

Advantage

Your personal finance edge

September–October 2019

Create a happy headspace

**Eliminate these
scary business
mistakes**

**Easy DIY
Halloween
costumes**

**Fall weekend
home projects**

**Carving out
downtime**

**The ultimate
Halloween
trivia quiz**

Make the most of the fall busy season!

September and October can be extremely busy months with new school years starting and the crunch of end of the year on the horizon. If it's your desire to pack as much fall fun into your days as possible, then you'll be glad that you picked up this issue of *Advantage* magazine—full of goodies to help you do just that!

For starters, you'll want to check out our article on avoiding scary business mistakes, offering several tips to help you head into the holiday spending season with confidence. And speaking of holidays... if you love Halloween and the whole harvest scene,

you'll enjoy our feature on DIY costumes, our candy quiz and our weekend project ideas.

With so much going on over the next few months, it's important to carve out time for you, so you don't burn out like a candle in a jack-o-lantern (seasonal simile intended). To help you avoid this kind of burnout, see our article, "Carving out downtime," as well as our tips for creating a happier headspace.

Wishing you a wonderful fall season!

Sincerely,

Your trusted advisors



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SCARY BUSINESS MISTAKES TO AVOID

A According to a recent Global Entrepreneurship report, over half of businesses fail—usually the result of poor or no planning. Whether you have a new business or you are a veteran entrepreneur, here are a few tips to help you avoid falling victim to the following scary business mistakes.

① Going it alone

For many people, running their own business is all about the freedom of working for themselves. However, just because you work for yourself, doesn't mean you have to—or should—go it alone. Identify areas where you can use some help. For example, start with the financial side of your business. If numbers aren't your area of expertise, working with an accountant to develop a proper financial plan can help keep your balance sheet in the black.

② Failing to build a team you can trust

While it's helpful to have people you can bounce ideas off of, it's imperative to build a team of professionals that you can trust to help you run your business. This requires you to identify areas in need of support, such as sales, marketing or client services, and then recruit candidates with the right skill set to handle a given job.

③ Not having a current financial plan

This may be one of the scariest mistakes that business owners can make. If you haven't done the proper planning, it's exceptionally difficult to achieve your financial goals. A solid financial plan enables you to monitor the metrics critical to business growth, such as:

- Required capital to build and run your business based on your long-term goals.

- Level of revenue, profits and expenses you can expect within a specific time frame.
- Required capital to pay for outsourced services, equipment and other expenses.

Having a financial plan in place is one area where you don't want to skimp. Hire a professional with the appropriate experience to support you here.

