



SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

White Horse Plains

Community Futures Development Corporation



April 2005

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Listening to Your Heart Following the Compass Inside

It's happened to all of us at one time or another - that nagging feeling inside that something is just not quite right. We may not know exactly what it is that's not working, but we know it's something. Whether you stop to listen to that inner nagging or not, may make the difference between finding the path you ought to be on, or staying on the wrong one. All of us have intuition to some degree. Some people have learned how to "tune in" to their inner compass more effectively than others, but it's a skill we would all do well to improve. Your inner compass tells you when you need to pay attention to something you may not consciously be aware of. It often lets you know when it's time for change, or when you're heading down a destructive path. If you learn to heed its prompting in your business, you may avoid unnecessary pain and move towards success much more quickly.

Divine Discontent

That inner nagging has often been referred to as "divine discontent". You may feel uneasy or restless for reasons you can't quite put your finger on. You aren't happy or satisfied with the way things are going but you don't know why. You feel the need for a change but may not know where or how. Your stress level increases, even though your circumstances remain the same. You find yourself daydreaming, and not sleeping well. You may be irritated by small things that don't really matter, and not care about the things that do. If you are experiencing some of these things, you may be in the process of divine discontent. Master motivator, Brian Tracey, said "Unhappiness is to your life as pain is to your body. It is sent as a messenger to tell you that what you're doing is wrong for you." He goes on to say that divine discontent is actually a very good thing, because it always precedes a positive life change. Satisfaction rarely leads to change, but discontent most often does. If you are feeling restless, discontent, or uneasy, don't ignore it. Ask yourself if there are areas in your life and in your business that need to change. If you take the time to really reflect on what you're feeling, the answers will come to you, and you'll know what path you're being prodded to pursue.

Personal Purpose

Many times divine discontent comes as a result of not being true to your personal purpose. If the direction you are going with your business conflicts with your values, principles, or simply the purposes you have set out for your life, you will feel discontent. The incongruence



eventually turns into stress and affects you physically and emotionally. If you've never really determined your personal purpose, you may be feeling restless because of it. We all need to have a sense of purpose for the things we do in life. If you've never taken the time to define what your purpose in life is, make it a point to do so in the next two months. Personal purpose not only helps you to line up all the aspects of your life, but it also propels you more quickly towards your goals. Why? Because they now have a purpose!

Uncommon Commitment

Sometimes discontent shows itself in a lack of commitment. It may be commitment to your customers, your staff, or your product or service. If you're experiencing a lackadaisical attitude towards your daily routine, ask yourself if you're committed to the right things. It's hard to be committed to something you don't really believe in, even if you once did! Commitment to what you're doing is a sure sign that you're on the right track. If your commitment is waning, it may be a warning sign. Pay attention.

Activating Action

If you think you've been experiencing some divine discontent, here are some steps that might help you to determine which direction to take:

1. Set aside a specific time when you will think about these things. It must be away from the office, your family, and your regular activities. Ideally, it should be away from other people. If you enjoy keeping a journal, use it as a way to answer the questions. If not, simply jot down some of the areas where you feel discontent, and ask yourself if there is a need for change that corresponds to those areas.
2. If you've never written a personal mission statement, you should take the time to do so. Spend some time looking at what's really important to you, what you value, what you want to accomplish in life, what you hope others will say about you when you're gone, and then work backwards to develop a personal purpose wherein everything you do - at work or at home - lines up with that purpose.
3. Look at your commitment. Are there things you're struggling to stay committed to? Ask yourself why. Are they no longer important to you? Are they not right for you at this moment in time? Are there changes that need to be made in order for your commitment level to rise a few notches?

Your inner compass will rarely lead you astray. The question you must ask yourself is, are you willing to tune in to what it's saying, and, are you willing to make the changes it's suggesting you make? Ignoring its prompting will leave you frustrated, irritable, and discontent. Paying attention will ensure you remain on the right path for you, and your business.

Uncommon Courtesy

A Tool for Growing Your Business

Many people are asking, whatever happened to common courtesy? Courtesy is something that appears to be doing a disappearing act in our culture. Recently, a group of advertising and marketing executives was asked how courteous they thought business professionals were today, as compared to ten years ago. Of those interviewed, 40% said they felt people are generally less courteous than they were ten years ago, and only 16% felt people were more courteous. While it seems

courtesy is often not a top priority for busy, sometimes harried professionals it is still something most people desire, and being a courteous business may set you apart from those who aren't. You can actually use courtesy as a way to grow your business. Since those companies who provide courteous service are rare, those who do are remembered, and referred to others.

