



SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

White Horse Plains

Community Futures Development Corporation



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Expand Your Leadership in 2006!

The beginning of a new year almost always brings with it some reflection and planning. Whether it's setting new year's resolutions, re-examining your business plan and making adjustments, or personal goal-setting, the blank slate of another year seems to inspire us to imagine 12 months of unlimited possibilities. Whatever form that reflection is taking for you as you face 2006, we'd like to encourage you to look at the area of expanding your leadership skills in your business in the coming year. As a business owner, you are a leader. You don't really have a choice about that. You lead those who work for you, you lead in your industry, you even lead your customers in their purchasing decisions and ultimately in remaining loyal to your business. So, given that leadership is inherent in being an entrepreneur, what will you do to expand that aspect of your business skill?

"Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen."

Alan Keith, Lucas Digital

That quote comes from an extraordinary book called *The Leadership Challenge*, by James Kouzes and Barry Posner. I highly recommend this potent book to anyone wishing to explore this area further. It's easy to read and apply the principles in it to your particular business situation. Keith's comment really sums up the philosophy Kouzes and Posner propose in their book. The foundation of leadership is not about trying to convince people to follow you, it's about giving them a reason to do so. When you do that, people can see their part in the plan and feel they are contributing to something greater than themselves, and then you have an unstoppable force for your business. Perhaps *The Leadership Challenge* can be part of your commitment to development this year (see article in this issue titled Committed to Development).

The first step in the process of expanding your leadership is to clarify your own values, strengths and beliefs. A true leader knows what they stand for and does so unwaveringly. One of the greatest weaknesses of failed leaders is a lack of clarity and purpose. So, here are a few ways that you can explore this for yourself. It may be just a beginning, but I trust that it will inspire you to do some further work in this area.

Take a journal, or sit down at your computer, and write the answers to the following questions. The writing part is important - something powerful happens when you commit your thoughts to writing. It propels you forward in



a way that simply thinking about things cannot do.

- What do others perceive as being my values? (Ask them if you don't know. Their answers may surprise you.)
- Are the values others are perceiving your true values?
- What do you stand for and why? How are you demonstrating this in your personal and business life?
- What do you believe in and why?
- What keeps you awake at night? Why?
- What kinds of things grab hold of you and won't let go? Why?
- Who have been leadership role models in your life? What qualities do you admire about them?
- Who in past or present history have you admired as leaders? What is it that you admire?
- If you could, how would you like to change the world?
- If there were no limitations (financial or otherwise), what would you like to accomplish in your business?
- Describe your perfect work environment (include the physical space, the qualities demonstrated by your team, and the image you present to your customers).
- What would you like people to say about your business?
- What do you think are your best leadership skills? (check back with the question about leaders you admire - you may be surprised that you exemplify some of the attributes you see in them.)

Review the answers to your questions and see whether you can see patterns emerging about who you are and what kind of leadership style naturally emerges. For example, when I did this exercise, some of the people I chose as leaders I admired were Martin Luther, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Mother Theresa. For the first two, the things I admired were their passionate commitment to their beliefs, their boldness in speaking and standing for those beliefs, and their tireless commitment to telling that story. In the case of Mother Theresa, I again admired her passion and commitment to what she believed to be her calling - helping the poor and desolate - and for her quiet, undying love for those people. Themes that emerged for me were passion, commitment, boldness, belief, and compassion. When I looked at the leadership activities I've been involved in throughout the past, I can see those things rising to the surface as values, and as a specific leadership style.

Take this first step in examining some aspects of your leadership. If you enjoy that exploration, take it a step further and take a course or read a book on leadership that will move you on to a deeper level of understanding and skill-building. Expanding your leadership skills will not only enhance your personal understanding, it will increase your influence and confidence in all the activities you undertake - whether on a volunteer basis or in your business. Give yourself a leadership challenge in 2006 and see where it takes you!

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Applying the "7 Habits" to Your Sales Strategy

If you've never read or listened to "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" by Dr. Steven Covey, you must put it on your list of goals for 2006. If you have, you should still add it to your goal list because it's worth reviewing every year or two! This time-tested, proven and brilliant series of life-rules has been on the best seller list for almost 20 years, and is as relevant and cogent today as it was when Covey wrote it years ago. These seven principles can be applied to any area of life, and reading through them in detail is worth your time and energy. This month,

we're going to look specifically at how those principles can apply to your sales approach to increase your confidence, your strategy and your bottom line.

