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## Even Steve Jobs Knew When to Let Go of Tasks — Now It's Your Turn

Holding tight to the belief you can manage it all? Expect a whirlwind of diminishing returns.



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Think about Apple's success. What picture comes to mind? How about Steve Jobs and his iconic black turtleneck? Although Jobs became the face of the company, he didn't

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singlehandedly catapult it to fame. Instead, he started as the marketing machine, enabling partners like co-founder Steve Wozniak to take on other, crucial roles.

Such is the case in the majority of success stories. And this concept was reinforced in Silicon Valley: The Untold Story, a three-part documentary studying Silicon Valley's top entrepreneurs that aired on the Science Channel in March. The film not only featured the real-life trials and tribulations of well-known figures on their way to the top, but showcased how important collaboration is in "making it."

If only all innovators would heed that rule.

In fact, too many founders think they have to do everything themselves. Ironically, they know that going this route is a problem; they just don't know how to change course. A full 37 percent of survey respondents for a CoFounder and ArcticStartup study said that finding the right personnel was the biggest hurdle of startup life.

As a result, instead of asking for help, leaders take on a perfectionist rhythm, as they attempt to balance the bulk of their company's responsibilities on their shoulders alone. They trudge along a steep learning curve, trying to navigate new landscapes -- including the struggle to manage the few employees they've cautiously brought into the fold.

And that causes problems: As Jan Lehman, president of [CTC Productivity](#), explained to me, training team members is especially troublesome for entrepreneurs who can't let go. "Many entrepreneurs are not innately skilled to do this or excited about the opportunity," she said. "To do this right, you need to know how to train or coach someone. You need to look at the overall communication. You need to know how to spot the right tasks to be delegated."

Certainly, managing employees is tough. But it's important to start giving away tasks before they break an entrepreneur's spirit, will and bank account.

Still holding tight? Expect a whirlwind of diminishing returns.

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At the outset, entrepreneurs can get away with doing everything themselves. However, the longer the business stays afloat, the more negative the effects become on the solo founder and his or her operation.

## **The negative outcomes from doing it "yourself"**

Certified professional organizer Ellen Delap has identified three specific outcomes in founders who forgo delegation. The most obvious, she told me, is constant stress. True, working in isolation might not sound terrible, but it breeds anxiety. After all, the expectations never cease; they only grow -- sometimes exponentially.

Without the ability to hand off assignments, leaders sentence themselves to a world in which everything depends on their ability to keep up physically and mentally.

Not surprisingly, this leads to Delap's second sign that she says tells entrepreneurs they need to reevaluate the load on their plates: burnout. Working 24/7 might be do-able and even exciting during the early years when the startup is still fresh, young and full of opportunity -- but it shouldn't be a forever experience. Otherwise, all the stressors and unmet responsibilities the entrepreneur has signed up for will lead to the third disastrous result: lowered revenue.

Even highly educated, intelligent entrepreneurs assume they can avoid these issues. But in shunning the true costs of being a lone wolf, they often miss the indicators that it's time to let go.

For instance, one leader can't possibly scale a company. As referrals come in, clients' needs must be met. With only 168 hours in a week, a single person can't fulfill every promise. At the same time, he or she might spend more time on projects than necessary due to a lack of skill. Why should any non-techie individual spend weeks designing a website? Yet it happens.

Eventually, procrastination takes hold. When Amy Tokos, owner of Freshly Organized, works with entrepreneurs, she told me, she looks for workflow gaps, such as missed task due dates. Once deadlines begin to slide, Tokos said,, the business goes into scramble mode. Not

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surprisingly, founders in this position end up facing a constant backlog that prevents them from strategizing.

## Three strategies for ditching the lone wolf mentality

The key to making it as an entrepreneur lies within and without. If you're prepared to tackle a new challenge that will ultimately leave you less frustrated and blessed with growing coffers, take the following strategies to heart:

### 1. Recognize your inherent abilities and acknowledge your gaps.

Every entrepreneur has strengths and weaknesses. Evaluate yours. Divide a piece of paper into four parts. Label one quadrant "I enjoy doing," another "I don't enjoy doing," another "I need to do" and the final quadrant "I don't need to do."

Fill in each square by evaluating your current responsibilities and determining which ones you're going to hold on to and which would be better for you to give away.

After finishing, you'll have a much clearer understanding of the path to freeing your calendar. From taking advantage of productivity tools for hiring contract workers, part-timers or full-time team members, you'll begin to clear up your to-do list. Delap also suggests establishing weekly and monthly reviews to stay on track and look for emerging areas for improvement.

### 2. Schedule office hours into your week.

Not getting tasks done? Having trouble focusing? Plan your days and weeks by committing yourself to office work. Setting aside time specifically for in-office work helps Tokos stay on track, and she advises others to do the same.

Ironically, you'll probably find that you have more time than before because you won't be trying to "fit in" important routine tasks here and there. By streamlining your week, you'll eliminate distractions and position yourself to concentrate on what's at hand. Rather than try

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to multitask every minute of the day, you can whip out great work quickly and then move on to other obligations.

### **3. Treat delegation as a friend.**

Lehman says she isn't just an advocate of delegating; she's also an avid practitioner. "If you are an amazing salesperson, you should hire resources to do all the administrative and transactional work so you have more time to sell," she told me. "The lower cost for resources will be recouped soon if you can sell and bring in more revenue."

Still hemming and hawing about putting faith in others? Circle back to the Jobs-Wozniak partnership. Apple couldn't have made headway had Jobs gone it alone. He needed Wozniak to continue working on the invention of the products themselves while he, Jobs, did what he did best -- marketing those products and inspiring a bevy of believers.

"No man is an island" might sound trite, but it's true. Unless you want to stay stagnant, you need a skilled team to breathe life into your vision. So, hire thoughtfully, and then allow your colleagues to work their magic.