

# To Hell With Resolutions! What's on Your "Stop Doing" List?

By [Donna Fenn](#) | January 3, 2011

I'm a big fan of [management guru Jim Collins](#), who frequently tells audiences of CEOs that while "to do" lists are fine, the most important list any business owner can make is a "stop doing" list. "One key decision about what to stop doing might have as much impact as five new initiatives," Collins wrote several years ago on [his blog](#). Bad habits can delay or even sabotage your best-laid plans. So before you dive into your spanking new "to do" list for 2011, think hard about what you need to stop doing in order to clear the way for those new goals. I asked several business owners what was on their "stop doing" list. Here are a few thoughtful responses worth pondering:

- **Stop being a slave to email.** Hands down, email obsession was at the top of almost every CEO's "stop doing" list. Amy Harcourt, founder of [Definitive Marketing](#) in San Francisco, admits that "my habit is to check email as soon as my eyes open (on my iPhone) and then begin responding as soon as I've brushed my teeth." Her new 2011 routine: "Check email first thing, but only as a form of triage. Respond only to those items that are urgent and important. Close email for the next two hours and immediately dig into most important project of the day."
- **Stop compromising on pricing.** "Our goal for 2011 is to raise our heads up, and put our collective foot down and just say no to low fees," says Kim Marshall, CEO of [The Marshall Plan](#), a communications company in Venice, CA. "The recession saw clients literally cutting our fees up to 80% and we also accepted clients who were too small and inexperienced," she says. "We did it to keep the lights on and we made it through the storm. Now we're stronger, wiser and not gonna take it anymore. In 2011 we're targeting Fortune 500 companies and asking for the fees we deserve and walking away from anything less."
- **Stop going to meetings every day.** Serial entrepreneur Ooshma Garg, the founder of [Gobble](#), an online marketplace for homemade food, says she's declaring a moratorium on Wednesday meetings. "A few larger companies have adopted this exact strategy or some form of it," she says. "I think it's a smart strategy that start-ups should employ as well. All too often, I hear founders regret that they don't have enough time to dive into the deep strategic work sessions needed to materially improve and advance their companies. Having a full workday dedicated to this important practice for company success simply makes me giddy."
- **Stop poor communication with clients.** [Robyn Arouty](#), a Houston-based photographer who specializes in people and their pets, is resolving to lay it all on the line for her clients before the shoot. "I need to make sure they have the price list for *everything* I offer," she says. "I had been giving away digital files for free up until recently because I never realized that not having it listed on the price list meant that I had to do all these favors. I also used to be able to get back to people with their online gallery within 24 hours of the shoot, but those days are history. Now it's minimum one week and I make sure to tell them that before they leave the shoot. That way they're not hounding me every day and keeping me from doing my job."
- **Stop trying to be all things to all customers.** Kristy Short, CEO of [SAS Communications 360](#) in Ypsilanti, MI, started her public relations and marketing firm two years ago with a specialty in tax and

accounting, fields in which she had a 10-year expertise. “To keep revenues coming in, I quickly abandoned a defined business model to take on any client from any industry that walked through the door,” she says. “This was a huge mistake. It took my focus away from building my business within a defined and lucrative niche. Instead, I scurried to learn new industries and spent countless hours getting past the dreaded learning curve. This year I go back to my original plan. By continuing to expand my expertise within the tax and accounting niche, I accelerate my value to clients, meaning I can bill based on value, not hours.”

- **Stop being a control freak.** Eric Bahn, founder of [Beat The GMAT](#), a community for MBA applicants, has resolved to start outsourcing some key functions of his business. “My team and I have gone through an exercise of deconstructing our current work into granular tasks,” he says. “And we’ve begun to outsource elements of our work by hiring three developers, a designer, and an editor/marketer. If I can successfully get myself and my team to let go of our work, it’s going to hopefully free up our time to do more fun things to grow our business.”
- **Stop saying yes to everything.** Rob Basso, president of [Advantage Payroll Services](#), admits that “I’ve always been the yes person. Whether it was a speaking engagement, lunch, business meeting, phone call — for some reason I find it rude to say no. However, in 2011 I want to be more strategic about my time management. I pride myself on being the go-to, can-do guy,” said Basso. “I want to focus that attitude by being able to say no in the New Year if it makes sense to do so and allows me to better service my clients and grow my business.”
- **Stop getting distracted by the small stuff.** “I am going to avoid all of the little distractions that occur during the business day and squash productivity by constantly checking my email with my various electronic devices,” says Nick Friedman, president of [College Hunks Hauling Junk](#). Friedman says that in 2011, he’ll check email once per day, which will allow him to focus on his most important task: “I will spend at least four hours per day on sales-related activities,” he says. “That’s the only way our business can grow. And as the business owner, I need to lead the focus on growth.”

What about you? What’s on your “stop doing” list for 2011.