JUST ONE MORE THING...

Making space for better decisions is the real challenge for many businesses today

One of the things I've noticed more and more in conversations with business owners is that it's rarely a lack of ideas that holds a business back. Most of the time, there's plenty of direction, plenty of awareness of what could be improved, and no shortage of things people could be doing differently. The real challenge is something less obvious: whether there's any space left to actually think those things through properly.

When I spend time with business leaders, our conversations almost always begin in familiar territory. We talk about growth, recruitment, marketing, cash flow or operational pressures. All of them are completely valid, all of them very real and all of them part of the reality of running a business. There is always another decision to make, another problem to solve or another opportunity demanding attention. It's simply the nature of leading a business, and for many owners that relentless pace becomes so familiar that it is accepted as normal.

Natalie Rich

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As those conversations develop, however, something deeper often begins to emerge. It isn't usually that people don't understand their business. If anything, the opposite is true. Most leaders are deeply connected to the detail. They know their customers, understand their markets and often have a good instinct for what needs to change. The difficulty is that knowing something and having the headspace to act on it are two very different things.

Business leaders make hundreds of decisions every week. Some are significant, many are relatively small, but almost all of them require attention. Over time, that constant decision-making creates a mental load that is easy to underestimate because it gradually becomes part of everyday life. The immediate naturally takes precedence over the important, and without noticing it, people become conditioned to dealing with whatever is directly in front of them.

Perhaps that's why certain phrases come up so often. 'We just need to get through this period'. 'We'll come back to that when things settle'. 'Now isn't quite the right time'. They are perfectly understandable, but they also reflect the belief that there will eventually be a point when the pressure eases. In reality, business rarely works like that. One priority is simply replaced by another, and the space people have been waiting for never quite arrives.

The result is that important decisions are rarely ignored, they are simply delayed. Not because people lack commitment or clarity, but because there is never quite enough time to give those decisions the attention they deserve. Gradually, businesses can become more reactive than intentional, with decisions shaped by the demands of the day rather than by the longer-term direction the owner wants to create.

That is why I have come to believe that one of the most valuable disciplines a business owner can develop is protecting time to think. Not because thinking is an alternative to action, but because it improves the quality of the action that follows. Creating space away from the noise of day-to-day decisions allows people to look at their business as a whole, recognise patterns, challenge assumptions and reconnect with the priorities that matter most.

The challenges themselves rarely disappear, but perspective has a way of changing them. Decisions that once felt complicated become clearer because they are seen in context rather than isolation, and priorities begin to separate themselves naturally from distractions.

Perhaps that is the real value of thinking time. It is not about generating more ideas, because most business owners already have plenty of those. It is about creating enough space to make better sense of the ideas that already exist. In the end, businesses rarely struggle because they run out of ideas. More often, they struggle because nobody has had the time to think clearly enough about the ones they already have.

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