

Pay Attention to the Details

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In his 1997 bestseller *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff and It's All Small Stuff*, Richard Carlson helped readers get a perspective on life and what's really important. In somewhat juxtaposition to that line of thinking is that idea that we should always pay attention to the details. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell is quoted as saying, "Never neglect details. When everyone's mind is dulled or distracted the leader must be doubly vigilant." In business, the difference in success or failure can certainly be in the details. Small incorrect details in a computer code can cause major problems. A tiny irregularity in manufacturing can sometimes lead to disastrous results. Think about the last time you reviewed a resume with typos. What conclusions did you draw about that person? What about an employee who is habitually late or makes errors in customer service?

Todd Tauzin has become a very successful financial planner and business person by paying attention to the details. For the last two years, he has been one of the Top 20 agents in the country for The Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, Milwaukee, WI (out of 7,000 financial representatives). Financial advisory is a very competitive industry, and there are many good financial advisors in Mississippi, so I recently visited with Tauzin to learn more about how he achieved this level of business success. A native of Bossier City, Louisiana, Tauzin graduated from Northeast University in Monroe, and he took a job right out of college with Northwestern Mutual in Dallas, Texas. He moved his practice to Jackson in 1992, and has practiced with The Spinks Group (Northwestern Mutual office) since his move.

One of the first things that struck me about Tauzin's practice is the level of detail that he knows about his own business. He has been in the financial industry for over twenty two years, and for that whole time he has carefully tracked information about his business. As most time management consultants would tell us to do, Tauzin faithfully plans his time. According to Tauzin, "at the end of each day, I have my posting and planning time where I review and record what happened that day and plan for the next day." He also tracks such details such as appointments made, appointments kept, referrals, and client interviews. It takes tremendous discipline to keep these kinds of records over the long term, but there are obvious rewards. Twenty two years of tracking this data allows him to analyze trends and better prepare for the future. As Tauzin aptly noted, "it is hard to determine where you are going if you don't know where you have been."

Tauzin bring this emphasis on detail into his client service model. His team focuses on follow through and delivering on their promises – big or small. Tauzin described the lessons he learned as a waiter in college including the value of being on time, following through, and common courtesy. We tend to overcomplicate things sometimes, and it is a good reminder that the basics in life really do matter. Tauzin emphasized that it takes a team effort to execute on these details, and he has had a loyal staff for many years. He also emphasized that he has found encouragement from mentors over the years. He also has a conference call twice a month with several professional colleagues in the industry from around the country to "sharpen the saw" and to encourage one another. Tauzin also acknowledged that "we can all get discouraged sometimes in business." He recommends focusing on the "pull throughs" that help you get through the difficult times. These "pull throughs" are your unique motivators to propel you through adversity.

While I agree that we can stress ourselves out focusing on inconsequential things, I do think Tauzin's story helps see the value in focuses on the details that are truly important to our business and life. I can say that I wish I had the level of detail on my business that Tauzin has tracked over the years, but I am motivated to stop and better consider the details that really count and how to measure and improve on them.

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