

# Small business owners need to put themselves first: ASBFEO

## **BUSINESS**

*The single-minded focus on the “daily quest to keep the doors open” is impacting the mental wellbeing of owners, says Ombudsman.*

By [Josh Needs](#) • 13 January 2023 • 6 minute read

After a Treasury survey found one in five is diagnosed with problems, the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman (ASBFEO) says small business owners must put themselves first when it comes to mental health.

Bruce Billson outlined five techniques to help small business owners manage the daily stress of keeping the doors open, including:

- Structuring their day — Mr Billson said proactively scheduling time for important tasks would help set clear goals and objectives to achieve in a day as well as key boundaries for much needed breaks.
- Self-care — he said to implement a personal wellbeing plan to stay healthy through getting enough sleep as well as water and maintaining a healthy diet, while also incorporating time to exercise, unplug from business and connect with family or relax by pursuing other interests.
- Not trying to do everything — prioritising what matters most, cutting unnecessary tasks, and delegating where possible was key according to Mr Billson, along with the ability to say no so as to not overcommit.
- Focus — he said to focus on what can be controlled, such as objectives that can be ticked off the to-do list and milestones reached, and to also remember the reason and joy that drove the business motivation initially.
- Support — small business owners should join business organisations or industry associations to build support groups of peers who can understand, share with, and discuss daily challenges that owners face, said Mr Billson.

“When you own a small business, it is just as important to spend time working *on* your business as it is to spend time working *in* your business,” he said.

“Too often the daily quest to keep the doors open and manage the many immediate demands prevents time being spent thinking about the health, future and goals of your business, and for that matter your own health.”

“That’s why it is vital those running or managing a small business look after their mental and financial well-being [*sic*], sometimes it can be as simple as making time to pause, reflect and reconnect.”

Mr Billson urged small and family business owners to reach out to the free support services provided by small business experts and called on policymakers to understand that under pressure small businesses do not have the same resources as their larger counterparts.

“A small business isn’t a shrink-wrapped version of a big one,” he said.

“They don’t have a slightly small HR department, there isn’t a smaller team of compliance people running around.”

“No one got into business for the ‘back end’ of running the business. It’s unrelenting obligations and duties, and typically it is one person doing everything after-hours.”

The Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA) agreed and called for governments to better understand the impact changes can have on small businesses struggling to keep up.

“When governments make changes to the legislation, they need to more acutely consider how these changes will be implemented — and by whom, and when,” COSBOA said.

“Humanising the face of small business is vital to prevent further ill health, we seek all sections of government to understand the real impacts of recent and proposed changes.”

“Enhanced consideration, care and direct consultation needs to occur, so the real impacts are understood — for human lives, family cohesion, and the mental wellbeing of thousands of people are at the receiving end of government changes.”

Mr Billson said while many small business owners ended 2022 exhausted, they should also be reinvigorated by the key role they play in the economy.

“We should not forget just how vital small and family businesses are. After the global financial crisis, the bulk of new job growth was driven by small businesses and the same can be true now,” he said.

“Small business leaders are innovators, producing new ways of delighting customers and new ways of creating wealth and opportunity.”

“They should have the wind in their sails, not the wind in their face.”