

SelfInformed

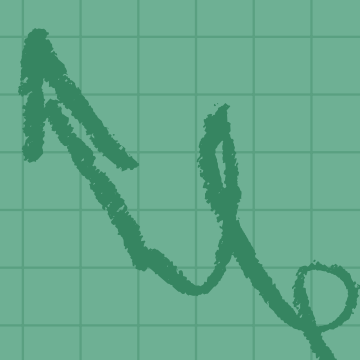
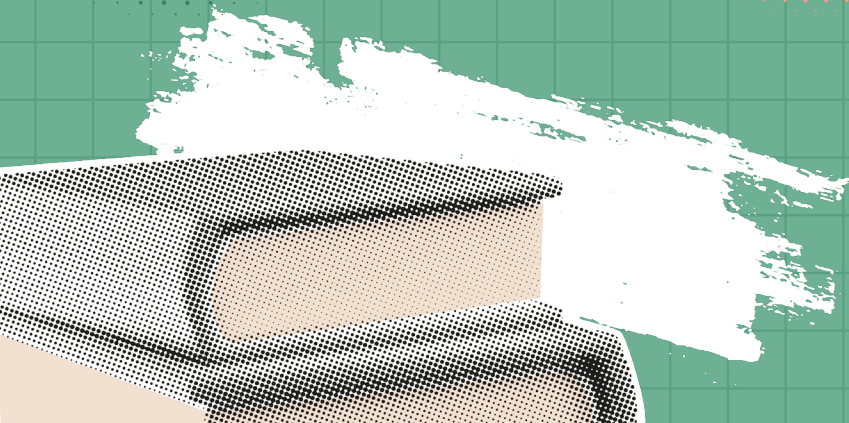
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NASE Dependent Scholarship Winners



Why *Consistency* Beats Motivation Every Time



A Systems-Based Approach for Self-Employed Success

BY BELLE NIBA

The Real Problem Isn't What You Think

Motivation is a terrible business partner. Some days it shows up. Most days it doesn't. And when it's absent, everything feels harder: returning calls, sending invoices, doing the strategic work that builds your future.

In the 2025 Mental Health in Freelancing Report by Leapers, 68% of self-employed professionals reported this same struggle: stress and mental fatigue sabotaging consistent execution. At NASE, many members fight this battle.

Here's what we've learned: *The battle itself is the problem.*

The issue stems from structural absence. It occurs when entrepreneurs attempt to run their business operations on willpower alone, a strategy that is unsustainable.

Research by psychologist Wendy Wood reveals that 43% of our daily behaviors are not conscious choices, but automatic habits cued by our environment. When you rely on willpower, you are fighting against your own biology. You don't need more grit. You need a system that works even when your motivation is low.

Why Motivation Fails: What Research Reveals

If you've ever reached 2 PM feeling drained despite accomplishing little or real consequence, you've experienced decision fatigue. Willpower isn't unlimited.

Psychologist Roy Baumeister discovered that willpower functions like a battery; it drains with use. Every decision depletes the energy available for the next one.

As a business owner, before you get to strategic priorities, you've made dozens of operational decisions: *Which task should I prioritize? Does my team have what they need? Which invoice needs attention first?*

By the time you sit down to work on strategic growth, your decision-making battery is running low. This isn't a character flaw. It's predictable and preventable with the right systems.

Research on habit formation demonstrates that behavioral routines eliminate the need for willpower. Entrepreneurs who execute consistently aren't accessing some secret reserve of motivation. They've eliminated motivation as a prerequisite for action using systems that make key actions automatic, bypassing emotional alignment entirely.

Why Popular Productivity Systems Often Fail You

If you've tried productivity systems that left you overwhelmed, you experienced a fundamental mismatch. Here's why popular systems fail for self-employed professionals:

- **Getting Things Done (GTD)**

Brilliant for people with administrative support. Overwhelming for solo operators managing everything simultaneously.