Habit #1 - Be Proactive

Rolling the dice and hoping you'll wind up with a sale doesn't cut it in today's market. You need to be savvy and strategic. Covey's first point emphasizes the importance of not leaving things to chance, and encourages a proactive approach to all areas of life. As a sales professional, are you continually looking for new markets? Are you prospecting regularly? Are you generating and following up on leads? Are you constantly on the lookout for new people to approach or new ways to talk about your product or service? If you are proactive in your approach to sales in the coming year, you'll notice a marked increase in your sales success. Those who are on the proactive edge will always be two steps ahead of those who are waiting for sales to drop into their laps.

Habit #2 - Begin with the end in mind

Covey talks about the importance of knowing what you want to achieve before doing anything about it. Be clear about your goals and what you want to accomplish and work backwards from there. Do you want to increase your gross sales by \$30,000 this year? What will you need to do to achieve that? Break it down and be specific. \$30,000 is \$2,500 per month or \$625 per week. What do you need to do each month in order to raise your sales by that much? Do you want to improve your skills by taking additional training? When will you do that and how much will it cost you? Keep your vision clearly in front of you and work from there toward accomplishing your goals.



Habit #3 - Put first things first

Dr. Covey is fanatical about priorities, and all of us would do well to listen to this principle as a precursor to success.

Putting first things first means knowing what's important to you, and organizing your life accordingly. Sales success and earning a good living is important, but is it more important than spending time with your family? Covey suggests that if you truly put things in your life first that ought to be first, the rest will fall into place. Examine your goals and how you're spending your time to see if they line up with your values. Incongruence in this area will cause stress, and will hold you back from success.

Habit #4 - Think win/win

In every situation, with every person, if you begin thinking win/win you will become more successful. This principle has the power to transform the ordinary to extraordinary. If, every time you're talking to a customer or prospect, you're thinking win/win (in other words, how can they get what they want and need, and you get what you want and need), you will be far more likely to make the sale and win a loyal customer. If all you focus on is how much money you can make off the sale, you may win in the short-term, but you won't win the long-term results.

Habit #5 - Seek first to understand, then to be understood

This is not a new concept. In fact, you've probably heard some variation of it in every sales conference or workshop you've ever taken. Improving your listening skills is important. But Covey goes beyond just "listening" to "understanding". If you really want to get to the root of what your customer needs, you have to do more than listen. You've got to read between the lines, hear what they aren't saying as well as what they are. Above all, you've got to set aside what it is you want them to understand about you (how great your product is, how much it will benefit them, how much you need this sale, etc.). As long as you're thinking about being understood, you're not going to be able to understand.

Habit #6 - Synergize

The sixth habit involves the art of communication and positive energy between you and other people. Are you getting the most out of your relationships with co-workers? Do you feel a partnership with them? Are you on the same page, the same team? Are you pulling together, speaking the same language, wanting the same things, encouraging and rooting for each other? As a business owner, are you building a synergistic team? Are you working closely with others in your community? The energy of many always outperforms the energy of one. Where can you apply the principle of synergy in your sales strategy?

Habit #7 - Sharpen the Saw

Finally, Covey talks about the commitment to continuous improvement. As a sales professional, are you always looking for ways to improve your skills? To grow as a professional and as a person? Nothing in life is static. It either moves forward, or backward. If you're not growing, you're shrinking. Sharpening the saw is about an attitude of perpetual growth and improvement. How dull is your saw?

As you approach this new year, challenge yourself to read Covey's book. Take a look at how these principles can help you to reach your goals of even greater sales this year. You might be surprised to find yourself applying them to other areas of your life as well, and achieving a kind of success in your life you never even imagined!

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Committed to Development

Are you the type of person who receives a seminar flyer in the mail and leaps to your computer to complete the online registration form so you can be one of the first to register? Do you think about and relish the thought of how many days you can spend this year taking courses and attending workshops? Does the mere idea of increasing your knowledge and skill bring tears of joy to your eyes? If you answered yes to these questions, you probably don't need to read this article. But if you're like most small business owners, the sight of that flyer simply induces guilt from knowing you ought to consider it but not seeing how you can afford the time away from your business. Personal and professional development is vital to personal and business success, but it seems to be the thing that is most easily neglected in the grand scheme of life's demands.

Why not make this a year that you commit to development for yourself and your business? There are many, creative ways to bring professional development into your busy schedule, and the more that you do, the more you'll boost your creativity, your perspective, your skill and your confidence. It doesn't necessarily take a huge investment of time or money to build development activities into your life, but if you do, you'll reap the benefits of doing so. Here are a few ideas.

Conferences - chances are, there are conferences in your industry every year. These can be expensive, especially if they are held across the country, but you should consider attending every so often. Connecting with other people in your industry, hearing about progress and new developments, and being challenged by great speakers, can boost your development as a person and your business development. Build conference attendance into your budget and plan ahead.

