

Are You Working On it or In it?

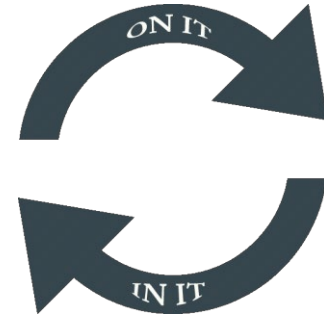
By Paul Donehue, President **Paul Charles & Associates**

The most important business decisions we make each day are what we choose to work on and how we choose to accomplish that work, says Conway Management Company, continuous process improvement specialists.

We couldn't agree more!

For example, many of us—including small business owners, professional service providers, sales managers, and sales professionals—consistently struggle with the never-ending challenge of simultaneously juggling three critically-important components of our work:

- Managing our business, practice, team, or territory
- Finding and developing new business opportunities
- Delivering solutions



In other words, we are constantly challenged to make time for working both “in” our business and “on” our business.

Working *in our business* means doing the day-to-day work that generates income.

This generally includes attending to operational and shorter-term tasks, addressing urgent matters or executing tactical components of strategic plans. Service providers provide services to clients... managers review performance data... salespeople make sales calls... bakers bake... and so on. It can be difficult to keep-up with these demands, and if we're not careful we might find ourselves focused only on the daily grind or responding to whatever is urgent—some refer to this as "firefighting!"

In contrast, *working on our business* involves planning and managing the work.

This might involve creating an annualized business development plan, developing our team, fine-tuning systems, budgeting, or engaging in personal development. Service providers create twelve-month marketing plans... managers develop strategic growth plans... sales people craft territory management or account management plans... bakers create operating budgets... and so on. This type of work is foundational, and if we fail to allocate a sufficient amount of attention to it we might quickly find ourselves spinning our wheels instead of making headway.

In a *Small Business Trends* article, the late John Wyckoff, author of “*Mind Your Own Business*” outlined some of the changes a business owner or leader might make if they started to work more on the business rather than just in it.

“First, he or she would not be the first one in and the last one out... wouldn't necessarily come in [to the office or store] every day... would be circulating in the community making contacts with other owners of small businesses [or practices] exchanging ideas. He or she would seek out organizations made up of businesspeople in the community, and would be joining associations... once a member, the owner / leader would be attending regular meetings to become an integral part of the community.



“They would be expanding their circle of associates or their professional network and would be spending “think time” contemplating the future and how to use all that knowledge bottled up inside but not exercised because of day-to-day pressures.”

Of course, there are different types of enterprises, and each will demand a different mix of working “in” and “on” the business. As explained in an *Inc. Magazine* feature by PH.D. Jay Ebben, “A useful way to look at the evolution of your role in your business [the degree to which you must work “in” it versus “on” it] is through a framework developed at the University of Wisconsin in the late 70s... they observed that small firms generally fall into one of three organization types: Craft, Promotion, and Administration.”

The text box further defines these organizational types. However, as stated by author and CEO Adrian Pinkewich, “It’s easy to talk about working on your business rather than in it... a lot easier than actually doing it!”

Here are a few ideas that might help you find better ways of working both “on” and “in” your business, as suggested by Pinkewich and others:

Allocate time specifically to work on your business. Whenever possible, include others in this activity, which might enable you to maintain accountability to the process.

Systematize your work processes, as many experts believe a business will only be as good as its systems. Certainly, this approach will promote consistency, and organizations of all types and sizes run better when systems are in place.

Invest in the business to keep it evolving and growing. This will require ongoing education, a strategic plan, and people, either on a full-time or contract basis. It might also require some financial sacrifice in the short-term but is almost always worth it in the long-term.

Seek and evaluate advice. Even advisors need advisors, and we all need a sounding-board from time to time. Whether you have access to an advisory board or to advice through peer relationships in professional or trade organizations, it’s important to develop a steady source of fresh ideas and different perspectives.

Did You Know?

Different business “types” require different leadership styles. Three of the most common classifications and the corresponding management styles are:

Craft Firms, which are typically started by a person that is skilled at a certain craft; the business depends on that individual being personally involved in creating a product or providing services to customers. Owners of craft firms can make nice livings doing something they love to do, usually with moderate growth. The owner tends to work more *in the business* rather than on it.

Promotion Firms, which are generally known for high growth centered on a product or service with a competitive advantage. These firms are usually started by the stereotypical entrepreneur who has started other businesses and who has high growth goals and vision; possibly “the person good at starting a business but not the best person to run the business.”

To be successful as other firms enter the market, these companies need to become administrative, which many times requires the entrepreneur to hire professional management and take a lesser role.

Administration Firms, which are characterized by professional management that spends its time *working on the business*. These leaders spend their time planning and budgeting rather than being directly involved in the day-to-day activities. These companies will likely have formal procedures, processes, and job descriptions, and will focus on product and process improvement, and growth.