Courtesy has been defined as "showing good manners - being polite". When was the last time you experienced someone showing you good manners or being polite? Courtesy often goes out the window because of how rushed we are. We can't wait the extra five minutes to allow someone to go ahead of us in a line because we're late for something. We don't let another person go through the door first because we want to get ahead of them. We neglect to thank a store clerk for their help because we're rushing off to make our purchases. Courtesy has indeed become, uncommon. How courteous are you? How courteous is your staff? Are you known as the company that shows good manners and politeness at all times?

Here's a checklist of some common ways to show uncommon courtesy.

- Do you always say please and thank you at restaurants, when you shop, when someone has helped you in some way?
- Do you notice when people are approaching a building at the same time as you and hold the door open for them?
- Are you generous with compliments and express them when others have done a good job?
- Do you return phone calls and emails in a timely manner?
- Do you allow the person with one grocery item to go ahead of you at the check-out?
- Do you allow other vehicles to move into the lane in front of you without honking your horn?
- Do you regularly express gratitude to those around you, especially when someone has done something nice for you?
- Are you available to others without making them feel like they're imposing?
- Do you pay your bills on time, or let your creditors know if you cannot?
- Are you cautious about how you speak about others?
- Do you make sure never to put down your competitors or speak ill of them?
- Do your customers know that you value them?
- Have you trained your staff to respond with courtesy and politeness in all situations?
- Do you regularly ask others for input, and genuinely consider what they have offered?
- Do you make sure never to keep people waiting for longer than a few minutes to meet with you?
- Do you make every effort to curb your tongue when you feel like flying off the handle?



You get the picture. They may seem like small things - but it's the small gestures that make a big impression. Do a courtesy check for yourself and your staff, and use polite, courteous service as a tool to impress your customers and prospects, and draw them through your doors. After all, who wouldn't want to do business with a company as nice as yours?

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Spring Cleaning Your Office

With Spring just around the corner, most of us feel a tug to Spring clean, organize or tidy some aspect of our world. People are seen washing windows, cleaning closets, organizing spaces, getting rid of clutter, cleaning their yards . . . but what about your office? When was the last time you spent some time giving your office space a good overhaul? After all, it is where you spend a lot of your time, and represents your business to others. What kind of impression do you make on potential customers or clients with binders piled up on the floor behind your chair, files strewn about as if they're not important enough to have a home, a desk piled high with papers, books and coffee mugs from the last three days? What goes through the mind of the customer on the other end of the phone line when you say "hang on just a minute while I locate that file", and leave them on hold for 10 minutes while you're looking? A cluttered, disorganized work space not only reflects badly on your ability to manage your business, but actually prevents you from working efficiently and effectively. Even if you don't have the Spring cleaning bug - take the initiative to give your office a good clean. You'll notice the results right away.

Depending on your style, you may want to take an entire day to go through your office and be done with it. If you can't afford to take that much time at once, or if it seems too overwhelming, take each section of the following items and tackle one at a time over a week or so. Whichever way you decide to proceed set a goal for when you'd like it to be done, so the task doesn't carry on into summer!

Filing Physical Files

This includes everything currently on your desk, in your in-basket, sitting on trays or in stand-up files. Put all your files in one large pile on your desk and go through them one by one to create three piles: to file (archive), active/current projects, potential work (future projects). Each file must be placed on one of these piles. File the folders that need to be archived. Next, define a system of how you will deal with current projects and potential work. If you're the type that likes all current work on your desk for easy daily access, create a place to keep them on hand. If you like everything to stay in your file cabinets, file them. Do the same for future projects.

Contacts

Go through your Rolodex, business card file and address book. Cross off or toss any contacts you know are old. Update any information that needs to be updated (i.e. that new phone number for Joe's Body Shop you scribbled on a napkin should be transferred to your address book).

Computer

Does your computer desktop look like the sale bin at the back of your grocery store? Take a look at how your computer files are organized. Can you create folders and sub-folders to categorize your files logically? Are there files you can delete? Are there items that have been saved to the wrong file? Move them to the correct file. Doing this will help you to find things more easily when you need to access them. While you're there, take a look at your browser bookmarks. Are there some you can delete? Is there some way to organize and categorize them to make finding sites easier? What about your email? When was the last time you deleted unnecessary messages? Have you created email sub-folders to make searching for that specific email from Company X simpler?



Physical Space Desk

How much unnecessary stuff is on your desk? More than one coffee mug is not OK. A family photo or two are fine, but if your desk looks like a photographer's showroom you'll need to simplify. The

clearer your workspace, the more efficiently you will work. Consolidate and simplify what is on your desk. Put away what you can in drawers to leave a clean, neat working surface.

