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If “The Most Wonderful Time of Year” is behind us, what does January bring? For some, there are those nasty post-holiday blues. But for many, we design our New Year’s Resolution chart to plaster around the house.



For small business, you can do the same thing, too. Let’s take 7 of the most common resolutions and apply them to your business. Even as we face a long road ahead, we find renewed vision to start off right!

1. EXERCISE

The most successful weight-loss strategies typically involve muscle building. Businesses engage in strength training by first assessing their talent base. Look for ways to rotate some employees to various positions in your company. Give them exposure to new areas of responsibility. It’s easier to let everyone stick to what they do best, but by strengthening across the board, you eliminate the vacuum that remains if one employee leaves her post or if one guy just happens to be sick for a week. Learning other jobs also broadens the employee’s perspective and usually improves morale as employees learn to walk in one another’s shoes. A team with greater diversity of understanding and experience makes for a strong force when times are lean.

2. EAT BETTER

Small business must consume healthier options. The most demoralizing product your employees consume is the feast of silence from the top. Our human nature gravitates to boss-bashing, quarreling with other co-workers, and griping about wages. This is a buffet of disaster and makes businesses sluggish. Feed your employees praise and positive reinforcement. Acknowledge the good efforts and don’t just criticize the mistakes. Provide opportunities to learn new skills. There are many low-cost webinars that can empower and encourage. Don’t forget the power of surprise rewards, the unexpected financial recognition that every employee loves. Even year-end bonuses over time become expected and lose their intended purpose (just ask Clark Griswold of “Christmas Vacation”).

3. STOP HARMFUL HABITS

Many commit personally to quit smoking or stop excessive drinking. But what about those harmful habits destructive to our business? One of the grossest areas of abuse is in the area of self-promotion. Yes, that’s right, quit promoting your services and products! The most common marketing error is saying, “if they only knew more about X, they’d buy it!” People don’t care about your products, but they do care about how those products will benefit them. Consumers are self-focused - that’s why they dispense their hard-earned dollar to whichever company offers the better price. Spend your marketing words on talking about the consumer - speak in their language and in ways that benefit them. Harley-Davidson has long been recognized for not selling motorcycles, but for the way it makes their loyal customers feel.

4. SMARTER FINANCIAL DECISIONS

Small business must make better financial choices. In your marketing, look for ways to stop putting down a lot of money for little ROI. Make sure you have strong measurables for that ad you've kept placing in your local yellow directory. Reduce your advertising space in the local paper and direct them to your website where you have unlimited space to tell about all the benefits. Quit sending out those same direct mail pieces if you can't account for its success (TIP: set up unique phone numbers and web landing pages for each venue in which you advertise - this helps quantify the leads).

5. ORGANIZATION

I started my year already by cleaning the garage, our bedroom closet and my office (well, it's a work-in-progress!) But we also decided as a family to make some family goals, plans and intentional efforts toward what results we really didn't see last year. Don't even begin to think of squeaking quietly through 1Q09 without a comprehensive yet simple marketing plan.

6. CONNECTING

Plenty of people start the new year committing to joining a networking group, signing up for their local Lion's or Rotary Club, or even attending and volunteering more in your local church. We satisfy our desire to connect with those whom we can help and from whom we receive benefit as well. Your business has got to break down the impersonal barrier and connect with your customers and prospects. The web is ridding the world of formalities, walls, and sales pitches. People need to know your values, the things that are important to you. They must hear your story, your journey of challenge and reward. Again, social media tools like Facebook and Twitter may be a way to allow your target market to become aware of you, have more likeability toward your business, and ultimately trust you enough to become your advocates and champions in the community.

7. GIVING MORE

I believe that most of you in small business are not in it just for the money. If so, in a recession, you'd walk out in a heartbeat. No, most of us went down the entrepreneurial path because we wanted a better quality of life: more time with the family, control over vacation schedules, ability to influence the community and world through charitable giving, and putting us in the driver's seat of our own destiny. I call them "greater things" - the often intangible, but clearly identifiable when you ask a small business owner why they continue to endure daily challenges and hardships. In a recent article, I talked about how charitable giving needs to be an essential element of how you present yourself to the community. This passion for influence and involvement is something often robbed of people sitting in a corporate cubicle. Rediscover your passion and recommit to making 2009 all about the greater things!

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