of paper; add these to your brain dump page and *throw away the original papers*
- as you scan your work space, take note of any time you see something that makes your shoulders hunch and say to yourself, "I've *got* to handle that!", then add that item to your list
- remember that no activity is too small to include; if it's been buzzing around in your head, it goes on the list



So...How'd it go?

Was it straightforward because you've already got a way to capture all your great ideas so you can decide when to implement each? Because you're able to quickly and decisively say which activities deserve your attention and which don't? I think you deserve a huge pat on the back!

Or did you get part of the way through and feel you just weren't pulling it together? Did you get *all* the way through and *know* you'd never get done what truly needs doing? Then just give me a call at 319-270-1214 (U.S.) for a free-of-charge, 20-minute laser call to answer your questions. I promise I won't go for the jugular or try to "close" you in any way.

The Take Action Now System™ Step 2:

Decide How to Decide

While your business has certain features in common with every other small business, it also has unique characteristics. Your next step is to develop decision-making criteria that will allow you to quickly and confidently say “yes” to activities that will powerfully propel you toward **your** goals and “no” to activities that won’t.

It doesn’t really matter what’s crucial for anyone else, even people like your networking-group colleagues or your Mastermind buddies; what’s important is what **your** business needs right now. That means that your decision-making criteria need to make it easy for you to know what activities are truly important and which are simply nice ideas that don’t deserve your time—right now.

So, to decide how to decide where to invest your precious time, ask yourself:

- What do I need *right now* to take me to the next stage in my business? What is the main thing I want my activities to accomplish?
- *In what way* will this activity going to move me toward my goals? (**Note: This is *not* the same thing as figuring out *how to do* the task.**)
- Is this particular activity going to pay off in the short term or the long term? If I’m looking at a long-term pay-off, can I afford to spend time on this activity right now?
- Am I the best person to do this job? Do I have the necessary skills to do it efficiently and effectively?

Once you’ve answered these questions, write out the answers and post them in a place where you’ll see them every day. These are the decision criteria that will make it far easier to remove unhelpful items from your To Do list.



So...How’d it go?

Did this help you clearly articulate your current, effective decision-making strategy? Are you loving the way this has helped you realize that you're one of those relatively rare entrepreneurs who's *proactive* rather than *reactive*? Be sure to spend some time basking in your accomplishment!

Or was it easier to just read the questions than to come with answers to them? Perhaps there's some frustration brewing because you ended up with questions *about* the questions? Maybe it's time for that jugular-safe 20-minute laser call...

The Take Action Now System™ Step 3:

Separate the Wheat From the Chaff

Okay, so I'm a city girl and have never, to my knowledge, actually seen chaff. Not a problem; the key point here is that some stuff is important (the "wheat" activities that strongly support your business) and some is not (the business "chaff" that is useless as far as business growth is concerned). Not all activities have equal priority – nor should they. In fact, each of the million and one tasks facing you on any given day can be put into one of three categories:

- activities that are *essential* to your success; a friend of mine calls these "mission critical"
- activities that are important, but not make-or-break for your business
- activities that are simply nice ideas or are fun to do; these tend to be more fluff than substance

I've found a distressingly easy way to identify the mission-critical tasks facing me: If it makes my stomach clench because it's big and scary, it probably is *really* important for me to do.

Often times, these mission-critical tasks are what Stephen Covey referred to as "Quadrant II activities". While there's no sense of *urgency* about accomplishing them, they're truly *important*, because failure to complete them will have a significant negative impact on your business, just as accomplishing them will have a major positive impact.

Here's where life gets really exciting and energizing. You cleared your mental (and physical) decks in Step 1, then identified relevant decision criteria in Step 2. Now, in Step 3, you'll apply those criteria to each item on your brain-dump list and designate each activity on there as mission critical, important, or a nice idea.

Go back to your list and prioritize each activity on it. You can do this with a simple A-B-C rating scale, by highlighting the various priorities in different colors, or with any other system that suits you. By the time you're done, you'll breathe a sigh of relief knowing that, of all the activities you *could* do, you've clearly identified those that you *need* to do to achieve your goals.

