

The High ROI of Learning: Why You Must Force Strategic Time for Growth

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As small business owners, we often measure success by the speed at which we complete the daily to-do list. Yet, the relentless cycle of urgent tasks prevents us from tackling the biggest strategic problems. The truth is, you will never truly find time to step back, learn, and improve.

Instead, you must force yourself to make time. This strategic pause, when done consistently, is the secret weapon of successful entrepreneurs. It's based on the principle of compounding: small efforts, consistently applied, lead to exponential returns. For many small businesses, the return on investment (ROI) from a strategic hour of learning is often ten times higher than just knocking out another urgent task.

Learning is a long-term investment that adds high-value tools to your management toolkit. Here is a ridiculously simple approach to building a learning cadence that applies new knowledge directly to your business's bottom line, ensuring you are constantly steering your ship toward better results.

1. Practical Application: The Consistent Practice

The goal isn't just to learn; it's to apply that knowledge consistently to your business. Consistent review ensures you are constantly steering your ship toward better results. Make time for these two non-negotiable sessions:

- **Weekly Deep Dive (30–60 Minutes):** Dedicate an hour weekly to look at short-term drivers in your business. This means pulling up reports and taking notes on key operational areas like current **cash position, sales activity**, and people management status.
- **Monthly Financial Review (60–120 Minutes):** Once a month, force yourself to zoom out. Spend time reflecting on what happened financially and strategically over the past 30 days. This is your opportunity to truly steer the ship based on facts.

2. Technical Training: The Strategic Investment

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- **Quarterly New Skill Commitment:** Every four to six months, commit to learning something new and measurable. This could be reading a key article, watching a specific training video, or taking an online class on a business topic.

- **Take Notes and Tinker:** The ultimate goal of learning is **practical application**. When you absorb new information, take notes and immediately look for ways to bring those learnings back to your monthly review sessions. Tinker with your existing reports or try looking at new metrics to see if they give you fresh insights into your business's performance.

Key Questions to Ask

To ensure your learning time is high-ROI, consider these questions:

- Which single metric, if improved, would have the most significant impact on our profitability?
- How do my key financial ratios compare to available industry benchmarks?
- What processes do best-in-class companies use that we could adapt for our own business?

Staying Current with Trends

- **Benchmarking for Talent:** In today's competitive labor market, benchmarking employee-related metrics, such as compensation and turnover rates, against industry norms is vital to attracting and retaining top talent.
- **Consistent Foundation:** As a business grows, the informal approach that works for a solo entrepreneur quickly becomes a source of confusion. A clear employee handbook provides the structure necessary to manage your team with fairness and consistency.

By implementing this consistent cycle of measurement, analysis, and improvement, you empower yourself to make proactive, informed decisions that drive sustainable growth. Your brain just needs that strategic break to absorb and apply new information.