④ Failing to measure KPIs

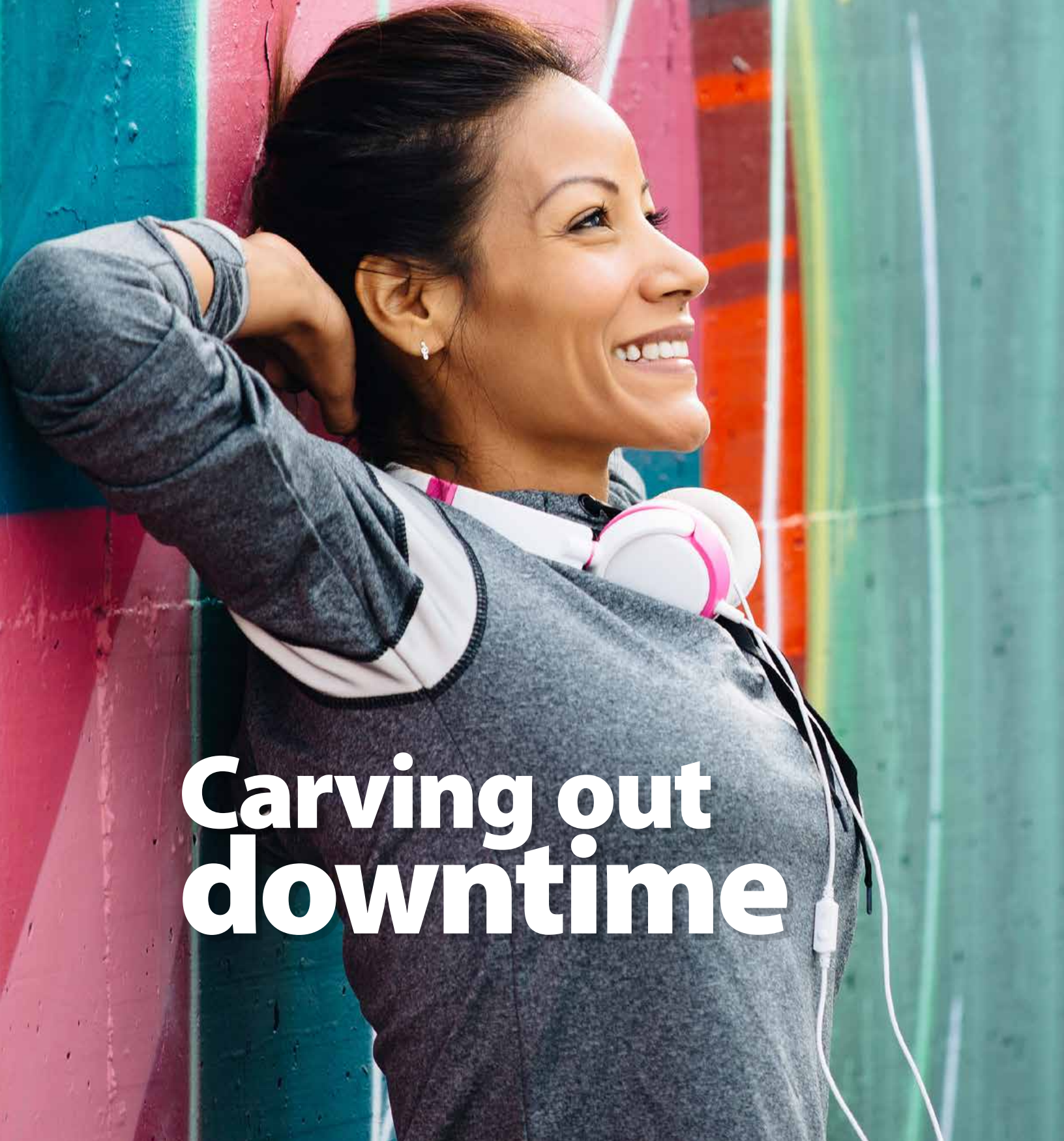
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are specific data points that allow you to measure business performance (compared to goals) in multiple areas. Here are a few standard KPIs every business owner should pay attention to:

- Sales revenue
- Net profit margin
- Gross margin
- Monthly recurring revenue

Because every business owner will have unique goals, your KPIs may vary. This is why you want a seasoned financial expert in your corner.

Take steps now to avoid these scary business mistakes

If you have made any of the mistakes listed above, take action today. Start by identifying the most pressing issue and then make a plan to correct it—whether that means recruiting new staff or updating your financial plan. Here's to your business success! ■



Carving out downtime

Fall is one of the busiest times of the year, and that means it can be hard to carve out a little downtime to relax and recharge. However, study after study shows that doing so is important to combating stress, which can dampen our immune systems and make us more susceptible to disease. And as we are about to head into cold and flu season, making time for you is even more important.

So, how can you fit some down time into your schedule? Follow these steps to lighten your load and treat yourself right:

■ Be honest with your schedule

Make a list of your non-negotiable weekly tasks—those that absolutely must get done, like laundry, paying bills and taking the kids to school. Then make a list of your negotiable activities and rate each on a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most rewarding and 1 being the least). These activities could include exercise, friend lunches, golf, reading or baking—to name only a few.

■ Edit your activities

The next step is to eliminate the lower-rated activities (1 or 2) for the week. For items rated 3 to 5, decide if they are really important to you by examining your motivation for doing them. For example, attending every one of your daughter's dance classes or helping a friend pack for a move. If these items are a priority, then keep them on the list.

■ Accept good enough

Activities rated 6 through 8 should be the things that you enjoy but don't have time to perform perfectly. For example, baking treats for your child's school party. To lighten the load, go the store-bought route. Or, if you promised to have lunch

with an old colleague, make it a quicker brunch date. This tip is all about doing what is enjoyable to you, while not sucking up your valuable downtime.

■ Make room for downtime

Here's the fun part...scheduling time for activities rated 9 or 10 on your list. These activities represent your "downtime Dos." They offer peace and a sense of being able to handle the other parts of your life that are more stressful. These activities could include taking a nap, reading a good book or spending time with your children playing outside. Make time for highly rated items to help reduce stress and bring more joy to your life.

