



A Small Business is a Living Creature

I am in the middle of Tax Season, which means I haven't had time to think through an article which is nearing deadline.

For inspiration, I turned to the blog on Jason Broadwater's website, and immediately found the following quote. This quote coincides with something that I have been pondering recently, and it serves as a springboard for all of us who own and/or live in Small Businesses. Here's Jason's quote.

"I love business. A business is a living creature, or a small nation, or a culture with its beliefs and rituals and tendencies. ... you must stop sometimes and look at your business as something else – to draw an analogy, to give you a different way to think. The new perspective leads to new ideas."

Think about that: "A business is a creature with its beliefs and rituals and tendencies." That's so true—our business reflects our values, and style, and priorities. Nobody else's.

My managerial career is approaching its 30th year, and I have come to believe that **the single most important thing I can do is to create an environment where good people can be successful.**

I don't emphasize supervision and control. I don't log people in and out of work. But I will teach, and encourage, and tolerate mistakes.

I'm not talking about mistakes that are repetitive, silly, or resulting from a lack in judgment. I'm talking about mistakes that are the inevitable result of good people moving beyond their Comfort Zone.

And that moving beyond the Comfort Zone is the key to success in small business. The world we live in is continually affected by the rapid pace of technologic change, shifts in buying patterns, consumer tastes, and dynamic socioeconomic currents.

The business that stands past with a well-established formula may do well in the present, but is almost certain to be devoured in the future. And that future is likely to come sooner, rather than later.

Is it not plausible, then, that a successful small business is a living, growing, adapting creature, as Jason suggests?

If true, the Small Business Owner must continually be open to change, and must surround him/herself with others who embrace change.

Quoting Jason again,

"But new ideas have to be put into action. And the best way to do that is a combination of two philosophies:

1. a system must be put into place to establish any type of real change
2. just do it and do it now

These philosophies in practice can sometimes be opposites and directly contradict each other.

- The "get it done" guy thinks the "systems" guy is paralyzed.
- The "systems" guy thinks the "get it done" guy is going to create more problems than he solves.

This idea of the opposing forces of the "Do it now" vs "Systems" approach has been debated for at least 25 years. Organizations live with built-in tensions that properly harnessed can add greatly to productivity as well as the sheer pleasure of owning and operating a small business.

Here's what I do. Much of our planned change is introduced in the summer, after the pressures and the speed of the Tax Season have passed.

I write Policies and Procedures, which are developed and approved by all of us. I'm trying to be Jason's "systems" guy, and I'm sure the "get it done" people hate this process. They want to **get it done**, after all.

But in a surprisingly short period of time, the new process—and the new roles it creates—has been absorbed, and serves as a foundation for future planned change.

What's the key point in all this? That a small business must incorporate a mechanism to continually move itself and its people outside the Comfort Zone. And to create an environment that brings change in a way that is planned, managed, and positive.

All things need balance in their lives. I suppose that is why the term unbalanced sometimes is applied to those with mental or emotional issues.

So too with the living creatures called small businesses. They too need the balance supplied by Jason's two forces—the systems guy (or gal), and the do it now type.

The successful business, then, is the one that builds a culture that can embrace both values in a positive and dynamic way, and that can do so over the long term.

Change—and the stress that comes with change—is inevitable. What is needed, then, is a culture and a process that proactively addresses that change in a positive way.