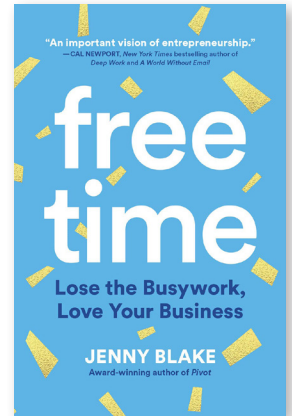


Free Time

Lose the Busywork, Love Your Business

by **Jenny Blake**



Contents

Heart-Based Business

Page 2

Free Time Framework

Page 2

Part 1: Align

Page 2

Part 2: Design

Page 4

Part 3: Assign

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

As business owners, we've all been there. You have a long list of must-do items but you find yourself stressed, avoiding, and distracted. You are not quite at burnout but you are getting there, and quick. During these times, the strong temptation is to just throw in the towel and pivot into something else entirely. Entrepreneur and author of *Free Time: Lose the Busywork, Love Your Business*, Jenny Blake calls this state “burn-it-all-down mode and whenever it strikes, it is a signal communicating that you are not working sustainably. If you don't do something about it, sooner or later it's going to catch up with you. The good news is that “something” could be your next big business breakthrough.

Free Time is not about working as little as possible. It's about applying a framework that creates a business that energizes every person who is involved, from you as the owner to your “Delightfully Tiny Team” and the wider community you serve. It's about designing and running a “Heart-Based Business” that does not require you to sacrifice your time or your health. By “repeatedly applying the principles and systems throughout this book” you will be able to happily, and strategically, work less.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to apply the Free Time Framework to your Heart-Based Business
- Why and how to align your values, energy, and strengths to your work
- How to design work for ideal outcomes, impact, and optimal process
- Who, What, and When work should be assigned to others

Heart-Based Business

Being a business owner does not mean that you have to live a stressed out, profit-focused, give it all you got life. You have a choice. Instead of focusing on growing your business at the expense of your health and peace of mind you can choose simplicity, streamlining, and the pursuit of less stress.

You can choose what types of clients or industries you serve so that they are aligned with your values and have the potential to make the kind of impact you desire to make. You can work with integrity, honoring the health and humanity of all involved. All of this and more are characteristics of the Heart-Based Business mode.

Over the last decade this evolved to become a central guiding question for Heart-Based Business, one that I have shared with thousands of small business owners to stay focused on possibility instead of worst-case scenario outcomes. Heart-Based Business means engaging with an ongoing inquiry:

How can we earn twice as much in half the time, with ease and joy, while serving the highest good?

As Heart-Based business owners, it's not about who can hustle, grind, and grit to "beat" the competition. You deserve to honor your life while you build your business.

The ingredients of meaning, community, family, and vitality are at the heart of life-giving businesses and they energize everyone who participates in them, from the owner to the team members to the clients and community.

Free Time Framework

Free Time can be viewed in two ways within the context of running a business. Free Time is:

- Used as a verb to describe the continual improvement of systems that free your time, and
- Used as a philosophy that reimagines how we work, focusing on freedom and Heart-Based Business values, instead of orienting toward money or growth at the expense of time and health.

The Free Time Framework is designed entirely within the above contexts and aimed at moving you and your business away from friction and towards flow. Let's look at both sides in more detail.

Friction: Disharmony, resistance, procrastination, over-

whelm, or even dread. Too many mistakes happen, work falls through the cracks, and things go haywire. You feel guilty, even embarrassed, by the state of your systems.

Flow: Busywork is eliminated, focused on the vital few projects and clients, spend the majority of your time working on tasks that you and only you can do, aligned with your greatest strengths, while delegating the rest.

Friction in your business is typically caused by a problem in one of three areas:

- Pressure to bring in more revenue to cover rising expenses,
- Prices that do not generate profits and undervalue your services and the increasing complexity of running a business, or
- Porous boundaries with people you work with that consume crucial recharging time.

Anytime you find your business in a state of friction, you can work through the Free Time Framework process, which is structured according to three stages: **Align, Design, and Assign.**

Part 1: Align

The Free Time Framework begins with a focus on your mind, releasing yourself from invisible and outdated ways of working that are keeping your time unnecessarily and artificially constrained.

You are your best asset, and systems are a skill. You have to move towards a new way of working that is aligned with you in three key areas.

- **Your values:** Operationalizing what makes you and your company unique
- **Your Energy:** Discernment about what to work on (and how) to achieve results
- **Your strengths:** Doubling-down on your talents, intuition, and imperfection.

One of the bonuses of going through this stage is that it is also an important gauge. If you discover the work or opportunity no longer aligns, you will phase it out. No need to systematize what should not be done in the first place.