Now is the time to be ruthlessly honest with yourself. If you're like most of us, you have a tendency to view most (if not all) of the items on your Too Much To Do list as "A" priorities. Not true! There are seriously vital activities that will make or break you, and then there's everything else. It's essential that you get clear on which is which.

You're already very experienced at figuring out which activities simply *must* get done to achieve a particular goal, and which can be left by the wayside. If you've ever had to get the house clean before guests arrive or get kids ready for school before the bus pulls up, you know just how adept you are at identifying exactly which are the "gotta-get-'em-done" tasks. Now it's just a matter of applying that expertise to making decisions about your business activities.

Have you ever looked at your Too Much To Do list at the end of the day and realized that almost nothing got checked off? How do you feel when you simply move all today's undone tasks over to tomorrow's list? And how can you effectively grow your business when you're weighed down by all the things you've *failed to accomplish*?

The goal of Step 3 is not to give yourself permission to weasel out of doing the work. It's about empowering—even mandating—yourself to do *only* what is truly going to propel you toward your goals.

Not only will this clear focus improve your bottom line, but it will probably improve your emotional and physical health, too. Think of how you feel when you're faced with a Too Much To Do list that only has one or two items checked off – and those items were nothing more than busy work. Does "frustrated, anxious, and overwhelmed" ring any bells? Now imagine how energized yet calm, powerful and excited you'll feel knowing that you clearly identified the **three most important activities** to be done today and *did them*.



So...How'd it go?

Are you confident that you're already clear on your do-or-die activities? Are you actually feeling kind of smug because your clarity about—and commitment to—those scary-but-important tasks gives you results that are the envy of your peers? High five!

Or do you realize that you truly *do* have the To Do List From Hell, and that every single item on it still feels like still an “A” priority? Do you feel that list sucking the very life out of you? If so, I have just three words for you: “laser coaching call.” (Okay, and maybe a few extra words: “with no sneaky attempt to ‘close’ you.”)

The Take Action Now System™ Step 4:

Make Sure Your Business Wheel Rolls Smoothly

Chances are you've experienced the "revenue roller-coaster" for yourself:

- You market yourself like crazy and...
- you bring in a bunch of new clients and...
- you finish working with them and realize...
- you don't have any in the pipeline because you haven't been promoting yourself, so...
- you start marketing like crazy...

Stop the madness!!

Wouldn't you like to settle your stomach (and smooth out your cash flow) by getting off the roller-coaster? You can, to a large extent, if you become **conscious, strategic, and intentional** about the activities you take on. A simple yet powerful way to do that is to evaluate possible tasks in terms of working **on** your business as well as working **in** it.

When you actually deliver your service, you're working *in* your business.

Whether you're a private chef, an accountant, or a trainer, your clients pay you for your expertise and for your ability to solve their problems. When you're wearing your problem-solving-expert hat, you're working in your business.

The problem for so many entrepreneurs is that they spend *too much* of their time doing this.

"But how is that possible?," you may ask. "Aren't revenue-generating activities our friends?"

Yes, they definitely are—and those same activities need to be supported by business-development activities to ensure your long-term success.

When you're doing business development, you're working *on* your business.

Your business won't grow itself. It's up to you to take well-thought-out, purposeful steps to build your client base, menu of products and services, and revenues. It will help to break down the oversized concept of "business development" into four smaller, more manageable categories, which I call The 4 P's.

- prospects
- presence in the marketplace
- products and services
- professional and personal-management skills

Think of your business as a wheel with five spokes. A profitable, smoothly running business requires actually doing the work people pay you for (the Delivery spoke) *and* laying the groundwork to *get* paid in the future (the 4 P's of Business Development spokes).

Since you've already got the technical expertise to work *in* your business, let's talk about how you can more effectively work *on* it.

The first P: develop your Prospects.

One of your most important business development tasks is to create a pool of ideal prospects for yourself, then develop ways to move them through your sales funnel so that they become paying clients who are delighted with your work.

