

Small Business is Personal . . . Very Personal



There are millions of small businesses operating in the US. Many of these businesses face the challenge of managed, controlled growth or to even maintain current operations.

Why?

Go to any bookstore and you will find rows of books that profess to answer that very question. The books are telling how to: motivate your employees, grow your profit centers, market more effectively, get noticed on the internet and much more. There are textbooks on small business management and standard procedures for financial management. You can go to any accredited university and study business in route to an MBA.

Many small business owners come from backgrounds where they lack either formal business training or a complete education in running all aspects of a business. Therefore, more education under these circumstances would be warranted to help improve their conditions.

But there some aspects of running a business that are all but utterly ignored by classic business management texts.

It's the personal part, the personal issues of the small business owners and members of their management team. I believe that more than 50% of the business failures I have seen were the result of personal issues from the people at the top that were never resolved. Personal issues are issues no one wants to talk about.

It's not hard to understand why this is so. It is much more comfortable for everyone involved to blame business difficulties to quantifiable forces. "Sales are down because we are in a recession." Or, "We continue to lose money because our productivity stinks." Both excuses may be true. The problem is that there may be more to the reasons "why?" that prevents solid business practices from being implemented within the company on a sustainable basis.

Personal issues are messy. And they're difficult to correct, especially if the people involved are in denial about their circumstances. Frankly, it can be very uncomfortable to finally face up to the issues involved, even if you recognize what those issues are in the first place. Many people at the top of an organization have never had the friendly, objective support necessary that allows them to really explore their own needs and motivations. As a result, they continue with patterns of behavior that are counter to real, sustainable results.

Here are a few examples of personal issues that could impact your business:

- ❑ The small business owner being pressured by a spouse or disrupted by family problems such as a divorce.
- ❑ The small business owner who refuses to trust and delegate to others, believing that he is the only person who really knows what he's doing.
- ❑ The small business owner who always operates on "hyper-overdrive", expecting the same from others and creating chaos that others have to manage.
- ❑ Husband and wife owners where their relationship spills over into the workplace, creating situations that employees have to tip-toe around.
- ❑ The small business owner who constantly destabilizes the company with impulsive and rash business decisions.
- ❑ An inventor with poor social skills who believes that others want to thwart the success of his inventions.
- ❑ A management team that unknowingly mirrors their own individual family patterns with one person seen as the "favorite son" and the others jealously trying to gain favor.
- ❑ The owner covering up a substance abuse issue.
- ❑ The small business owner who thinks he always right and refuses to listen to the advice of others.
- ❑ A small business owner who forces his will to build a company when he really wants to do paint landscapes, built a race car or be a charter boat captain or whatever.
- ❑ A small business owner, who routinely underpays everyone, is always late paying his bills and negotiates ruthlessly creating suppressed antagonism where others want him to fail.
- ❑ A small business owner working long hours for little pay because he secretly feels he doesn't deserve to be properly compensated.

The list could go on and on. The disruptive actions of these individuals may be partially or completely unconscious to those actions or worse, justifiable in their own eyes. Businesses affected by these behaviors will struggle or never reach their full potential. Even so, it is also important to acknowledge the talent, drive and accomplishments that these people have brought to the table. It's the counter productive behaviors and patterns that must be acknowledged and fixed.

Personal problems can be dealt with in a helpful, compassionate manner. The support team could include consultants, counselors and even therapists depending on the severity of the issues identified. The first step as CEO is to acknowledge that personal issues can and do inhibit the success of your company.

To summarize: small business issues fall into two broad categories:

Problems that reflect poor business competency and the inability to implement the requisite changes

Personal problems that may be disguised as “normal” business problems

Business competency and implementation can be corrected by identifying the area of concern and installing a plan of action. Personal issues must first be acknowledged and then adopt a strategy to reduce their negative influences on the work environment. Correcting business or personal issues can be challenging and require different approaches and styles. And bear in mind . . . the two types of problems may be intertwined.

Fix business problems by looking for what has been overlooked and ignored. Self examination and scrutiny is a good quality in a small business owner provided it is not carried to the extreme.

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