Values

Operating principles stem from core values. Principles

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provide the logic of “why and how we do things here,” the overall mindset and approach to work. Where process outlines exactly how you achieve desired outcomes within each area of the business, principles guide those processes to a higher level. Clarifying your values is only a fraction of the work; the rest follows in operationalizing those core values through streamlined systems. To ensure your values are honored throughout day-to-day interactions, you will:

- Set agile operating principles
- Create an externalized mind
- Systematize the spirit of your business

Setting Agile Operating Principles: Your operating principles, whether you are explicitly aware of them or not, are already serving as a foundation for systems you do (or don't) have in your business. Articulating them is crucial, especially as you expand your team, as they set in motion a chain of reasoning based on underlying values.

Create an Externalized Mind: In addition to your operating principles, clearly outline processes that define how you work in a well-organized, easy-to-navigate Manager Manual: your externalized business mind.

In doing so, you will be more confident and less stressed, better able to trust yourself and others to run operations smoothly, and communicate about your business clearly. In an ideal world, no piece of information (or your clients) lives only in someone's mind—yours or your team's. None. Nothing.

Systematize the Spirit of your Business: Design onboarding systems to preemptively address buyer's remorse by deciding in advance what you want their experience to be, designing a process to reflect those values, then doubling down to ensure new clients feel welcome. Special touches come from intentional process design for the values that embody the spirit of your business.

Energy

Notice your energy as you work. Pay attention to interactions with your team and clients: When and with whom do you feel most in the zone? When do you feel most discon-

nected and drained? What are the most energizing aspects of your business and which ones create unwanted friction? To work with ease and joy, you will:

- Set purposeful intentions
- Let it be easy, let it be fun
- Give yourself golden hour

Set Purposeful Intentions: Setting intentions allows you to filter opportunities, especially ones that seem good on the surface, but that are not energetically aligned with your aims. Purposeful intentions steer you through tough decisions toward your highest contribution. Part of intention-setting involves examining underlying, unconscious intentions muddying the waters of desired business outcomes. It could be that you are complicit in creating the conditions you say you don't want.

Let it be Easy, Let it be Fun: There are two types of challenging work: hard work and Hard Work. Lowercase hard work is rewarding, challenging, and pushes us to the edge of our stretch zone, where we discover flow. Uppercase Hard Work is worn as a badge of suffering, one that mostly leads to burnout. There is a better way.

If something is too hard, take it as a signal to pause, regroup, and revise your approach. If the process of what you are doing, building, or creating is no longer fun, stop.

Give yourself Golden Hour: You have golden hours, one or two times per day that are optimal for your peak energy and creativity, given your unique circadian rhythms. Make sure you allocate your golden hours for your best work. What's your job today?

Be discerning about what you choose and know that it will fluctuate and require trade-offs. Remind yourself that doing this one thing means it has been a successful day.

Strengths

How you do that one thing you love is not how you do everything. It is a pocket of blissful work that yields greater results than working on what you are mediocre at. The

responsibility is yours to fill or reduce the many roles that aren't aligned with your unique strengths. To remove barriers to create more space for your strengths, you will:

- Build your business intuition
- Continuously bust bottlenecks
- Embrace imperfection

Build your Business Intuition: Pay attention to abrupt signals, surprises, or alarming occurrences. These moments indicate when you are no longer in flow, despite what your heart wants, or what your mind thinks you should be doing.

The signs are speaking to you, letting you know what it is time to lean into your intuition as a strength signaling what to do next. Trust that an answer will emerge when it is time.

Continuously Bust Bottlenecks: Finding yourself embarrassed, missing important deadlines, or profusely apologizing to others on a regular basis can be signals that you are bottlenecked in your business.

You might be the best in the world at what you do, but if your systems are broken or outdated, your clients will quickly become frustrated and go elsewhere.

Embrace Imperfection: Embrace “cookie dough” work that is awkward, imperfect, and incomplete. Launch it anyway and gather real-time feedback. Trust that your creative cookie dough will be delicious as is.

Part 2: Design

This second stage of the Free Time Framework, Design, will help you create space for your most important work, ignoring distractions along the way. Before starting any new project, you will clearly define three areas:

- **Ideal Outcomes:** What are the ideal outcomes, large and small? How will you measure success? How will the finished product look? How will you know it is complete?
- **Impact:** What impact will this project have in the world? Who is it for? What problems are you solving? What do they write when they send you a thank-you note for creating it?
- **Process:** This is where you design how you and your team will work toward your ideal outcomes and impact. You will create a project plan with key mile-

stones, and decide how to communicate along the way, noting what to do when problems arise.