Seminars and workshops - the next time one of those flyers crosses your desk, don't immediately throw it into your recycle bin or into your "I'll take a look at that when I have time which will actually be after the seminar is over" bin. Review the contents and see whether anything appeals to you (or perhaps more accurately - what you think would be valuable for you to learn). If a majority of the content appears worthwhile, give yourself permission to take a day and attend. What you learn will give you a fresh perspective on what's going on in your business, as well as the opportunity to

network with others, which can be a great marketing by-product!

Audio tapes/CD's - there is a plethora of development programs available in audio format. These are wonderful because you can listen to them while you're in your car, even in your office while you're doing mindless tasks like filing. They don't require a day off work, but you can still gain valuable insights and ideas by listening to great authors and speakers like Jack Canfield, Steven Covey, Brian Tracey, and others. These are easy to build into your already busy schedule.

Training videos or DVD's - again, easily available to rent or purchase. You can view them on your personal time, or use them in staff meetings as part of your staff training. Or, you can take a personal day and do training in the comfort of your own home. These are great, especially if you purchase them, because you can watch them over and over. You'll be surprised at how many different things you notice each time you view them, depending on what's going on in your business at the time.

Focus or peer groups - gather together a group of colleagues in other industries and form a focus group whose purpose is professional development. I was part of a group like this several years ago. It was made up of women entrepreneurs, and we met every Wednesday over lunch. Each week someone would be responsible for either making a presentation or finding a speaker. Because we came together from many different industries, the topics were usually focused on the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in general, and women specifically. It was delightful to have a specific development activity each week, and to meet with others who were facing the same challenges.

Books and tutorials - another inexpensive and practical way to build development into your business is to read books and to use tutorials. Find a book that interests you - it may be an industry-specific book or a more general one where you will apply principles to your business - and commit to reading it by a certain date (because we all know that if you don't, it will still be sitting on your bookshelf six months from now!). Use tutorials to learn specific skills - they're especially great for learning new software programs.

There's really no excuse for not committing to development in the coming year. Set a goal for how many development days you'd like to build in, and then schedule your time accordingly. Whether you take a few days to listen to a high achiever share how he or she built their business, or attend a seminar to learn how to improve some aspect of your business, you'll benefit greatly from that commitment. So will your business.

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Trading Spaces with Your Marketing

If you've ever watched the popular home design show "Trading Spaces", you will have either been amazed or appalled at what happens when two families literally "trade spaces" and redecorate portions of each other's homes. With the right designer leading the process, the results can be fabulous. Drab, dreary rooms are transformed with brilliant colour and accents. Bad room layouts are turned into functional, practical living spaces. The transformation is often remarkable. What do you think would happen if you tried a similar concept with your business marketing? What if you found a complimentary business and literally "traded" your marketing? You gave them your brochures, flyers, ads, and strategies and they gave you theirs. Then, you reviewed each other's materials and offered suggestions for improvement, shared brilliant ideas, and allowed each other to view your marketing from a completely unbiased and unique perspective. Here are some things

you might consider.

Choose a complementary but not competitive business

It might be a bit awkward to do this kind of a trade with one of your competitors since it would be difficult to be objective, but there are businesses that complement yours with whom you might be very successful. Are you a car dealership? Perhaps you could consider the carwash down the road. Are you a small coffee shop? The bakery a few blocks down might be a good choice.

Define what you want from each other

Ask the owner of your complementary business if they would be interested in engaging in a fun and hopefully productive review of each other's marketing. If they agree, define for each other exactly what kind of feedback you're looking for. Are you looking for first impressions? Are you interested in an in-depth review of content? Would you like some feedback on the graphics you're using? An overview of how your material comes across? Then ask them what they're looking for. Write those things down and perform your review based on those things.

Determine a deadline and follow through

Depending on how busy each of you are, you could probably perform a fairly comprehensive review in a month or so, however, the timeline is up to you. Decide on a date when you'd like to get together to talk about your findings, and arrange a place and time.

Keep an open mind

In the TV show - sometimes the results are not exactly what the returning homeowner wants. In fact, sometimes the results are downright disastrous. You may find that the review provided by your partner gives you information you disagree with, or don't like. Try to remain objective. It's easy to get defensive if someone criticizes something you've worked hard on. Most of the time if you can take a step back, you'll see something worthwhile and valuable in what has been said. After all, you wanted a completely unbiased opinion, and holding on to the way you've done things in the past won't help you to move forward. Remember that your partner is seeing things that other people are probably seeing as well, and you'll do well to take into consideration what they have to say. This doesn't mean that you will implement every recommendation, but it does mean that you'll think about them before discarding them.