To maximize your payoff from this activity, you'll want to get crystal-clear about the following questions.

- Who is your ideal client? What makes them ideal? Address both demographics and psychographics.
- Where do they hang out, both online and offline? The idea is to go fishing where the fish already are.
- What do your prospects want that they're not getting anywhere else? In fancier terms, what does a gap analysis reveal about their unmet needs?
- What's important to your prospects? This is often trickier to determine than it sounds, because what *you think* is important may or may not be what truly *is* important to them.

The second P: develop your Presence in the marketplace.

You can have the most innovative and effective product or service imaginable, but if nobody knows it's available, it will never do anyone—including you—any good.

As you map out your strategy to get the word out about what you have to offer, consider the following:

- What is your Unique Selling Proposition? Be aware that, while a major part of your USP is *what you do* for clients, it's also important to distinguish yourself from your competition by addressing *how you do it*. And more important than either of those is sharing *how your services make life better for your clients*.
- Having identified where your ideal clients hang out (see The First P), how will you make yourself known there? Be specific! Don't just say "social media;" decide whether Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, or any other medium is right for you. Don't just say "speaking engagements;" determine what groups attract your ideal clients and get in front of them.
- How can you build your reputation as an expert in your field? (Remember: You *don't* have to know *everything* in order to legitimately claim expert status.)

The third P: develop your Products/services.

It's tempting to keep developing new goodies to offer your clients. After all, you're probably like most entrepreneurs in that you're very creative. The challenge here is to balance the lure of the new and different with fully capitalizing on the excellent offerings in your current line-up.

As you consider expanding those offerings, answering the following questions will help you make solid decisions.

- As you review the gap analysis you did for The First P, what possible additions to your menu does it suggest?
- Have you been keeping a list of services that past and present clients have requested? If so, where does that point you? If not, when will you start this "Do you offer...?" list?
- If your current focus is on services (e.g., coaching or consulting), how can you package that area of expertise into products you can sell?
- If your current focus is on products, how can you provide that information as a service, e.g., through training or speaking?
- Thinking back to the areas of expertise you identified as part of your USP, where can you teach those skills? Many talented entrepreneurs have secured positions as continuing-education instructors or adjunct faculty members at a local college. Don't ignore your local Small Business Development Center, either; they pay their consultants.
- Once you've finished working with a client, what other, more in-depth services or products can you offer them to keep them building on the success you've already helped them achieve?

The fourth P: develop your Professional and Personal-management skills.

This is, for me, one of the most intriguing spokes of the business wheel. Although I occasionally run into entrepreneurs who fail to address this crucial aspect of business development, it's far more common to encounter those that are so intent on learning more that they allow themselves to be overwhelmed by all the learning opportunities out there. They also get so busy *learning* that they never get around to *applying* what they've learned. Ouch.

As you map out the best use of your professional and personal development time, use the following questions to guide you into good decisions:

- Can you clearly identify *how* spending time on a particular activity will move you closer to your goals? As a lifetime learning junkie, I can say from painful personal experience that "Wow! Isn't that *interesting!*" is **not**, in and of itself, a valid reason to spend time or money on a workshop, seminar, or "how to" product.
- Is a potential development activity intended to further hone an existing strength or shore up a weakness? More and more studies indicate that true success comes from improving what you're already good at and addressing weaknesses only enough to ensure that they don't sabotage your strengths. Put another way, you want to follow the advice of golf great Tiger Woods' coach: practice your weaknesses just to *adequacy*.
- Just how much do you truly need to know about this particular topic? Remember that you don't have to be an expert in everything. However, you *do* want to know enough about key factors that influence your business so that you're able to speak intelligently to those issues—and to the people that you delegate to address those issues.



So...How'd it go?

Are you doing a happy dance because you're so pleased at how you combine working *on* your business with working *in* it? Are you feeling more clear, in control of your results...*sane*? Time to add chocolate to the celebration!