Ideal Outcomes

Design the process and ideal outcomes before starting work on a new project. Notice when you are stuck thinking something will be long, hard, or exhausting. Invite nonlinear breakthroughs by opening up to the possibility that results could happen quickly, joyfully, and easily.

Stop mopping with already soaked time sponges: doing repetitive, reactive work without cleaning up the actual mess. Instead of reacting in the moment, create systems to free up time in the future. Notice micro-guilt, people-pleasing, worrying, and saying yes to lukewarm opportunities just to avoid saying no.

Invite nonlinear breakthroughs (NLBs): An NLB is an unexpected sharp turn of clarity or success, rather than a linear, long, or otherwise time-consuming analysis or slog. You may assume that the only way to achieve progress is through hard work and intense willpower. Invite an NLB instead.

Envisioning a path that might just be easier than expected, is exactly how many entrepreneurs achieve liftoff. NLBs invite us to be surprised not only by the outcomes of any business effort, but by the path to get there.

Apply serendipity as a business strategy: Serendipity happens when you release your small experiments, or pilots, out into the world, without knowing what will result. Sure enough with luck, effort, and persistence to keep putting things out there, someone's interest will spark.

If you stick with steadily launching your ideas, they accelerate. With serendipity as a business strategy, you do not have to design precise outcomes, have all the answers right away, or a detailed plan mapped out from the start.

Solve for Sisyphean systems: Sisyphean, a Greek mythological king, was sentenced to an eternity of futility, rolling a giant boulder uphill only to have it roll back down once he neared the top. In today's world, these giant boulders come in the form of never-ending inboxes and notifications.

Many of these Sisyphean systems are, by definition and by design, “hard to contain or eradicate.” It takes Herculean willpower—or a shift in systems and mindset—to resist the urge to respond all day, every day, into eternity. If we get caught up in these addictive systems, we miss the chance to do our best work, in our best timing.

Be mindful of the impact of how you describe your community and customer journey and consider the myth that hard work is all it takes.

This requires awareness, stepping back to see a bigger picture and possibilities, and implementing a pattern-interrupt or new process for repeating situations that are not serving our best work.

Impact

Design with your desired impact top of mind, creating solutions that serve the highest good for all involved, including your team, clients, and broader community. Continually collect feedback and improve your products for greater resonance. Be mindful of the impact of how you describe your community and customer journey and consider the myth that hard work is all it takes. Consider the invisible privileges that impact success.

Always be listening: Built-in listening is a systematic way of ensuring there are feedback mechanisms built into the business. Always be listening by making a practice out of continuous open listening, setting up a variety of systems to do this. Consent is key, of course and in addition, ensure that a monthly recurring task rolls the feedback up for review to improve products and inform every new project.

Scale by getting ready for a big break: Prepare your systems to catch the wave of interest and incoming leads that get generated. If you scale with sloppy systems, your problems will only multiply. If you don't see it coming (or envision that it is possible and act accordingly) you may run out of inventory, crash servers, or experience other flubs. Build with excellence and prepare ahead of time for all possible outcomes.

Use life-giving language: The words you use publicly and behind the scenes matter. They carry energy. Respect and acknowledge hard work, luck, and privileges—as success is almost always a combination of these and more.

Language represents our values and beliefs. Consider how language maps to processes in your business, and your resulting motivation (or lack thereof) to follow them. For example, acquiring a new customer refers to a human you respect as an object to be bought or caught. That language is dehumanizing and demotivating, especially if you are a

Heart-Based Business. Be accessible and inclusive in your language and actions.

Process

Ensure that you and your team are intentional about designing the process required to make the work happen before you assign to team members. Be strategic with your time with batching of small and not time-sensitive tasks to eliminate task bloat. Design your default state to be intentional, active focus.

Design deep work containers: You deserve to have uninterrupted, focused time to do dynamic work, at times when you are most creative. It is all important to systematize deep work time amidst a world of fractured, digital distraction.

Deep work time means nothing else gets scheduled in advance during that time. Give yourself permission to turn your phone to Do Not Disturb during deep work times.

Time block and bake in batches: Time blocking is dividing the day into specific segments to complete discrete activities through concentrated efforts. Knowing what this is and doing it are very different things. You will not block time expansively if you hold yourself to an outdated energetic imprint of what a calendar means, and how it should be managed.

Rethink calendar-cramming habits that no longer serve you. Batch your time by doing similar activities together, even planning them in advance on a quarterly basis.

Automate what you repeat: If this then that (IFTTT) represents a way of thinking for repeatable tasks in your business. No task needs to be repeated the same way twice, at least if you are paying attention and willing to do a little bit of extra work up front to define if this then that rules. By automating as much as you can, you stay focused on the work you love most.