- **Time Blocking**

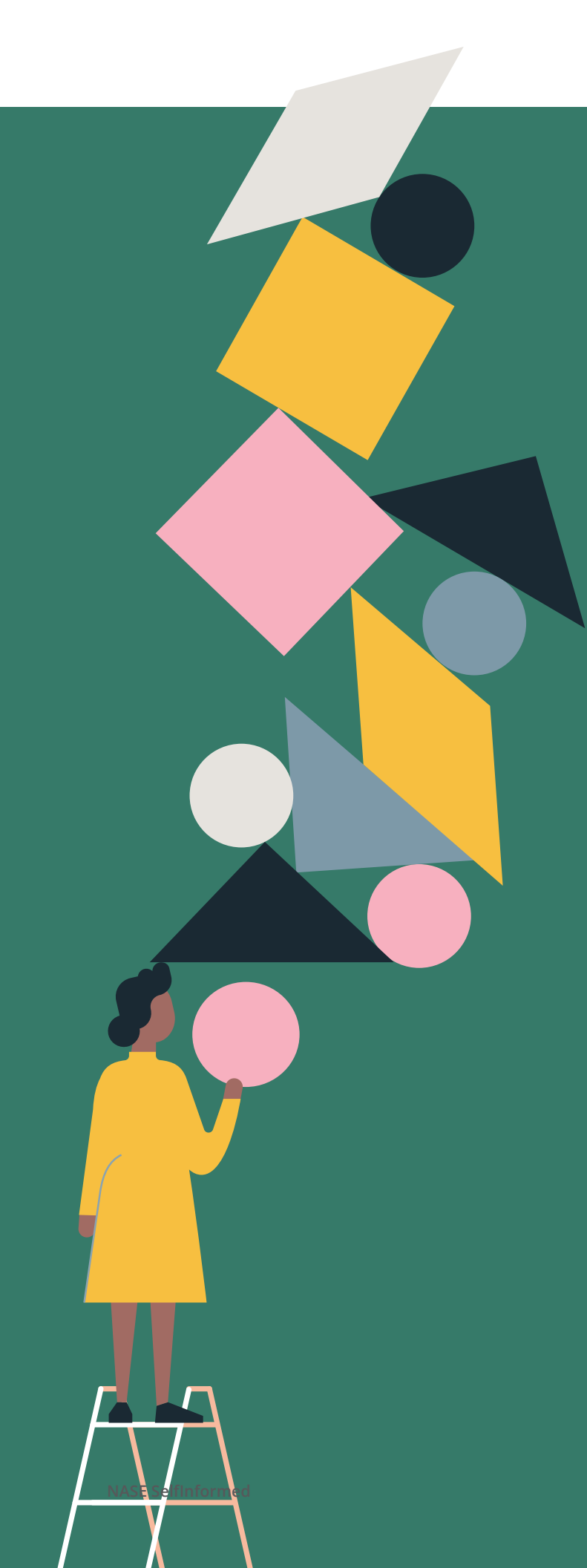
Effective when schedules are predictable. Fractures when client emergencies or family obligations arise.

- **Pomodoro Technique**

Excellent for task execution. Provides no framework for determining which tasks matter most.

These systems don't fail due to poor design—they were designed for different contexts: organizational support, predictable schedules, separated planning and execution roles that don't exist when you're building a business alone.





Why Systems Create Freedom

Research by Wendy Wood and James Clear into behavioral automaticity reveals something powerful: identity-based habits outperform motivation-driven approaches. Approximately 43% of our successful daily actions are automatic, relying on neurological loops in the basal ganglia rather than conscious intention. This bypasses decision fatigue completely.

For micro businesses, the impact is measurable. Business owners maintaining consistent weekly client contact generate 40-60% more qualified opportunities annually than those working sporadically—even with identical total outreach. The difference isn't effort: it's automation. Habitual actions move from high-effort conscious decisions to low-effort automatic execution.

When most small business owners hear “systems,” they picture corporate bureaucracy. For the self-employed, systems are habitual routines that convert high-effort tasks into automatic ones.

Think automated savings: set once, transfers monthly without thought. Business systems leverage the same neurological principle. A Friday 2:00 PM invoicing routine becomes automatic, eliminating the mental burden and friction of starting. What once required willpower now requires none.

The Constraint-Focused Weekly Operating System

If you've tried multiple productivity approaches without success, here's what went wrong: you were optimizing everything simultaneously. When you're a department of one with limited time, that guarantees overwhelm.

This system works differently. It's built on one principle: overall performance is limited by the weakest link—the constraint. Improving non-constraint areas produces minimal impact. Improving the constraint improves everything.