Bookshelves

Are your books organized in some kind of order so you know where to look when you need something? Are they neat and tidy or have they become the receptacle for everything you don't know what to do with - photos from the Christmas party, the outdated company envelopes you can't bring yourself to throw away, disks and CD's you don't know what to do with? De-clutter as much as you can, and put the rest away.

Cabinets

If you're lucky enough to have cabinets in your office that have doors on them, you can hide a lot of stuff you don't know what to do with. If you don't, you may need to invest in some bankers boxes or storage bins to get things out of the way.

Floorspace

Nothing says "disorganized and inefficient" like stuff overflowing onto your floor. Binders piled high, that box of annual reports you ended up printing too many of, the three boxes of printer toner you keep forgetting to recycle, magazines, etc. Try to get everything off your floor that isn't a piece of furniture or equipment. You'll be amazed at how good it feels to walk into a room that's been de-cluttered.

Office Equipment

When was the last time you took your computer in for a cleaning and service? A few bucks now will save you a lot later. What about your printer, scanner, keyboard and mouse? Do they need a dusting or service of any kind? Your fax machine? Keeping your office equipment well-serviced and maintained will save you hours of frustration, as they won't break down as readily.

Are you feeling inspired yet? Set a goal for accomplishing a Spring clean in each of the above categories. You won't believe how good it will feel, and what a difference it will make on the impression you make on others.

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7 Ways to Make Your Customers Feel Important

How many times have you spent your well-earned dollars on a product or service, only to feel like a number or a commodity to the company once they've received payment? On the other hand, how well do you remember the companies that made you feel like they really valued you as a customer? It seems that the second scenario is becoming rarer, and those companies that do go the extra mile to make their customers feel important and valued, stand head and shoulders above the rest. Winning customer loyalty takes a lot of time and energy, which is why so many companies can't be bothered, but achieving it will give you a never-ending source of repeat business and referrals. How is your business doing in making your customers feel important? Here are some ways you can wow your customers.

Pay attention

When dealing with your customers, take note of all the little things that may not seem important to

the transaction at hand. Did Mr. Jones walk in with a limp and a cane today? Was Susan not her usual chatty self when she came in to pick up that part she ordered? When John came in, did you notice he had a new puppy in tow? Paying attention to the little details of everyday life, and letting your customers know you noticed, will make them feel valued.

Really Listen

Use what Stephen Covey calls Level 4 Listening - listening empathically. Not just for the content, or for how you will respond, but listening between the words you hear. Do you hear fear, reluctance, or excitement? When you really listen you can learn what your customers truly need, and meeting their needs is another way you can make them feel important.

Put Them First

Remember that most customers are thinking WIIFM (what's in it for me?). In all your interactions with customers, think about whether you're giving them the answer to that question. Do they know you care about what's important to them? What's in it for them has to come before what's in it for you, or the customer service equation doesn't work. I recently heard someone say, "people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Put Yourself in Their Shoes

So, that customer standing in front of you is angry about what they perceive is sub-standard service. It sounds outrageous to you, but to them it's very real. When faced with complaints or confrontation by your customers, put yourself in their shoes. Try to remember the last time you were unsatisfied with something you paid for. How did it feel? Were you acknowledged or dismissed by the company? How would you have liked to be treated? Stepping back from the situation and realizing every consumer is just like you, might help you to show a little more compassion and understanding in difficult situations.

Be Honest and Genuinely Open to Feedback

Criticism or complaints from your customers are actually your greatest customer service opportunities. When you know what you've done wrong, you can take steps to make it right. Be honest when you have made a mistake, and genuinely seek to rectify it. Throw defensiveness out the window, and take your customers' feedback to heart. It may sting at first, but it will take you to a greater level of customer service. Implement the things you hear from your customers, and thank them for the opportunity to get better at what you do.



Deal with Problems Quickly

Nothing is more irritating than having a problem with a business, and getting the runaround, or worse, getting no attention at all. When a problem comes to your attention, deal with it immediately. This assures your customers that they are important to you. When you make the time to deal with their issues right away, you show that you value them. When you put it off, allowing weeks to go by without a word, you let them know that you don't care if they go somewhere else!

