



This is a guest post by Bradford Bucknum, Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia's senior associate of communications, and appears here through a partnership with SBN. ✕

There is a good chance you've found yourself — willingly or unwillingly — engaged in the hackneyed contest called [“The Busy Game.”](#)

You know it: The game where you keep telling people how busy you are without really looking for support. The game that involves a lot of complaining and little action. We should all agree to stop playing this game.

Of course, business owners — all of us, really — need safe harbors where people they trust can make space for them to share the victories and challenges of running their own business.

But this constant one-uppance, vacillation of grievances and growing pile of gripes about the demands of one's schedule too often does not serve as an invitation for friends and colleagues to truly support each other well, share best practices and at the very least, help each other sweep clear their mental landscape making room for the next round of challenges.

This

“Too often we don't ask ourselves, How can I make my job easier?”

very unfun game does more to reinforce the cliché of the small business owner burning the candle at both ends than it does to support the possibility of a healthy work-life balance for entrepreneurs.

“Too often we don’t ask ourselves, How can I make my job easier?” said Kate Strathmann, the “chief disruptor,” director and CEO at Philly consulting company [Elysian Fields \(http://elysianfieldsphila.com/\)](http://elysianfieldsphila.com/). “Business owners feel that we need to be working all the time and staying up until one in the morning answering emails to be successful rather than reverse engineering the process and asking what can be changed.”

Elysian Fields has worked with some of the most exciting and innovative businesses in the region, including Primal Supply Meats, Philly Style Bagels, [Little Baby’s Ice Cream \(http://generocity.org/philly/2017/04/06/little-babys-ice-cream-elysian-fields-grant/\)](http://generocity.org/philly/2017/04/06/little-babys-ice-cream-elysian-fields-grant/), Solar States and Klip Collective. She also moderated the [Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia’s](http://directory.sbnphiladelphia.org/business/elysian-fields-llc) (SBN) most recent **Best Practice Forum** about [navigating the pains of a growing business](http://directory.sbnphiladelphia.org/business/elysian-fields-llc). (Elysian Fields is an SBN member (<http://directory.sbnphiladelphia.org/business/elysian-fields-llc>.)

She spends her time helping business owners unpack their own experience and discover the right questions to ask.

“I don’t tell anyone how to run their business,” Strathmann said. “I listen deeply and then ask questions about how they can align their business model with their values. I give them a lens to view their experience and then help them identify bottlenecks that most businesses will encounter.”

It will come as no surprise to hear that many fledgling business owners have to learn how to create a healthy work-life balance. Of course, no one is saying that running your own business is easy, but Strathmann is actively rethinking the cliché of the burnt-out business owner. Here are five ways she’s discovered by starting her own business and supporting others to rework this mindset.

1. Celebrate time off

“I don’t apologize for taking time off,” Strathmann said. Vacation is a tool that aids business owners to refocus and return to their work with fresh eyes.

She adds vacation days to the calendar far in advance. She also recommends that workers who are less likely to take time off — even if they have unlimited PTO like Elysian Fields employees — to schedule their personal time in advance, put it on their calendars and perhaps even buy a ticket somewhere so the decision to rest, recuperate and return as a healthy, productive worker is made for them.

2. Let your business take care of you

“Don’t be a helicopter parent to your business,” Strathmann said. Just like a parent, you have to learn to distinguish when your business truly requires you to lose sleep

and when you need to step back and trust that your business can glide with less oversight.

3. Carve out time for unconventional tasks

Once a week, on Monday morning, Strathmann attends a three-hour figure drawing class at **Fleischer Arts Memorial**. As the creative visionary for the company, she carves out this time and protects it. She isn't preparing for an art show; she's using this to tap into and spur on her creative side.

"This feels like an insane practice to not be working on a Monday morning," Strathmann said. So, she registers in advance so she can't back out. For her, this so-called unproductive time is a non-negotiable for her to be able to continue to be the creative force for her company.

4. Make your life easier

Sometimes the most sustainable and meaningful action is the path of least resistance; martyrs don't get bonus points. Strathmann recommends that business owners have a clear idea of their priorities and are not afraid to take a step back and ask, "What would be easy?" She also emphasizes that meaningful actions must come from a foundation of a business's priorities.

5. Be comfortable with uncertainty

"One of the most important things for a successful business owner to do is to admit when you don't know things," Strathmann said. Find the right community of people who can make space for you to admit what you don't know and where you

can find support.



Bradford Bucknum is the senior associate of communications for the Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia, a community of local, independent businesses that demonstrates the degree to which businesses can build profitable enterprises while serving community needs and protecting the environment. He received his MFA from Temple University and writes and performs with the rock band Oldermost. His lyric essays can be found at Entropy and Funhouse.

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