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# Do Less

Years ago, when I was starting my first company, I believed in two things: “Survival is Success” and “Take the best project you can get, but take a project.” I figured that if I was always busy and I managed to avoid wiping out, sooner or later everything would work out. *continued* ▶



by Seth Godin



Most organizations, from tiny to huge, operate from the same perspective. As you add employees, there's pressure to keep everyone occupied, to be busy. Of course, once you're busy, there's a tremendous need to hire even more people, which continues the cycle.

If your goal is to be big, there's no doubt that taking every gig you can makes sense. Pricing for the masses, building the biggest factory and running as fast as you can is the very best way to get big. And if big equals successful, you're done. Many of us have realized, though, that big doesn't equal successful.

If success (for you) is a decent (or indecent) wage plus the time to do really good work and enjoy both your job and your family, then perhaps you're trying too hard and doing too much. Perhaps you need to be a lot pickier in what you do and for who you do it.

A real estate developer I just met told me that he does one new investment a year. It's not unusual for his competition to do ten or a hundred deals in the same period of time. What Dan told me, though, really resonated. "In any given year, we look at a thousand deals. One hundred of them are pretty good. One is great." By only doing the great deals, Dan is able to make far more money than he would if he did them all. He can cherry pick because his goal isn't volume.

Or consider the architect who designs just a few major buildings a year. Obviously he has to dig deep to do work of a high enough quality to earn these commissions. But by not cluttering his life and his reputation with a string of low-budget boring projects, he actually increases his chances of getting great projects in the future.

How many newly-minted college grads take the first job that's "good enough?" A good enough job gets you busy right away, but it also puts you on a path to a lifetime of good enough jobs. Investing (not spending, investing) a month or a year in high profile internships could change your career forever.

### **TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR CLIENT LIST.**

What would happen if you fired half of your clients? If you fired the customers who pay late, give you a hard time, have you work on low-leverage projects and are rarely the source of positive recommendations, would your business improve? Even in our dicey economy, it's pretty easy to answer that one with a 'yes.'

### **WHAT IF YOU FIRED HALF YOUR WORKFORCE?**

Give the very best people a 50% raise and help the rest find a job in which they can really thrive. Unless you make a commodity like oil or billiard balls, it's not clear that selling more and more to an ever larger audience is the best way to reach the success you seek. When your overhead plummets, the pressure to take on the wrong jobs with the wrong staff disappears. You're free to pick the projects that make you happy.

**PROJECTS.**

A funny word to have used thirty years ago, but one that makes complete sense today. Thirty years ago, we were still fine-tuning our factories. Thirty years ago, everything was part of the assembly line. Today, though, we're in the project business. Just about all of us work on projects, and the one thing we give very little thought to is which projects should we do?

“If I was **always busy** and I managed to **avoid** wiping out, sooner or later **everything** would **work out**.”

When I was a kid, the buffets in town proclaimed, “all you can eat!” Now they say, “all you care to eat.” There's a big difference. You only get to eat dinner once, and most of us are smart enough not to eat more just because it's free. So, as you head through the line, the question you need to ask yourself is, “would I rather eat this...or that?” You can't have everything.

Same thing's true with our business life. We can't have everything. We've tried and it doesn't work. What we've discovered, though, is that leaving off that last business project not only makes our profits go up, it also can dramatically improve the rest of our life.

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## READ THE BOOK

Seth Godin's *Free Prize Inside: The Next Big Marketing Idea* is out in bookstores now. For more information on this and his other books, [click here](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seth Godin is a bestselling author, entrepreneur and agent of change. In *Free Prize Inside*, his follow up to the best selling marketing book of 2003, *Purple Cow*, Seth helps you make your product remarkable with soft innovations. You need to make each of your employees idea champions so they can find the Free Prize.

Godin is author of six books that have been bestsellers around the world and changed the way people think about marketing, change and work. Seth is a renowned speaker as well. He was recently chosen as one of 21 Speakers for the Next Century by *Successful Meetings* and is consistently rated among the very best speakers by the audiences he addresses. He holds an MBA from Stanford and was called "the Ultimate Entrepreneur for the Information Age" by *BusinessWeek*.

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
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