

The Professional Skill of Selective Neglect

There are always tradeoffs in life. If you want your cake, you can't also continue to **have** a cake, for instance.

Tradeoffs are especially noticeable in the startup world, where cake is limited, but time and resources and people are especially so.

There are always fires burning and always more projects and improvements that need to happen than can happen. If you're already working startup hours (i.e. a lot, weekends or evenings not spared) and still not getting the capacity you need, there are about four options you have.

1. **Think about getting more staff.**
2. **Become more efficient yourself.**
3. **Automate/eliminate/solve the root cause of the work.**
4. **Ignore the problem.**

2 and 3 are great, 1 is sometimes a solution, and 4 reasonably disgusts any of us with real work ethic and self-responsibility.

The problem is that doing 2, 3, and 4 takes time, resources, and people. You're short on those, remember?

Option 4 has a place, believe it or not.

Good chess players know when to sacrifice certain pieces to get closer to a larger objective or gambit in the game. As a businessperson, you're going to have to make similar sacrifices if you want to make the changes that are really going to count.

So what are you going to let fall behind? This is the art of selective neglect.

Perhaps you let your email inbox fill up for a week so you can focus on finishing a product launch. Maybe you leave other projects languishing so you can focus on revamping your core offering. Maybe you delay or delete all meetings from your week so you can write your company mission and vision statements.

I know. It's painful. It's embarrassing. And of course it's not where you want to stay.

But if you can stand all of those things enough to use selective neglect when it really matters, you might still be around to fix the problems once crunch-time is over. Companies/people that try to solve everything at once? Probably not so much.