Common constraints for self-employed professionals:

- **Revenue:** Not enough clients or sales
- **Capacity:** Too much work, not enough time
- **Clarity:** Unclear offer or positioning
- **Visibility:** Great work, but nobody knows
- **Systems:** Operational chaos preventing scale

The Six-Step Weekly Framework

This practice takes 15–20 minutes on Sunday evening or Monday morning.

Step 1: Identify Your Primary Constraint

Ask: “What single factor limits my business progress most right now?” Be honest. It’s probably what you’ve been avoiding because it’s uncomfortable.

Example: Marcus, a consultant, would prefer improving service delivery. But his real constraint is revenue. His pipeline is too thin for consistent monthly income.

Step 2: Define Your ONE Thing

In their book *The ONE Thing*, Gary Keller and Jay Papasan identified a powerful question that cuts through competing priorities: “What is the ONE thing I can do this week such that by doing it, everything else becomes easier or unnecessary?”

Apply this question to your identified constraint. Which single action addresses it most directly?

Marcus’s ONE Thing: “Contact 20 past clients to request referrals and re-establish relationships.”

Important: This isn’t your only task for the week. It’s your priority task that receives protected execution regardless of what else happens.

Step 3: Schedule Your ONE Thing First

Protect your priority work through deliberate calendar management:

- Block specific time for this work.
- Reserve your highest-energy hours (usually morning).
- Schedule in one or two concentrated blocks.
- Treat these blocks as non-negotiable client appointments.

Research by Peter Gollwitzer demonstrates that specific time-and-place commitments increase follow-through by 2-3 times compared to general intentions.

Marcus blocks Tuesday and Thursday, 9:00–11:00 AM, before scheduling any client calls.

Step 4: Add Supporting Actions

Identify 2-4 additional actions that either support your ONE Thing or keep your business running smoothly.

Marcus adds: invoice two outstanding projects, prepare Friday’s client presentation, schedule next week’s LinkedIn post.

These remain explicitly secondary. If Tuesday gets disrupted, Marcus might skip the LinkedIn post. But he protects the client outreach—that’s his ONE Thing.

Step 5: Conduct Your Weekly Review

Every Friday afternoon or Sunday evening, address three questions:

1. Did I complete my ONE Thing?

- **If yes:** What made it possible? Document it to replicate those conditions.
- **If no:** What got in the way? This is your most valuable learning.

Common patterns: overcommitment to client requests, email displacing priorities, scheduling deep work during low-energy hours, family emergencies.

Then ask: “What ONE behavioral change protects my priority work next week?”

Marcus realizes Tuesday morning email derailed his outreach. His adjustment: “Next week, I’ll complete my ONE Thing before opening email—even if that means starting at 8:00 AM.”

2. What constraint will I address next week? (Often unchanged for 2-4 weeks)

3. What is my ONE Thing for next week?

This 10–15 minute review prevents reactive starts and transforms successes and setbacks into learning data. After 4-6 weeks, you’ll see your patterns and design weeks around actual behavior, not idealized versions of yourself.

Step 6: Acknowledge Completion

When you complete your ONE Thing, acknowledge it. Not when everything is finished (it never is). When you complete the one action that moved your business forward.

Small Rituals Matter

Mark completion with your favorite pen, text your accountability partner, end Friday early without guilt, buy yourself your favorite coffee. Self-employed business owners rarely receive external validation. You must build acknowledgment into your system, or the system won’t last.



Staying Focused When Business Slows Down

Discipline becomes most critical when urgency disappears. Routines collapse most frequently during low-urgency periods, exactly when you need them most.

This is where Minimum Viable Progress (MVP) proves essential. Adapted from the tech concept of “Minimum Viable Product,” MVP focuses on the smallest action needed to maintain momentum.

During slow months, MVP might be: one networking conversation, one updated document, one marketing post. Not full capacity, just enough to prevent the “broken streak” effect that makes restarting exponentially harder.

Apply your weekly system during slow periods by recognizing your constraint shifts to momentum or visibility. Your ONE Thing might be reconnecting with leads, updating your website, or organizing finances. You’re not just maintaining—you’re

positioning for recovery. When business picks up, you’ll execute immediately rather than spending weeks regaining rhythm.

What to Expect

Let’s be realistic. This system won’t magically solve every challenge. It will provide structure that makes consistent execution possible. Consistency separates sustainable businesses from struggling ones.