Be Creative in Showing Appreciation

Creativity takes effort, but taking those few moments each week to do something nice for your customers goes a long, long way to making them feel special and inspiring loyalty. You may need to add some money to your marketing budget, but the little you spend on showing your appreciation will pay off huge dividends. The possibilities are only as limited as your imagination. Here are just a few ideas:

- Hold a customer appreciation event with free hot dogs and ice cream
- Send flowers to a long-time customer who's experienced a loss or is going through a difficult time
- Charge up \$10 on a few Starbucks cards and have a draw for two customers a month - just because you appreciate them

- Send a bottle of wine to a customer who made a large purchase
- Purchase two event tickets (sports or concert) and send them to a customer who gave a referral
- Have a weekly or monthly draw for a gift basket - customers can enter every time they make a purchase
- Send thank you cards for no other reason than to thank your customers for their loyalty

What's holding you back from making your customers feel important? These few simple steps can help you create a loyal customer base - and that's something solid to build a business on!

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Winning Advertisements for Small Business

We've all seen them - those regular two-page spreads, full-colour, glossy magazine ads from mega-companies - and most of us who run small businesses just shake our heads as we imagine the cost of running just one of those ads. Advertising your business can be expensive, and the return on your investment is often low. As a result, many small businesses do not advertise. However, if you are going to spend advertising dollars, here are some tricks you can use to maximize the effectiveness of your ad. These principles are proven to increase ad response and to provide your business with stronger exposure.

Remember that advertising is rarely effective if it's a one-shot deal. If you're going to advertise, you should do it strategically so the ad appears in a given publication or site for at least 4-6 times. Marketing experts say that it takes the average consumer ten hits (exposures to the same information) before they respond to it. If you feel you'd like to try an advertising campaign for your business, follow these steps to building a strong ad, and carefully plan your strategy.

Targeted Placement - Your ad for mountain bikes may not be very effective in a senior's magazine. If you're selling rich gourmet desserts, you probably want to stay away from health-oriented publications. Determine who your target audience is and research what they read and where they look for information. A trade magazine might be the perfect place to advertise your product or service, but there might be other sources as well. What about a full-page glossy poster selling your fitness training services at local health clubs or health food stores? Perhaps a rack card at your local tourist or visitor info centre might be the way to advertise your Bed and Breakfast. Think about all the places your target audience gathers, and place your ad where they will see it.

A Catchy Headline - A headline is perhaps the most important piece of your ad. If what grabs your audience's eye doesn't also grab their attention, you've lost the battle. People are drawn to headlines that have numbers - "Ten Ways to . . .", "Five Things You Should Know About . . .". They are also attracted to what they might consider "insider" information. "What the ABC industry isn't telling you about . . .". Sometimes, well-placed humour works to catch people's interest. "The Zoo at Your Table". Another effective headline tool is "How to . . ." and "Tricks or Tips for . . ." Make your headline an attention grabber and you're half-way there.

Well Thought-Out Graphics - This can be the trickiest part of any ad. I've seen all too many cluttered, illogical graphics in advertisements that just scream at me to look away rather than be drawn in. Graphics are powerful if used well. A simple image with the right three words can sell millions (remember "Just Do It")? A graphically complex ad can also be very effective, but the graphics need to have purpose, and point to the words rather than detract from them. If you're not particularly graphically inclined, it may be worth your while to hire a graphic artist to create your ad for you. It will be



money well-spent.

An Irresistible Offer - Do you know why television infomercials are so effective? Because the offers are irresistible to the consumers who are watching. Not only do you get the incredible grill, but you also get the accessory kit AND the cookbook for free. And oh, if you order in the next ten minutes you'll also get Some people can't resist if they feel they're getting extra deals for the price of the original item. Can you place something in your add that complements the product or service you're offering? It doesn't have to cost a lot, but it can work to draw those customers who just love getting that "something extra".

Limited Response Time - There's something else that's irresistible to some people - a limited response time. If you tell them they can only get the deal for the next 30 days, they're more likely to buy it than if they think they have unlimited time to make a decision. Limited quantities can also work - "Only 200 tickets available - order now!" This creates a sense of urgency in people and pushes them towards making a purchasing decision.

A Call to Action - This is the most-often forgotten element in ads, and yet it is the entire point of the ad! Give people instructions as to what you want them to do. "Call today, buy now, fax in your registration before January 20th, register now". If you don't tell people what you want them to do, and make it easy for them to do it, they won't do anything. A recent ad promoting a talk about Tibet placed by a museum, had no telephone number, and their website had no way to order. Rather than calling for action the ad promoted inaction!

An Easy Response Vehicle - Make it as easy as possible for people to respond to your call to action. A toll free number, an email address or web site, a number of payment options - the easier you make it for people to respond to your ad, the more likely they will. Be specific, and if possible, give a variety of options.

For a small business, advertising can be tricky, but with a few strategic elements, you can create a winning ad that brings potential customers to your door.

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Published in cooperation with Your Corporate Writer - www.ycw.ca