

Managing a translation agency: The daily routine of an idler

Previously we wrote that in order to effectively manage a company, it is important to find the time to do managerial work. [As we have already ascertained](#), two key ways to increase the amount of free time is to delegate work to subordinates and automate repetitive and routine operations using the various available project and business management systems.

For CEOs who are accustomed to working all day long and fully devoting themselves to their business, suddenly having free time can often be disconcerting. Inaction makes them feel uncomfortable: how is that possible, everyone else is working hard, and the boss isn't doing anything! Such CEO wants to and can work, and doing nothing in front of subordinates can be awkward! But what should managers do if everything is going smoothly?

Managers have the instinctive desire to fill up their time with something. And often they opt to do some work assigned to their subordinates — personally taking on a translation project in the place of a project manager or creating invoices instead of the accountant.

This seems like the natural thing to do, but in practice CEOs who do this find that once again they are suffering from a chronic lack of time and are back on that same hamster wheel that took so much effort to get off in the first place. [By voluntarily doing such work](#) CEOs will not have any time to carry out managerial duties, and the need to manage often arises out of the blue.

You should not work for the sake of it, having barely dealt with your everyday jobs. If you think about it, [for a manager inactivity is the pinnacle of his or her managerial art](#). If you have managed to set up your agency so that it works smoothly and grows in your absence, congratulations, you have something to truly be proud of!

CEOs who are used to having insufficient time are usually disconcerted by this idea. To clarify, we draw an analogy.

Your office probably has a local computer network. Suppose that you need to hire a system administrator who will ensure that it works smoothly. You have two candidates to choose from: one is always in a hurry and is constantly busy dealing with technical issues, while the second correctly set up the network once so that it works smoothly, and then started to optimize it. Who would you prefer to hire?

The first one works more and is busy all the time, but is he or she effective? What is the point of doing such work, if he or she never has enough time to deal with even small problems?

[A great CEO can make a company grow without doing anything.](#)

But things don't quite work like that. Firstly, it is impossible to foresee all possible scenarios and automate these scenarios: you constantly need to be alert and work on improvements. Secondly, even if a translation agency operates without the involvement of CEO, this does not mean that it works efficiently and has reached its developmental peak.

As doctors joke, "there are no healthy people, only unexamined people." Perhaps the CEO simply is not seeing clearly, and misses new possible opportunities and obvious problems.

Not every manager who works well with a small team of five people is able to manage an agency with 50 employees. Not every manager of agency with a dozen project managers and 50 translators does a good job managing an MLV company with hundreds of employees.

If you ask yourself in what way your competitors are more effective, why they get more orders, where you can reduce costs without lowering the quality of translations, etc., you will quickly find that there are many ways your company can improve, although it's not always clear how to achieve these improvements.

Suppose you have a great team of translation project managers, translators, and editors — but who knows about this, except you? You have the opportunity to make improvements, promote the quality of your team to the market and boost the reputation of your agency.

Are sales going well, but you suffer from a low level of IT knowledge and a poor-performing translation project management department? In this case you could: master new technologies, send employees to refresher courses, hire an experienced techie who will deal with your technical problems and train up your staff.

In terms of sales and job quality, everything is fine, but you are having problems paying freelancers. ...You know what to do.

There are bound to be weaknesses in any business process, even the most advanced ones. Such weaknesses are ubiquitous. Top managers should not do the work of subordinates, but should instead focus on **identifying and dealing with weaknesses**.

It will be difficult to get used to at first, and will require awareness and willpower. And then it turns out that the management process takes all the time you have freed up — even when you are riding the subway or strolling around the park. Providing, of course, you take your managerial duties seriously, and do not dodge them by doing the work of your subordinates.