Self-employed professionals implementing this system typically report:

- Reduced overwhelm from knowing their ONE Thing
- Improved follow-through (60-80% completion vs. 20-40% baseline)
- Clearer thinking about what matters versus what feels urgent
- Less reactive work patterns
- Better work completion boundaries

These outcomes emerge not from working harder, but from directing effort more strategically.

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MONDAY MORNING

(15 Minutes)

1. **Identify Constraint:** What is the #1 thing limiting my growth right now? (Revenue, Capacity, Clarity, Visibility, Systems).
 2. **The ONE Thing:** What is the single action I can take to alleviate that constraint?
 3. **The Block:** When exactly will I do this? (Mark it on the calendar as "Busy").
-

THE EXECUTION RULE

- I will not open email or check social media until I have completed at least 30 minutes of my ONE Thing.
 - If a client/staff emergency strikes, I will reschedule the block immediately. I will not cancel it.
-

FRIDAY REVIEW

(10 Minutes)

1. Did I do it? (Y/N)
2. If No: What specific obstacle stopped me?
3. The Adjustment: What one rule will I change next week to prevent that obstacle?

Building Something Sustainable

Whether you're starting a business, growing a business, or managing a business with a small team, this shift from reactive to systematic operation represents the distinction between merely surviving and building something sustainable.

Discipline is a learned skill accessible to any entrepreneur willing to design work that requires less motivation and more structure. Research demonstrates that structured, repeatable processes consistently outperform intention-based approaches, particularly under the cognitive load inherent to business ownership.

The constraint-focused weekly system addresses this reality by providing a simple, flexible framework: identify the single factor limiting progress, define one high-leverage action, protect its execution, and build continuous learning from both successes and setbacks.

You're building something to sustain you long-term. That doesn't require more motivation. It requires better systems.

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Since 2006, the NASE has awarded nearly \$1,000,000 to members just like you through the Growth Grants program by providing small business grants. These grants can be used for things like marketing, advertising, hiring employees, expanding facilities, buying new equipment and other specific business needs. Applications are accepted 365 days a year and you may save your progress, the application doesn't have to be completed in one sitting.

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NASE Awards \$15,000 in Scholarships to Five Dependents of Self-Employed Americans

Aug 17, 2026

NASE today awarded \$15,000 in scholarships to five dependents of NASE members — including three who are heading to college with plans to start or expand a business of their own.

[READ FULL STORY ➔](#)



As Entrepreneurs' Use of AI Skyrockets, It Continues to Reshape the Small Business Community — Here Is How to Do It Right

Jun 17, 2026

Artificial intelligence is no longer a technology of the future — it is a tool reshaping the small business landscape right now.

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2026 NASE Dependent Scholarship Winners

In 2026, the NASE awarded five Dependent Scholarships totaling \$15,000. The NASE Dependent Scholarship Program is designed to help ease the financial burden of higher education for legal dependents of NASE Members between the ages of 16 and 24 by providing five \$3,000 educational scholarships.

Since 1989, the NASE Scholarship Program has awarded more than \$1.8 million to members' dependents in support of their educational goals.

This year, our review team evaluated 25 outstanding applications, and we would like to thank everyone who took the time to apply.

Selected from a highly competitive group of applicants, the five recipients chosen in 2026 demonstrated exceptional dedication, academic achievement and ambition. We are proud to support them as they pursue their educational goals and wish each of them continued success in their studies and future endeavors.



Joseph Whooley

La Cañada Flintridge, California

Joseph will use the scholarship to attend Louisiana State University where he plans to major in Animal Sciences with the ultimate goal of becoming a veterinarian.



Kaitlyn Lee

McLean, Virginia

Kaitlyn will use the scholarship to attend Harvard University where she plans to major in Economics / Computer Science with the ultimate goal of becoming a technology entrepreneur.



Spencer Hirsch

Charlotte, North Carolina

Spencer will use the scholarship to attend Cornell University where he plans to major in Electrical & Computer Engineering with the ultimate goal of working for a large company like Lockheed Martin or Microsoft then transitioning to entrepreneurship.



Paul Zyskowski

Port St. Lucie, Florida

Paul will use the scholarship to attend Florida State University where he plans to major in Business Management with the ultimate goal of leading and expanding his family's construction business.



