

Looking for Cheese

Every now and then a business book comes along that revolutionaries how the business world views an area of focus. One such book had the amusing title "Who Moved my Cheese" by Spencer Johnson. This short book that is illustrated like a children's story has some profound ideas in it that will radically change how any business approaches the marketplace. It is a book that has had his biggest impact in helping employees who have been displaced view their job change. But the ideas that are made simple in "Who Moved my Cheese" can impact virtually every area of business dealings.

The book communicates its message through a story of a mouse who finds that the place where he can find his cheese is no longer reliable. The mouse's friend continues to go to that same place to find more cheese only to continue to get hungrier and hungrier. But the hero of the story finds the new location of his cheese. When he finds his new source of cheese, he not only is astounded by the bounty but that even after telling his friend of the new source of cheese, that friend continues to insist that his cheese will be there where it always had been before and that in fact, the hero of our story is mistaken about the new location of cheese.

This, obviously, is not a tale about cheese location. It is a parable of how to handle change. The core value being taught by "Who Moved my Cheese" is that we cannot always look to the same resource for our supply. Markets dry up, businesses go through slumps and have to lay good people off and revenue streams change.

But one thing is for sure. There is always a new reservoir of funding somewhere in some market. And the wise business can foresee a change in the marketplace well in advance and make the changes they need to make so that they go where the money is, or move with the cheese to find the new source of rich funding and tap into it.

It is more than just a parable about looking for a new job. But it sheds light on the plight of the unemployed. So often someone who loses their job gets stuck in a mental cycle of waiting for their old job to hire them back or looking for an identical job in a very similar industry. However, if that industry is under economic pressure or if the business paradigm for that industry has changed dramatically, there may no longer be rich sources of funding and employment availability there that was once so reliable. In short, the cheese has moved.

This lesson has rich wisdom in business beyond the employment scenario. The businesses who have learned to be adaptable in a changing marketplace and have made the changes to follow the changes to the new source of "cheese" are the businesses that survive decade after decade. The grocery industry has seen that kind of change. Many grocery chains went belly up waiting for the cheese to come back to the old paradigm. But others saw the invasion of the big discount stores such as Wal-Mart and found ways to combat that change, to find new niches

in the industry where an untapped market need existed or to compete in the new business paradigm. Other industries where such dramatic changes have forced businesses to find out who moved their cheese are the record industry and the book sales business environment that have been so heavily impacted by internet sales.

But those businesses have survived. And if they can be aggressive and adapt and change with the markets, it's a good example for all of us as we continue to look for the new source of "cheese".

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