Share the results with your partner

If you do get great feedback and decide to implement some of the ideas your partner suggested, let them know what you're doing. It will build trust and solidify your relationship with them, and they'll feel good about having shared in your business growth and success.

Recognize the bonus of a marketing partner

An added bonus to developing this kind of partnership, is building relationships with another business from whom you might benefit in the referral of customers. If you become top of mind with the owner of a complimentary business, who do you think they'll refer their customers to when they're looking for your product or service? Hopefully you'll do the same for them. A reciprocal relationship like this can be a great way to boost your exposure and increase your customer base.

If you feel your marketing has become tired and stale, and want a fresh new approach, this "trading spaces" concept might just be a way for you to get some new ideas and inject some energy and flair to your marketing strategy.

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Learning the Skill of Rising Above

"Nothing great has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside them was superior to their circumstances."

Bruce Barton

If you're like most entrepreneurs I know, you have days when before you've even had your second cup of coffee the number of emergencies you've attended to and fires you've put out has sent your blood pressure soaring. There are days when it's smooth sailing, but more often than not the business owner's day is full of crisis, problem-solving, stress, disappointment, and anxiety. On those days when you are at your wit's end and feel you can't handle one more thing, how do you react when that final straw is laid onto the pile? Being able to rise above the stress and strain of running a business, being able to keep perspective and stay calm when all is chaos around you, may be one of the greatest skills you will ever learn or develop. You don't have to enroll in the nearest yoga class to learn how to keep that inner calm (although many people find that a useful tool), but there are some things you can begin practicing that will help you to rise above whatever circumstances you are facing, no matter how big or stressful.

1. Practice eliminating unrealistic expectations

It's when we have unrealistic expectations both of ourselves and of others that we become disappointed in our/their performance. If you can learn to accept yourself for your strengths and weaknesses and stop placing unmeetable expectations on yourself, you'll reduce your stress level overnight. If you can do this with others as well, it will be even more beneficial. People are people - they make mistakes and from time to time they're bound to disappoint you. This doesn't mean you shouldn't set standards and work toward achieving them, but it does mean that when mistakes are made, you accept them, learn from them and move on.

2. Practice focusing on timeless values

In the article on leadership, we challenged you to know what you believe and what you stand for. In this situation, the challenge is to focus on those things when you're faced with stressful situations. For example, say one of your employees fesses up to making a big mistake that may cost you money or time to fix, but offers to do whatever he/she can do to make up for it. If you value honesty, integrity and loyalty, focus on the fact that they behaved in a way that lined up with your values. The cost of time and money may add stress to your workload, but having an employee you can trust and count on is a greater blessing than the cost of that mistake.

3. Practice seeing and making the positive choices

In every situation you have the choice to respond well or badly. There's no such thing as "I had no choice", in how you react to a situation. The lesson is in recognizing that immediately, and choosing the higher road regardless of how you feel. Remaining calm when your customer calls for the 10th time that day asking if their repair has been done; choosing conversation rather than conflict with your manager; biting your tongue when you are tempted to complain about an employee; choosing not to yell or cuss in front of your staff when you find out your supplier is going to be late - these are the kinds of situations where you choose your reaction. Rising above your circumstances involves making choices, sometimes a thousand times a day. But practicing those positive choices will make you better at it. In the end, you'll like the result much more than when you allow yourself to give in to the stress and behave in ways you will regret later.



4. Practice the art of gratefulness

There will always be people that are better off than you are, and it's easy to look at them and wonder why you can't get those breaks too, or to be as well off as they are. But at the same time, there are a hundred people who don't have it as well as you do. Practicing gratefulness as a life strategy will help you to maintain a positive, balanced perspective. So your supplier is going to be late. So you have to phone your customer and let them know their item won't be delivered on time. Here's what you have to be grateful for . . . you have a business that's earning you a decent living. You have employees who care about you and your business. You have a loyal base of customers. You're healthy enough to work hard. Sure, that situation will impact the stress load in your workplace, but if that's the only thing you see you're sure to cave in to that pressure.

5. Practice rational problem-solving

By this I mean take the emotion out of the situation you're facing and look at the facts. Often when we do that, the situation is not nearly as bad as how it feels. When you rise above the emotion and look at the situation for what it is, you can make solid, rational decisions about how to solve it. Recognize that there are deeper triggers that cause your emotional reactions and know what they are so you can move away from them to see the situation for what it is. If you have trouble with this, ask for help from someone who can look objectively at the situation.

If you begin by practicing these five principles when you feel like circumstances are getting to you, you will find yourself being able to rise above those circumstances and reducing the amount of stress that you feel. You'll also lead by example, and those who work with you will follow your lead. Become a "rise above" workplace and see what an impact it has on your business!

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