

We Need Help Working on the Business

06/09/08

Expenses are up and revenue is stagnant. As a result, we've been in the trenches trying to deal with day-to-day issues like getting the next customer and keeping the ones we have happy. We haven't been thinking about the big picture. We need to focus before we lose the whole year. Any suggestions you can make would be appreciated.

Let's take a look at how to put together a leadership development plan, structured business decisions, and small business advice into a package to help this team get moving forward.

This family owned business is based in Fairfield County. I hear this kind of concern from a lot of small business owners these days. It seems like many businesses are balancing on the edge between a good year and a down year. Fortunately this family is thinking about how they can get help to get un-stuck. So, let's get to it!

Start building a leadership plan by answering the following questions. Who is in charge – of what? How are responsibilities divided among family members and key employees? What do each of those individuals need to be doing, in addition to day-to-day responsibilities? What else do they need to learn or practice, so that they get better at running the company?

Now take a look at how the company can make more structured business decisions by answering the following questions. What stands in the way of working on the business? Where and when during the week do members of the management team come together to discuss how the business is doing? What reports exist to define the facts of how the company is doing? What process exists to forecast how the management team expects to go forward, and the results they expect to produce?

Now it's for some small business advice. Regardless how busy an owner is, there is always time to do some on-the-business work. Some owners work on the business over the weekend. Some are committed to taking the weekend off and find time during the week. Some owners do their planning over breakfast. Some meet with their partners for lunch or dinner. Some set aside time at the end of the day when they get back from working out in the field. 20% of the owners' time needs to be spent thinking and planning, in order to make their remaining time optimally productive.

On-the-business time is like preparing to leave the house in the morning. Some people rush out the door, somewhat unprepared. They have to return once or twice for things they've forgotten. Or, they don't have time to come back and so they end up doing without critical items

during the day. Either way they waste time and effort or get less done than they could.

Some people spend time organizing before they head out the door. They have a routine checklist – cell phone, wallet, schedule, briefcase, special materials for the day's meetings, etc. Some organize the night before, some get up early enough to do it in the morning. They leave the house once, with everything they need, and a game plan of how to get through the day. They waste less effort, and get more done because they spent a little time organizing, and because their routine checklist helped them stay on top of what they needed.

Think of working-on-the-business as taking time to organize yourself and your company. Have a checklist to go through, to be sure you're checking on everything. Include in that checklist: goals, budgets, actuals, performance reviews, meetings with employees, obstacles list and proposed changes, to name a few critical items.

Develop a way to make structured business decisions. Include in that structure a review of the facts, such as reports on how the company is doing. Comparing results versus goals will help you understand if you're on track or if it's time to make adjustments. Make assessments based on the facts, and record



Trusted Advisor to Business Owners

We Need Help Working on the Business

06/09/08

those assessments in your goals and plan reports. Set up conditions of satisfaction for going forward – what would cause you to say you’re satisfied and what wouldn’t.

If you’re having trouble getting though all of this working on the business and making structured business decisions, by all means find a business mentor to support the process. Some of the best owners are those who surround themselves with people who push them and challenge them. They find that both they and their companies get stronger by being challenged.

Regarding sales growth: if you have 10% market share think about expanding into a second offer. If under 10%, get going with expanding sales and marketing activities. Lay out a plan quickly, and get to it. Have the company work smarter, not just harder.

Looking for a good book? Try *Designing Solutions for Your Business Problems: A Structured Process for Managers and Consultants* by Betty Vandebosch.

Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at www.AskAndiBlog.com. Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.

*If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call **1.877.238.3535** or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.*