

Back to the Basics for Business Owners

By Adolfo Prieto

We all know the economy is in turmoil and businesses are being forced to reinvent themselves to simply survive. So what now? What should business owner do? President Obama's words during his inaugural speech were very clear when he said, "Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America." But how?

Recently, a dear friend shared with me the book "*The Four Agreements*" by Don Miguel Ruiz. This book outlines the four principles people should follow to succeed in life. I believe these principals can easily be implemented into practice in the business world and can make the difference between surviving or becoming another business failure statistic.

The first principle is to ***become impeccable with your word***. According to Don Miguel Ruiz, this simply means to speak with integrity and say only what you mean. In business, this could be interpreted as promise only what you can deliver. In the never ending quest for success, businesses over-promise and usually under-deliver. This is a recipe for failure. In a difficult and competitive economy, buyers will only give you one opportunity to prove yourself. If you fail, they will

simply move on to the next business. Buyers are more likely to stay with you if they believe in your integrity and reliability and will reward you with their business as long as you continue to deliver.

The second principle is to ***not take anything personally***. Unfortunately, when facing difficult times and a lack of success, many business owners begin to take things personally. I often hear complaints from business owners saying that banks don't want to lend them money and don't want to help them. When turned down for loans, it is usually taken as a personal failure. Business owners should understand that banks are businesses too, and they have to act on "their" best interest. It is not personal, it is simply a business decision, and if we were in the bank's place, we would probably do the same thing.

The third principal is to ***not make assumptions***. Do not assume you know what your customers want and that you have the best product, price, or service. Remember, there is always someone out to get your customers, so don't assume you know it all. Another dangerous assumption is that customers are happy as long as they do not complain. Many times, customers will leave because they did not get what

they wanted and probably would have stayed if their wants were not ignored. Businesses tend to concentrate on new clients and assume existing clients will always be there.

The last principal is ***to always do your best***. This sounds like a no-brainer but is hardly ever done. Entrepreneurs often confuse doing much with doing your best. A perfect example is the entrepreneur who tries to do every job within the organization, accountant, sales, collections, etc. It is impossible to do your best when you are doing everything. Concentrate on what you do best and hire people to do the rest. This is a far better strategy than trying to do everything to save a few dollars. Think of it this way, you can probably generate hundreds of dollars per hour if you could concentrate on sales, but for every hour of your day you spend doing accounting, collecting, billing, or administrative work, you fail to produce income for your company.

The keys to running a successful business are not simply having good products or services. With the current economic situation, it is important for businesses to get back to basics, to reevaluate what they do, how they do it, and to be the best they can be. Businesses tend to focus on the bottom line, cash flow

and new clients, at the expense of the basic fundamentals that will make them successful. The recommendations listed above are not sexy or new; in fact, they are principles that have been around for a long time, but



most of us tend to forget. It is time to get back to basics!

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