Automate small, repetitive actions through software. Engineer simple systems to prevent failures of memory, energy, overwhelm, decision making, and delegation.

Part 3: Assign

In this last stage of the Free Time Framework, now is the time to let go of as much of it as you can by assigning next steps to someone other than you. You will set up structures that build trust in your team. The assign stage challenges you to assign most of what you can. For every task, project, and responsibility, you will get clear on:

- Who
- will do What
- by When

Who

If you are the only person working in your business, you are far more likely to be the bottleneck and to be burdened by work that drains you. In this section you will:

- Promote yourself from Chief Everything Officer
- Construct your Delightfully Tiny Team
- Double how much you delegate

Promote yourself from Chief Everything Officer:

It's nearly impossible to do your best work when you're doing all the work. To create a lasting company, you need to ensure that it does not hinge only on your energy, effort, attention, and time.

Consider hiring a thought partner who compliments your skillset and an assistant or project manager who can take care of the details for both of you.

Construct your Delightfully Tiny Team: Examine team size based on leader preference, culture, and cohesion. What makes a team delightfully tiny is up to you, the leader, to decide, based on the intersection of three things: your strengths and energy, your current strategic projects, and desired outcomes for your team or business.

Delightfully Tiny Teams help you reach your personal sweet spot of efficiency and freedom as the owner, enabling you to focus on your best work.

Double how much you delegate: Even if you think you already delegate effectively, you have room for even greater efficiency and resulting peace of mind, whether on the home or work front. Conduct a 5 T's audit for tiny, tedious, time-consuming, terrible at, and time sensitive tasks you can offload next.

What

Look for person-to-project alignment as you facilitate ongoing conversations with your team. Look for ways to automate, delegate, or drop the draining work. In this section, you will:

- Make yourself replaceable with the Fiji test
- Identify, discuss, and solve for drainers
- Take responsibility for all frustration

Make yourself replaceable with the Fiji test: What would happen if any one of your team members were whisked to Fiji on a moment's notice for a three-week vacation, and told to leave all of our devices at home?

Set up systems and documentation so that a stranger to the business can step in tomorrow, in any role, and run things smoothly. Each person must work towards making themselves replaceable every day.

Your true strengths
are areas you are
already skilled at and
that energize you.

Identify, discuss, and solve for drainers: Your true strengths are areas you are already skilled at and that energize you. Better understanding your energizers can also help you navigate your drainers, which is work that is soul-sucking and drains your energy instead of charging you up. Conduct design-your-role conversations that identify and solve for drainers with each team member.

Take responsibility for all frustration: When the pandemic hit and all future work started being canceled, it would have been easy to wallow and feel sorry for myself. A pandemic is not any one person's fault. The best thing to do as a business owner was recenter and take full responsibility, one small step at a time. Taking responsibility and being open to feedback is the only path to sanity.

When

When you work matters as much as how you work, and how much. Most work is not urgent; Set parameters for your communication cadence, and how you will indicate when something is truly time-sensitive. In this section, you will:

- Track every task and assign one clear owner
- Answer less: every question lives three lives
- Save someone next steps

Track every task and assign one clear owner: A central task database to capture every single activity, large and small, ensures your externalized mind won't fail. You will benefit greatly by building a task management system you can trust, so you can focus without worrying that you are forgetting things.

Answer less: Disorganized documentation around common questions in your business triples the work—and the frustration—for your team and customers.

Every question lives three lives: the first time it is asked and answered, the documentation of the question and response in the Manager Manual, and the addition of that Q&A to a public-facing resource.

Save someone next steps: Ask your team to get in the habit of looking beyond the initial details of a request. Run through a quick check before marking something complete, by anticipating what the assigning person will need to do next. Take a far back view to anticipate what subtasks will follow.

The Free Time Framework can help you spot and eliminate friction step by step, pulling your attention out of the weeds

and back to your highest vision. For any given project, you can realign with why work matters (sometimes phrasing it out), then design a more streamlined process alongside your ideal outcomes, and finally assign it to someone on your team to shepherd its success.

By committing to smarter systems and heart-based operating principles, we expand into even more immense potential, taking extra steps now to help us soar far into the future.



Jenny Blake, author of the award-winning book *Pivot* and co-creator of Google's acclaimed Career Guru coaching program, is back with her signature blend of heart-based operating principles and practical tools. Jenny is an international keynote speaker helping forward-thinking organizations and individuals map what's next. She hosts two podcasts with over 1 million downloads combined: *Free Time with Jenny Blake* for heart-based business owners, and *Pivot with Jenny Blake* to help others navigate change. Jenny started her first blog, *Life After College*, in 2005, which was later turned into a book and published by Running Press in 2011.

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