



## **Masters of Time... part 1**

*Mark Rendell, independent trainer and project manager, reflects on the finer points of self employment and how it forces you to develop an assertive and mature relationship to time...*

Speaking personally, self employment impacts on every aspect of life, both professional and personal. It's not for everyone as there is an increased sense of vulnerability in earning a reasonable income and it demands a broader range of skills to deliver effectively and consistently.

What I have found though is that greater freedom to organise the activities in my life, to maximise the range of choices available to me and to articulate my values and ethics in the work I love to do is ranged against the significant impacts on my time, ability to 'switch off' from work and to manage my capacity effectively.

Being self employed has also pitted me against my deeply held patterns and strategies towards life that have come up for re-evaluation through doing my work. There's no hiding the fact that self employment has been the perfect vehicle for me to grapple with issues of self esteem and value (reflected in the way I charge for my work), assertiveness (standing my ground, seeking a 'win-win', being comfortable in the 'foothills of conflict') and time management. It's this third area that I want to tease out more fully in this article.

On deeper reflection, I think there are three factors at play in my relationship to time. Each of them is teaching me important lessons on the rocky road to becoming a 'Master of Time', but as you'll see below, I have identified a number of skills that still need to be developed before I get there.

### **1. Work / Life Balance**

It's relatively easy to let 'work' you love doing dominate all areas of life, because, quite simply, most of the time, it doesn't feel like 'work'. Another trap is to think that there simply isn't enough work to go round and that it would be foolish to turn it down. This is a state of mind (rather than any provable reality) – even in a recession, in my experience.

Time management emerges as a critical skill to maintain good work / life balance, (and the quality of any 'downtime'), to remain efficient in the work I deliver, and to build a reputation for consistent and reliable delivery. When you are fortunate enough to align your innate skills and talents to what you deliver in the world, then it's easy to feel guilty for charging what seems to come reasonably naturally.

*So, on reflection, here are some additional skills I need to develop: continuing to hone my idiosyncratic diary and schedule management. Valuing what I do enough to charge appropriately. Overcoming the fear that to turn down work may result in no income / or a lost opportunity. Delegation, sharing workload.*

## **2. Centrality of Work**

“*I am what I do*” is a simple mantra but holds a trap – what happens when someone doesn’t like what you do? The criticism, constructive or otherwise, goes deeper because there are fewer filters between what you do and who you perceive yourself to be.

This knockback can be exaggerated when you work for yourself and don’t hold your work at ‘arms-length’. And if the balancing viewpoints and support are slow to arrive you can end up giving the ‘inner critic’ free rein to trounce any vestiges of self confidence you had. If this then turns the experience into a ‘shameful’ one then the danger is that you withhold sharing the experience with others and deny some positive reframing and resolve to address it!

*In this particular example, here are some skills I need to further develop: an attitude that views criticism positively, actively seeks feedback (to desensitise feelings of rejection or unworthiness around this), stronger peer support, clear feedback and complaints procedures.*

## **3. Eager To Please**

Some of the sought-after attributes of an employee (self-employed or otherwise) are attentiveness skills and a ‘can-do’ attitude. These soft skills are key to building a positive reputation and for creating good rapport, trust and a sense of confidence in the ability to perform.

One of the traps in demonstrating these attributes is the temptation to say “yes” to a request before considering the full implications of what is being asked (possibly to avoid disappointing the client or assuming that a “no” will offend). This leads to the trap of over-promising and potentially under-delivering.

Out of sight of the client, this leads to serious impacts on (unplanned) time in delivering extra work or preparation; stress and lack of confidence and the increased risk that you will bring about the very outcomes you sought to avoid – disappointment and offence on the part of the client.

*In this example, I need work on the following skills: assertive skills that develop an ability to say “Yes, and not now...” or, simply “No, thank you.”. Addressing the “Good Boy Syndrome” – wanting to be liked / to please at the expense of my own needs or feelings. This is a big issue and may require support to reflect on its origins.*

In summary, these past 10 years of self employment have been a time of immense personal growth. I have been able to understand the true nature of self-confidence – rather like a bicycle tyre that needs to be checked regularly (particularly during bumpy terrain) and pumped up where necessary. Self esteem, too, is absolutely pivotal to the way that I attach value to my work and charge appropriately for my services. But above all, there is daily, wakeful, gratitude. I am so fortunate to be in a position to align my skills with a need ‘out there’ and be rewarded well for it.

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