Just like carving your Halloween pumpkin, carving out space for downtime activities takes thought and commitment. If you follow the steps above, you will be on your way to recharged and maybe just a little bit healthier! ■





Create a
happy
headspace

Do you feel like your mind is constantly whirling from one thing to the next? Do I need to pick up the kids, pick up dinner, wash the car...call a client back? If so, it may be time to create some happier headspace. We offer five easy steps to help calm the noise in your brain.

1 Practice mindfulness

One of the fastest ways to feel happier is to focus on what is happening in the moment—not the past or the future. Practice the art of mindfulness by devoting time to breathing or meditation exercises. Getting out for a little yoga or practicing relaxed breathing at your desk can make your headspace feel a lot less crazy.

2 Exercise

When you are active, your brain releases endorphins that make you feel better and improve your outlook. Many reputable studies show that just 20 minutes of cardiovascular exercise improves information processing and memory functions—and can also elevate your mood.

3 Take care of you

If you are constantly doing for others, it will eventually take a toll on you—and your happiness. Take some time each day to do something you enjoy and that will help you recharge (maybe going to bed a little earlier or exercising). Having a regular self-care practice helps cultivate a happier headspace.

4 Let your creative out

Even if you don't think you are the "creative type," try expressing your feelings through activities such as writing, drawing, painting, dancing, gardening or even putting puzzles together. This offers a little time to let your feelings flow and your mind wander in a relaxed state.

5 Make time for conversation

For many of us, talking to a trusted friend or family member can be soothing. However, striking up a conversation and connecting with people you may not know as well can also be rewarding and lift your spirits. So, challenge yourself to strike up a conversation with someone at your child's soccer game or in line at the store. These little talks can do you a world of good from a happiness perspective.

Following these tips can help clear the noise in your headspace...and they don't take a lot of time. They do, however, require some discipline to implement. Get your good vibes going and make some more room for happy in your headspace! ■

fall weekend home projects



For those fall rainy-day weekends that keep you stuck inside, here are a few DIY home improvement projects that can be finished in a weekend...

spray paint your doorknobs and fixtures

This is a cheap and easy way to give your home an update. Spray paint any dated gold-colored doorknobs and fixtures bronze or nickel using metallic spray paint (be sure to apply painter's tape and cover all nearby items).

make a mud room

Not planning on doing any major renovations to your home but still need a mud room? You can create a functional mudroom in your hallway by adding some molding, paint and hooks to an empty wall. Slide a shoe rack or boot tray underneath the hooks to offer a place to hang coats or sporting gear.

upgrade your laundry room

Most of us spend a lot of time doing laundry, so it makes sense to create a warm and welcoming space to do it in. Consider installing a folding table, extra shelving, and using decorative glass dispensers to store laundry essentials such as clothespins, detergent and fabric softener. Don't forget to hang some art or family photos on the walls as well.

decorate your doors

If your home has plain hollow-core doors, you can give your house a completely new look by replacing them. If this isn't in your budget, you can create the illusion of updated doors by using some trim and paint.

makeover your closet

Who says your closet has to be dark and dull? Consider painting it, adding wallpaper and some lighting. Use a shelving system to add more storage space and organization. You may even want to remove the doors and add mirrored ones or a colorful curtain instead of a door.

perk up your pantry

Pantries are another area of your home, like closets and laundry rooms, often forgotten. However, with a glass or stained glass door, some modular shelving and a set of pretty canisters for dry goods, you can completely transform this space. If you don't want your pantry's contents on display, you could use a curtain instead of a door.

These are just a few super simple projects that you can easily tackle in a weekend—and without breaking your budget or too much of a sweat. Commit to doing two or three over the course of the season, and you'll feel like you made good use of your indoor time! ■



10 easy DIY **Halloween** costumes



Dressing up for Halloween can be super fun—but it can also be expensive and time consuming to find a great costume. That is, unless you use one of the following DIY costume ideas—perfect for trick-or-treating, going to Halloween parties and showing off your creative side. Pick your favorite:

1 Jelly beans

Place multicolored balloons in a large clear plastic bag that is big enough for you to wear as a poncho. Staple the sides together and tie the bottom around your legs to avoid having the balloons float away. Make a label with your “brand” of jellybeans and tie a ribbon around your neck for a finishing touch.

