

Personal Outsourcing For Personal Freedom

by Barbara Sanfilippo

Do you outsource extensively in your business, but adopt a "do-it-yourself" attitude at home? If so, you're missing one of the great sources of personal freedom, according to Barbara Sanfilippo, a TEC Speaker who has learned from experience how to apply this management technique to her life.

"When I say, 'personal outsourcing,' I mean beyond the cleaning lady, and here's why. First, today's entrepreneurs and executives are incredibly busy. Then, their spouses are extremely busy too. Everybody's stressed out, and then one says to the other: 'There's company coming over on Sunday. We have to get the patio cleaned, then we need to clean off the grill and go to Home Depot for parts, and the refrigerator's getting low.'"

Barbara Sanfilippo and her husband Bob Romano have found a way out of the madness with a "personal errands assistant." Weekdays, the couple runs a national consulting, training and educational company that works with organizations to enhance their sales and service culture. On weekends, they've taken the skills they use in business to create balance in their lives.

1. Finding Someone to Handle Home Errands and Chores

"I put an ad in the local paper and I get tons of people responding for a job that pays between \$7.50 and \$10 an hour. They don't want full-time work. They're happy with maybe three or four hours a week," she says. So "expense" can never be the excuse for why a personal assistant isn't easing your life. "It's ridiculously inexpensive," she explains.

Barbara and her husband hired Margaret, who has been working with them for the past six 6 years. Margaret is the third person to fill this role in their lives, and she is an ex-ATT supervisor who took early retirement.

"I recommend you advertise under the heading of Personal Errands Assistant, describing the duties briefly and the hours per month. Next, it's smart to interview people by phone asking: 'What experience qualifies you for this position? Why are you interested in this type of work?' and 'How flexible are your hours and availability?'," Barbara says.

"Don't forget to mention that you would eventually do a background check with the DMV [Division of Motor Vehicles,] you'd check credit and criminal records, and then ask 'Do you have any concern about that?' Some people admit they have filed for bankruptcy or have difficult credit problems. Generally, we recommend eliminating those with serious financial problems since they will be dealing with your money, credit cards and checks."

"We've found that people who are mature with grown children, semi-retired and just want to keep busy are the best candidates," says Barbara. "Parents with small children and busy students are stressed, not as reliable and typically won't last longer than six months."

After interviewing by phone, select your best candidate and suggest you try it out for a few times before making a mutual commitment to one another. If you decide to keep working together,

then it's time to do the background check.

2. Delegating Your 'To Do' List

Trips to Home Depot are a thing of the past for Barbara and Bob. So is going to the grocery store. So is returning purchases that have to be taken back to stores. Look at the things you think you have to do on a weekend. If someone else could handle these necessities just as well, or better than you, why aren't they?

The couple decided they could maximize their assistant's time in the grocery store by organizing their shopping list according to the lay-out of the store. To do so, Bob made one visit to the local supermarket, recorded the categories he found in the aisles and created a computerized grocery list based on the store's retail topography.

"All we have to do is check off what we need. She also goes for us to Starbucks, Home Depot, the dry cleaners, and handles our store returns," says Barbara. It usually takes about four hours to shop for us and put everything away. At \$8.00 an hour it's a real valuable investment."

3. After testing a personal assistant on routine tasks, become creative in the jobs you assign him or her.

"We started out using our assistant two to three times a month, and it came out to a cost of something like \$75 to \$100 a month to have our errands done. Think of all those hours we got back for ourselves," says Barbara.

Soon, they were looking for new ways to enlist Marge's services.

When the hand-held vacuum cleaner broke, they asked her to research whether they should buy a new one or take the malfunctioning one to be fixed. Several telephone calls and 20 minutes later, their personal assistant came back with the recommendation to buy a new one.

Then Barbara hit on the idea of having the errands assistant pay the family's bills. Now, she simply reviews the checks and signs them, secure in the knowledge that her assistant has already saved them money by occasionally finding errors on the bills where a company failed to credit the family's account properly.

"We keep thinking of these little things that make our lives so much easier," says Barbara.

4. See what tasks you can hire a local teenager to do for you.

There are some physical jobs--like cleaning out the garage, changing lightbulbs or repotting the plants--that Bob was holding onto.

Barbara's solution? Scour the neighborhood for teenagers who are happy to make \$5 or \$6 an hour to help Bob get out from under the onerous "have to's" of these chores.

"Now, our neighbor's 15-year-old does this stuff for us. The kid's thrilled, and we don't have the 'manly chore things' on our 'to-do' list anymore," she says.

5. Get over the guilt.

Spouses who don't work outside the home might feel guilty about enlisting paid help in either of these two categories.

"But when the businessman or woman of the family wants to take a Saturday or Sunday off to go play, and the spouse says, 'I can't because I've got all this other work to do,' there's a problem. The spouse becomes the impediment to balance in their lives. By using these assistants and helpers, you are working as a team so both people can take those recharge days--and you both need them."

Barbara Sanfilippo, CSP, CPAE is a [motivational speaker](#), author and consultant specializing in sales, service and motivation