

# Mission Ready

Volume 3, Issue 1

January 1, 2001

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## New Year's Resolution - Bury the 7-Day Workweek

We all know the small business owner who works seven days a week – maybe some of our readers are such people. Others of you may not believe such workaholics actually exist. Let us assure you, they do. They're in every neighborhood; some of your own friends may be closet workaholics. Well, we're happy to tell you there's hope for this most unfortunate affliction. And affliction it is – it's one of the single greatest impediments to business growth. So, let's talk about your friends and ours.

We usually meet two types of workaholics (the writers do not suggest any clinical use of the term workaholic). Some work regular hours and take tons of work home with them, working late into the night. These are the closet workaholics – their neighbors see them come and go at regular hours, and have no idea that when everyone else is watching Leno or Lettermen these people are busy with the office problems they've taken home. The second type of workaholic isn't ashamed of the long hours and doesn't hide anything from neighbors, friends or family. He or she works every day of the week, breaking only when the family threatens to leave him or her.

As different as these two types may seem to most observers, the same forces cause their behavior. We'll talk about a few of the most obvious reasons for overwork and then offer a solution. Some find their businesses marginally profitable and declare an inability to hire the required assistants. Others lack confidence in their own ability to train others who could actually relieve their work burden. Some have had a revolving door of assistants and have grown weary of training new people. And, we've all met the perfectionist – only he or she can do the work well enough.

Because this column, our book and the keynote speeches the writers present all use the lessons we learned in the US Marine Corps we believe the Marines' use of small or baby steps in leadership training offers a practical solution to the current problem. During a new Marines' initial training at boot camp he or she is given greater and more challenging opportunities to learn and

practice leadership. The first leadership learning opportunity may merely be leading one other Marine in raking lifeless sand. The next, more challenging opportunity, may be leading three other Marines in marching drills. At the end of boot camp, with progressively more difficult leadership challenges met, a new more confident person emerges. It's quite the same overcoming unhealthy work habits. It's probably impractical to get the workaholic to work less, cold turkey.

We believe using the Marines' baby steps a proach to leadership works as well with slashing the workweek. Let's tackle the marginally profitable business first. The business may be small yet may also employ several people. The owner just can't see his or her way clear to hire someone to relieve his or her own work burden. The solution is to look at the small picture instead of the big picture. Perhaps you can't hire a fulltime office manager; but you can afford someone to work a very limited schedule to open the mail, sort the bills, and run the inevitable errands. The key is to start this person off with only a few specific duties and be flexible with this employee's schedule. As the financial health of the business develops you can start to think about a larger staff or more hours for the person you already hired.

For the workaholics with non-financial excuses for extreme work schedules they too must take it one step at a time. They must be reminded that for the business to live beyond them, it must have some practice living without them now. They must overcome their fears and bring new people in to share their work burden. And, as the new employees are taking away some of the load they must begin to work less themselves. But again, they don't have to do it all at once. Just getting in the habit of taking a few extra hours off will lead to them gaining more confidence in the staff and eventually working less themselves.

And, of course, you must not use the lighter workload to find more work for yourself. You must take the new free time to have a little fun.