Or are your business bones getting shaken apart because your business wheel jerks and lurches, making what little progress you *do* experience come in fits and starts? Are you getting a sense that you're used to riding the revenue roller coaster because your business development skills lag behind your technical expertise? I wonder what a 20-minute laser call with no hidden "closes" could do to smooth things out...

The Take Action Now System™ Step 5:

Chunk Down, Down, Down...

Newton's First Law of Motion is at least as important to entrepreneurs as it is to scientists:

An object at rest remains at rest [and] an object in motion remains in motion...unless acted upon by a force.

Talk about a double-edged sword. If you're caught in overwhelm to the point where you're paralyzed, that total lack of motion tends to create lots more of the same. In other words, inactivity breeds more inactivity in an increasingly dangerous downward spiral. You'll stay stuck until you're "acted upon by a force" — whether that force is the fear of not being able to make your mortgage payment or the ruthlessly compassionate nudges that come from someone you've chosen to hold you accountable.

On the other hand, if you stay in motion by *implementing strategically chosen activities* to grow your business, it's fairly easy to maintain that forward motion. In this case, what you want to guard against is any sort of "force" which would slow or even halt your forward motion: laziness, complacency, an unwillingness to move outside your comfort zone...

One of my favorite examples of this principle is the freight train. If you've ever sat at a railroad crossing while a train came to a full stop, you can practically *feel* the tremendous effort it takes to get that enormous mass back in motion. But once the train is moving again, better stay out of its way.

Similarly, the sooner *you* start moving — **even in small steps** — the easier it is to keep moving. The trick is to get started, and this brings to mind an old joke:

How do you eat an elephant?

One bite at a time.

While this may be corny enough to make you groan, it's still excellent advice when you're faced with the BIG (and often scary) steps that will build your business. One of

the best sanity-saving, procrastination-avoiding techniques out there is to break an overwhelmingly large task into tiny action steps. Each step, in and of itself, may not look like much, but all these baby steps, taken together, move you relentlessly toward completion of the overall task.

As you plot how to break big jobs into smaller, more actionable chunks, consider the following.

- § Review the mission-critical activities you identified in Step 3 (Separate the Wheat From the Chaff). Which of these make you feel like there's a huge weight on your shoulders? That heavy feeling is a good clue that you need to chunk down.

- § When you consider tackling a task, do you get overwhelmed by the sheer number of pieces involved in completing it? If so, take that as an opportunity to start chunking down and identifying baby action steps. (A mind map can be an excellent tool here.)

- § Are you judging yourself harshly because the steps you're mapping out seem wimpy and too small? *Stop it!!* The whole idea of this process is to get you in motion. There's no such thing as an unimportant baby step *if* taking that step will keep you moving forward.

- § Are you guilty of start-and-stop activity? If so, you'll dramatically increase your productivity, steady progress, and confidence when you move through the small action steps of which all big tasks are built.



So...How'd it go?

Did this step strike you as a big “*Duh!*” because you instinctively use this technique to make your work (and life) easy and efficient? If so, woohoo for you!

Or did those big, important, as-yet-undone tasks simply sneer at your best efforts at chunking? Since you know I never try to “close” anyone on the first date, do you think it’s time to take advantage of the resource available to you and schedule your 20-minute call?

The Take Action Now System™:

The Bottom Line

And there you have it: the five-step Take Action Now System™.

As you work your way through the system and start enjoying the benefits of your increased productivity, please know that I'd love to feature your success story in my weekly ezine. Now is not the time for undue modesty! Let me and hundreds of my readers celebrate your success with you.

On the other hand, you may decide after working through this—and maybe even after your one free-of-charge laser brainstorming/problem-solving session—that you're looking for additional support and accountability to make your goals a reality. If that's the case, just e-mail (Kathleen@SteppingIntoBig.com) or call me (319-270-1214). We'll set up a different kind of a no-charge, 20-minute call—one that doesn't commit nobody to nothin' but that *will* make it clear whether or not we could do fabulous work together.

Best wishes. . .



Kathleen