

Are your hours too long? Take back your weekends

Just try saying yes to more rest to maintain peak productivity

BY ANNE FIELD

ENRIQUE RAMIREZ'S business is all about relaxation. Like most spas, Face to Face NYC aims to provide its beauty services in an atmosphere of pampered tranquility. But Mr. Ramirez is anything but stress-free. Since the economic downturn hit in 2008, he's worked around the clock, opening up on Sundays—when the Manhattan shop used to be closed—and staying open until 10 p.m. during the week. "I had no other choice," he says.

It's worked, to some extent. At \$375,000, his sales for 2009 were down about 10% from the year before, not anywhere as precipitous a decline as many other similar businesses experienced. But the effort has taken its toll. After Mr. Ramirez

suffered many sleepless nights and a spate of bad colds, his doctor advised that he cut back on his hours. Now, he goes in every other Sunday.

The drawbacks

FOR MANY SMALL BUSINESS owners in New York City, the economic downturn has meant a longer workweek, often extending into weekends and late into the night. But it comes at a cost. Overwork can contribute to lower productivity, depression, high blood pressure and even heart attacks, says Debra Condren, a Manhattan-based psychologist and business coach. "Overwork can have all sorts of nasty, toxic effects, both psychologically and physically," she says.

The answer, according to Dr. Condren and other small business experts, is to find ways to work smarter, so you can cut back your hours without hurting your livelihood—and recharge during your time off.

That's easier said than done, of course, given the high cost of doing business in New York and the fast pace of life. Some entrepreneurs are finding that better technology is

the answer. Take Susan White. In 2009, the president of White + Warren, a Manhattan-based apparel designer with \$10 million in revenues, faced the departure of two senior executives over a period of a year, as well as the recession. She started working 24/7. "I never stopped," she says.

Last fall, Ms. White spent about \$25,000 to switch the company from PCs to Macs, which helped her designers work more efficiently and freed some of the time she spent overseeing staff. Then, she started using Skype instead of e-mail to communicate with factories in India and Hong Kong, which reduced misunderstandings and sped up delivery time. Next, she bought an iPad, which improved everything from communication with her designers to researching competitors online. As a result, Ms. White has significantly reduced her hours.

Just as important, say experts, is finding ways to boost your ability to focus, even when you are stressed out.

"By increasing your attention level, you can get more done," says physician Matthew Edlund, author of *The Power of Rest* (HarperOne).



MORE RELAXATION: Spa owner Enrique Ramirez has cut down on his hours.

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His suggestions: Start the day with a walk outside to get some mood-enhancing sunlight, list your most important tasks when you get to work so you can attend to your No. 1 priority first, and give yourself at least one 10- to 20-minute period when you work without interruption.

Turning off the BlackBerry

IF YOU CAN FORCE YOURSELF to unplug from e-mail in your time off, that may help, too. When the economy went south, Doug Heddings, who runs Heddings Property, a boutique real estate company in Man-

hattan with \$750,000 in revenues, began working all the time, checking his BlackBerry at home and on weekends. Recently, however, he started turning off the gadget in the evenings and all day Saturdays, so he could enjoy time with his family.

It's reduced his stress level, while increasing his efficiency at work. "You can be much more productive when you're not running on a hamster wheel all the time," he says. ■

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