

# Don't be overwhelmed by 'overwhelm'

A textbook definition of 'overwhelm' is "To bury or to drown beneath a huge mass of something." As a business coach, I have a somewhat different definition.

Here's my definition of 'overwhelm': When we are in a state of overwhelm, we have a sense of being ill-equipped to deal with the demands that are placed on us. In other words, we feel like there is too much to deal with right now.

Does this all sound far too familiar for you? Overwhelm is a major cause of stress, anxiety and depression in our society, and let's face it – it just isn't that much fun.

## Being a business owner

A long time ago, when I still had my building company, there was one feeling I experienced more than anything on a day-to-day basis, and that feeling was overwhelm.

There were so many different business development priorities jostling for



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attention in my brain that I simply didn't know which one to focus on. On a daily basis, there would be financial management, marketing, customers, systemisation, planning, quality assurance, sales, staff, contractor issues, etc, etc.

Some days this sense of overwhelm became so great that I would become quite paralysed and waste the whole day surfing the web (remember, this was more

than 10 years ago, before Facebook came along to make life even more distracting). Other times, especially when I was still actively 'on the tools,' I would spend days doing stuff I could have delegated to the labourers on my team, instead of wielding the shovel and hammer myself.

Overwhelm stymied the development of my business and I know that if I'd managed to find a way to manage myself better, the business would have developed further and sooner.

## The paradox of choice

It is a well-established fact that too much choice leads to overwhelm and decision paralysis. Here is a quote by Professor **Barry Schwartz** from a 2009 TED talk called 'The paradox of choice':

"A colleague of mine got access to investment records from a gigantic mutual fund company of about a million employees and about 2,000 different workplaces. And what she found is that for every 10 mutual funds the employer offered, the rate of participation went down 2%. You offer 50 funds and 10% fewer employees participate than if you only offer five. Why? Because with 50 funds to choose from, it's so damn hard to decide which fund to choose that you'll just put it off until tomorrow."



*This is the reality of being a business owner: more stuff to do than you can poke a stick at, all of it really important, but most of it out of your comfort zone.*

### 100 shades of white

I'm sure we've all experienced how much harder it is to decide on the new paint colour for our living room when the average paint store has a choice of 100 or more different shades of white alone.

As business owners, we are not unique in experiencing overwhelm, stress and anxiety, but there are some aspects to running a business that are unique:

- We simply do not have the resources in time and money to be able to address all the business development priorities

that are vying for our attention. They will always have to be culled ruthlessly.

- Generally we don't feel equipped enough to be able to decide what to cull.
- Even if we did know what to cull, most of the pressing issues relate to aspects of the business that are well outside our specific skill set (the skill set that is the foundation on which we started the business: farming, cheesemaking, retailing, engineering, marketing, carpentry, cooking, etc.)

### About the author

Roland Hanekroot is a business coach and the founder of New Perspectives Business Coaching. He is also the author of the acclaimed *The Ten Truths for Business Owners* series of books. Roland runs a monthly webinar called 'The Small Business Masterminds', on the 10 key aspects of business that every business owner that ever was faces when developing and growing their businesses. The first seminar is free (normally \$99). Book on [smallbusinessmasterminds.com.au](http://smallbusinessmasterminds.com.au)



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*Laziness has nothing to do with procrastination. It has to do with a lack of clarity about what is most important to do next, and how to do it.*

This is the reality of being a business owner: more stuff to do than you can poke a stick at, all of it really important, but most of it out of your comfort zone.

### Procrastination

No wonder we procrastinate. My clients will often tell me that they are the world's worst procrastinators and that they are lazier than anyone they've ever met.

But laziness has nothing to do with it. More often than not, procrastination and time wasting comes from a lack of clarity about what the most important thing to do next is, and feeling insecure that we would know how to do it, if we did know what it was.

Besides procrastination, the other default response we have to this sense of overwhelm is to pick up our trusted hammer (scale rule, cook's knife or widget machine) and do some more hammering instead.

Does any of this sound familiar to you?

Do you spend more time than you should 'hammering' and not enough time addressing the business development issues? And when you do put down the hammer, do you find yourself procrastinating and not getting as much done as you think you should?

Trust me, most of us do, all the time.

### The way out

So what is the way out? Given that I don't believe in easy answers and one-size-fits-all solutions, let me give you a five-step recipe to put on the stove and experiment with. It should start to take the sting out of this challenge for you:

**Step 1:** Stop beating yourself up. You are not the world's laziest business owner. (I am... obviously). Seriously, start by accepting that the challenge you have in this area is really common, we all face it every day. It's normal.

**Step 2:** Write down your major business development priorities at a high level (marketing, cashflow, etc.)

**Step 3:** Ask yourself this question: If there was one priority I could do something with today that would move my business forward one single step, what priority would that be? Lock in the first answer that comes to mind. Trust your gut feeling.

**Step 4:** Ask yourself a second question: What specific action(s) can I take today in relation to that business development priority that will make a real difference in my business?

**Step 5:** Block out a specific time in your diary today to carry out those specific actions.

### The experiment

What makes this recipe such a nice one to experiment with is this:

- There are a few skills you have mastered. Beating yourself up is one of those. You don't need to practice it anymore, it wastes precious creative energy and time, and makes you feel like crap.
- Actually forcing yourself to make a choice between all the different priorities is challenging, but your gut feeling (the unconscious) will know the answer and you can trust it.
- Breaking the major priority area down into small, specific actions for which you can block out a specific time in your diary can make it a lot easier to cut through the overwhelm and help you focus.

Get yourself into a habit to go through this process every day (and remember, habits take 28 days of consecutive practice to cement), and your business and your life will never be the same again. ■