2 Rosie the Riveter

Yes, you can do it! Dressing up like this famous female icon is as easy as wearing a denim shirt, your hair tied back and a red bandana around your head.

3 Care Bears

If you'd rather not be scary, why not be a Care Bear? Grab some brightly colored t-shirts, hair bands to attach ears to, felt and a hot glue gun. Google pictures of your favorite Care Bears to see the various decals for their tummies. Use felt to create the decals and then glue them to your t-shirt.

4 Day of the Dead skeleton

Wear a regular skeleton mask (or paint your own face) and t-shirt printed with skeleton bones. Then, transform both with colorful silk flowers, markers and fabric paint.

5 Emojis

All you need are yellow t-shirts and some bright fabric markers to make your favorite emojis come to life. Make emoji costumes for a group or the whole family.

6 Flight attendant

While a witch on a broomstick taking to the skies is classic, dressing up like a flight attendant is another way to add some levity to the occasion. All you need is a silk scarf or tie, a white shirt and dark skirt or pants, an airline pin (or make your own wings), and a piece of luggage.

7 Silent film actors

Be a silent scene stealer in this costume. Grab a vintage style dress or suit, a headband or a bolero, some pearls (for actress costume) or a boutonniere (for actor costume). Then make a dialogue card. Put it all together for a simple and unique costume.

8 Magician

Conjure up a black cape, white shirt, black pants, a wand and a top hat for one of the best DIY costumes around! Add a deck of cards and a magic bunny, and you'll be adding some serious tricks to Halloween night.

9 Where's Waldo?

Rocking the look of the classic kids icon on Halloween couldn't be easier! A red striped shirt, blue jeans, a red and white hat, and some black-rimmed glasses is all you need to truly stand out.

10 Flower power

Treat everyone to that peaceful 70s vibe with some vintage bell bottoms, a fringed vest, a peace sign t-shirt and platform shoes. Extra bonus: This is one comfy costume! ■

The ultimate Halloween trivia quiz

Forget the standard Halloween quizzes—this trivia will truly test your knowledge of this holiday. See how well you do, then test your family and friends to see who can claim bragging rights as the Halloween trivia champ!

- 1. What is the name of the Celtic harvest festival that many people believe Halloween is based on?**
- 2. What is a hallow?**
- 3. In what year will the next full moon occur during Halloween?**
- 4. What item is banned only during Halloween from 12:00 a.m. October 31 to 12:00 p.m. November 1 in Hollywood, California?**
- 5. What popular fall festival activity did the Romans bring to Britain when they invaded?**
- 6. The word Halloween is a contraction of what Christian holiday?**
- 7. In the correct spelling of Halloween, where is the apostrophe placed?**
- 8. In what two countries was “guising” the tradition of dressing up in costumes, and going door-to-door for food or coins for Halloween most popular?**
- 9. When people go house to house while “souling,” what do they ask for?**
- 10. In what country was the first written account of children using the phrase “trick or treat” on Halloween?**
- 11. In what decade did trick-or-treating as we know it today start gaining popularity in America?**
- 12. What were the original jack o’ lanterns made from?**
- 13. The round orange pumpkins that are used for most jack o’ lanterns today are native to what continent?**
- 14. What kind of candy is the SECOND most popular Halloween candy?**
- 15. In the USA, how many pieces of candy are most commonly handed out to trick-or-treaters?**

Answers:

1. Samhain (pronounced SAH-win or SOW-in) 2. A saint or a holy person 3. 2020 4. Silly String 5. Bobbing for apples 6. All Hallow's Evening (All Hallow's Even), a.k.a. All Hallow's Eve, All Saint's Eve, Allhallowe'en 7. Between the two es: Halloween 8. Scotland and Ireland 9. Soul-cakes (small round cakes that are baked to commemorate the dead) 10. Canada 11. The 1930s 12. Turnips 13. North America 14. Candy corn (Chocolate dominates first place by a wide margin) 15. Two

A man with short dark hair and a goatee, wearing a blue denim shirt and a brown apron, is leaning over a wooden counter. He is smiling and looking at a tablet computer he is holding with both hands. On the counter in front of him is a white calculator and a roll of paper. In the background, there is a glass display case containing bread, a loaf of bread on a wooden board, and a stone wall.

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