Jenna Becker

Las Vegas, Nevada

Jenna will use the scholarship to attend Augustana College where she plans to major in Art & Psychology with the ultimate goal of obtaining a master's degree and becoming a professional artist working with special-needs students.



Member Benefits

Visit [NASE.org](https://www.nase.org) to learn more about the following benefits!

NASE GROWTH GRANTS®

Apply for small business grants from NASE worth up to \$4,000!

Do you have plans for the steps you would take to grow your business, if you only had the available capital to do so? Would you hire and train additional employees? Market your business in new and exciting ways? Invest in new equipment or software? NASE can help!

Since 2006, NASE has awarded over \$1,000,000 to members just like you through the [Growth Grants®](#) program by providing small business grants.

* Growth Grant applicants must be a member in good standing for three months prior to submitting an application. Annual members may apply immediately. Monthly members may apply ninety days after joining the NASE.

Past Growth Grant Recipients



Save up to 10% off standard daily rates at over 6,000 Enterprise locations.

Experience Corporate Class on a personal level and save every time you rent with Enterprise Corporate Class Business Membership. Members receive up to 10%* off standard daily rates at over 6,000 neighborhood and airport locations across North America and pick up is free.

Get Started

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- Free pick up from home or office
- Airport and Home City rental locations for convenience
- Long term rental solution



Member Benefits

Visit [NASE.org](https://www.nase.org) to learn more about the following benefits!

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NASE members in the US can take advantage of special member pricing on Dell's entire portfolio — including laptops, desktops, peripherals, licensing, servers, storage and more. Dell Technologies partners with NASE to help members gain benefits and value tailored to their business needs.

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Halfway Through 2026:

How is Small Business Faring?

Six months into 2026, America's roughly 34 million small businesses and self-employed workers are navigating a landscape of genuine policy wins undercut by real economic strain.

The Optimism Rollercoaster

The NFIB Small Business Optimism Index tracked a volatile path through the first half of the year — dipping to 95.3 in May, its lowest reading since the post-election surge, before climbing back to 97.4 in June and then jumping to 99.8 in July, the highest level since August 2025. Hiring plans and capital expenditure intentions drove the July rebound, even as the Uncertainty Index stayed well above its historical average, with owners citing labor quality and availability as their top concern.

Legislative Wins: The One Big Beautiful Bill Act

The single biggest tailwind for small business and the self-employed has been the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), signed July 2025 but taking full effect this year. It permanently extended the Section 199A Qualified Business Income deduction — previously set to expire after 2025 — while widening the income phase-in range and adding a new \$400 minimum deduction for those with at least \$1,000 in qualifying income. The law also restored 100% first-year bonus depreciation and reversed a looming compliance headache: rather than letting the 1099-K threshold fall to \$600, OBBBA locked it at \$20,000 and 200 transactions, and raised the 1099-NEC/MISC threshold from \$600 to \$2,000 starting this tax year — sparing millions of freelancers and gig workers from a flood of new tax forms.

Regulatory relief followed. In February, the Department of Labor proposed rescinding the Biden-era 2024 independent contractor rule in

favor of a framework that gives more weight to worker control and profit-and-loss opportunity — a change the Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy estimates could save small businesses over \$2 billion over a decade. The comment period drew more than 16,500 submissions before closing in April, and a final rule is still pending.

The Persistent Headwind: Tariffs

Tariffs remain the dominant drag on the small-business outlook. A Federal Reserve Bank of New York analysis of the Small Business Credit Survey found small firms in goods and retail sectors were disproportionately hit by 2025 tariff costs and entered 2026 more pessimistic about hiring and revenue as a result. Separate research from the Center for American Progress estimated small-business importers paid roughly \$306,000 more in tariffs over the year than the prior period — even after the Supreme Court ruled in February that the administration's use of emergency powers to impose the tariffs was unlawful. A March Small Business Majority poll found 53% of affected businesses facing higher supplier costs, with many delaying expansion or hiring as a result.

The Bottom Line

Small business owners in 2026 are getting real structural help on the tax and regulatory side — permanence on QBI, lighter 1099 paperwork, a friendlier contractor classification standard in the pipeline — while absorbing real cost pressure from trade policy. Optimism is climbing, but it remains a fragile, hard-won recovery rather than a boom.

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