

## Tips for Success in Your Business

"Losers stop when they fail. Winners fail, fail, fail until they succeed."

I heard this phrase recently at a Tax Preparer's Conference, and it struck a responsive chord.

If you've started a small business, and have suffered some wins as well as losses you didn't anticipate, you may be wondering whether you made a good decision to start the business.

Most people question this decision at some point in their business. I know that I have. Several times.

Let's just cut to the chase. What's the biggest thing holding you back?

More often than not, the answer is not your skill or ability. Nor is it the skills and abilities of your employees. You and they are probably good at whatever it is that you do.

And the thing holding you back is probably not expenses, though there are always things we'd like to buy for our business.

Not even your competitors are the thing holding you back. Not really. Competition is a fact of life. Accept it.

What holds so many small businesses back is the lack of a continuing, effective sales effort.

And that sales effort is Job Number One for the owner. Doesn't matter how good the product or service, and doesn't matter how good the expense control. Doesn't even matter how much better you are than the competition.

If your existing and prospective customers don't know who you are, and that you actively want an opportunity to earn their business, they won't buy.

And everything stops.

Many Small Business Owners dislike one-on-one selling. Fair enough. It's a learned skill, and one that doesn't come naturally to most of us.

When I started my own business, I was often in the company of people who did small business accounting and tax preparation. These folks are highly intelligent and honorable and have so many good and admirable qualities.

Natural sales ability is usually missing. To be successful, they must either rapidly acquire that skill, or they must rapidly hire that skill - hire a salesperson.

The meetings I used to attend invariably had common themes - it's so hard to find good salespeople, it's so hard to keep good salespeople, and the prospects those salespeople find are usually not very good quality anyhow.

The tax and accounting practices that reported the most success with salespeople were usually large, successful practices. Success brings success.

What's going on? The owner of the beginning practice - the very definition of a small business owner - did not personally buy into the concept that successful sales was Job Number One.

You can delegate some of the sales work, but you must make sales your personal priority.

Business owners who don't make a personal and daily commitment to sales usually meet early and sometimes tragic ends.

Of the 5 practices that I started with, 4 were out of business within 6 months. Of the four, two had filed lawsuits alleging deceptive trade practices. One owner had been admitted to a psychiatric unit for severe depression.

The message for small business owners - both those early in the business, or those preparing to start a business is that you must make a personal, daily, and continuing commitment to sales.

If you don't, nobody else will. And you will never generate the sales volume you need. You can make excuses - competition is too tough, expenses are too high, can't get the right employees, etc.

And while all of those issues may be valid, the most common cause of the business failure is a lack of the owner's personal sales commitment.

Small business sales doesn't have to be daily cold-calling. Cold calling works, folks. But it's expensive, time-consuming, hot in the summer, and not very much fun for most of us.

Here are a couple of tactics that work for me.

Join A Networking Group. Committing to such a group should be a Number One priority for most full-time small businesses. It's a great way to extend your sales force, it's a great way to make some good friends, and it's a great way to reinforce your personal commitment to selling.

Invite prospects to a networking breakfast or lunch with some of your clients. Invite 3 prospects and 2 existing clients - 6 people total. All are honored to be included, and hopefully will enjoy networking with the others. It's an efficient and pleasant way to develop new business. This method also allows you to say thank you to your existing good client, who by their very presence will sell you to the prospect.

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