

SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS



April 2007

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Nine Essentials to Business Survival

Part 1 of 3

Survivor, LOST, The Poseidon Adventure, Castaway, The Blue Lagoon, The Swiss Family Robinson, and Gilligan's Island. As far back as I can remember, our culture has had a fascination about what it takes to survive. Hollywood has made billions of dollars on countless movies from surviving catastrophic physical events like hurricanes, earthquakes and twisters, to surviving the horrors of war. We are fascinated by what it is that allows one person to tenaciously hold on to life, while others succumb to their circumstances. Al Siebert, author of *The Survivor Personality*, is internationally known for his research on survivor traits. His research has shown that there are nine persistent common traits present in those who survive horrific life traumas. As I read about these 9 traits I realized that these very traits are inherent in the owners of successful businesses – many of which have also survived their own traumas. These traits are so important that we're going to treat them in a 3-part series. In part I, we'll look at the first 3 of these traits.

Trait #1 – Ability to learn from experience

Learning from experience is all about having “street smarts”. It's not about book knowledge or academic achievement; it's about experiencing tough times and figuring out the important lessons to be learned from those experiences, and then applying them to the things you face in the future. Of course, it takes a willingness to try new things and take risks in order to have those experiences in the first place. Lionel L. Fisher in his book, *On Your Own – A Guide to Working Happily, Productively and Successfully from Home* says this about people who demonstrate this trait: “By retaining a childlike curiosity, by questioning constantly, by trusting their feelings, by being willing to experiment with life, and to make mistakes – even to look foolish provided they learn from them – they develop an increasingly accurate understanding of the world around them. This hard-earned understanding in turn, refines their coping skills and talents.” To be a survivor in business, you must demonstrate this trait in great measure. So much of running your own business is trial and error. Are you willing to try new things? Are you willing to make mistakes? Do you ask questions and experiment? Are you willing to move beyond the security of where



you are right now? When you face setbacks or failures, do you mutter under your breath, try to forget and just plow through, or do you look at what's happening and find ways to learn from that situation so that you can apply it down the road? Developing this skill is critical to business success.

Trait #2 – Mental and emotional flexibility

Fisher says “These folks can be optimistic and pessimistic, self-critical and self-confident, assured and doubtful, trusting and suspicious, selfish and unselfish – in fact, all at the same time. And because they can be both, they choose to respond in one way or the other, depending on the circumstances and the moment.” Mental and emotional flexibility means that you are able to choose the reaction appropriate to the situation. No one would survive on a desert island if they were not able to be flexible. So, the first hut you built out of bamboo and straw didn't keep out the rain. Rather than choosing to give in to despair, you look around you and see what else you have to work with. You use your creativity to learn from the challenges you faced the first time. Tom Hanks demonstrated this trait magnificently in the film, *Castaway*, in which he alone survives a plane crash and is stranded on an island. Day after day he must use his ingenuity, flexibility and determination to survive. In your business, are you in control of yourself mentally and emotionally? When bad things happen, when struggles come, do you throw up your hands, get angry at the world, take it out on the people you love? Or do you choose a different path? Survivors choose when to be cautious, and when to leap; when to move forward and when to hang back, when to be bold and when to be reflective. They don't allow circumstances to control their actions. They respond to the circumstances with positive choices.

Trait #3 – Empathy

I found this trait really interesting. Why would empathy be important for survival? In his book, Fisher tells the story of Joan Chun. Joan worked for a large corporation as an executive assistant. She became known for being able to pick out the perfect gift for any occasion. Whether it was for a client, or a co-worker, others in her firm always seemed to ask her to do the shopping because of her knack for choosing the perfect gift, every time. Joan saw an opportunity, and opened her own business as a personal shopper. Corporate executives now paid her to do what she once did for free. Soon after, she opened her own gift shop on the main floor of a busy executive tower and it has done exceedingly well. When asked why she was so successful, she replied, “I'm a people person. I seem to have a sixth sense for what others like. I know how to talk to people. Call it empathy, or sensitivity, or consumer awareness, or anything you like, but companies and individuals in the business of catering to the public must have this quality or they will fail.” I agree with her. If you want to be a company that survives, you must develop the ability to sense what's going on in the minds and hearts of others. You must be able to look beyond what you see on the surface to determine what they really need. Unless you do, you will never be successful at trying to meet their needs with your product or service. If you're waiting for people to tell you the obvious, you'll be waiting a long time. And, you won't always get the right answer. Empathy allows you to recognize and understand how others feel, even though you may not feel the same way. Can you sense what your customers need and want? Do you hear what they aren't saying as well as what they are? Can you anticipate their needs? How about your staff – do you notice when things aren't flowing the way they should? Do you see when certain people aren't performing at their peak and sense why? Empathy is rarely thought of as a corporate quality, but those business owners who are employing it generously will tell you that it is! They are also reaping the benefits.

In part II of this article, we'll look at the qualities of a positive outlook, results orientation, and self-confidence and the roles they play in being a small business survivor. By the way, it shouldn't surprise you to discover that Siebert knows first-hand what it means to be a survivor – not just because of his research, but because he himself was a small business owner!

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Stifling the Sales Slump

5 Ways to Improve Your Sales Success

Have you ever found yourself in a sales slump? Where the thought of getting up and hitting the streets again one more day is almost more than you can bear? When it feels like the last time you heard a “yes” was months ago and your paycheck has been bearing witness to that fact? When your motivation is low and your energy, practically non-existent? Take heart. Everyone who has ever worked in sales has gone through a slump or two in their career, including sales professionals who are leaders in their industry. Slumps are normal, but how you deal with those “slumpy” feelings determines whether they will make or break your sales career. Recognize those feelings as normal, but be determined not to wallow in them. The sooner you can start taking positive action – even if those actions don’t provide instant success – the sooner you’ll move toward getting back on your feet and conquering sales again. Here’s some advice to keep you on track when you’re demotivated and discouraged.

1. Keep prospecting current and continuous

One of the greatest temptations for sales professionals is to stop prospecting once they build up a healthy client load. Those who think prospecting is for beginners will lose their edge pretty quickly. If your prospecting is current and continuous, when a slump sets in, you automatically have a “hit list” ready to go. Prospecting regularly helps you to stay current with what’s in the market, whose business is closing, who’s starting a new business, what new franchises are coming to town, and who advertises where. Keep your prospect list up to date and it will help you pull yourself up when you feel like you’re hitting brick walls.

2. Qualify your prospects

Many sales people spend way too much time trying to sell to people who aren’t qualified to buy from them. It’s a waste of your time, and learning to quickly qualify your buyers will move you toward success faster than you can imagine. If Mr. Smith is a really nice guy and will gladly and politely listen to your sales proposals, but does not have the budget to purchase what you’re selling, you’re wasting his and your time. If the Johnson’s just took out a huge mortgage on a new house and have

been clear that their discretionary dollars will be tied up for a while, it won’t matter that they’ve spent a lot with you before – right now they’re not qualified to buy. This doesn’t mean that you should stop maintaining relationships with people who can’t buy from you right this minute, but you may be wasting a lot of energy trying to sell to people who cannot buy, no matter how much they may like to, or how much they like you!



3. Moving from

convincing to revealing

A big mistake many sales people make is thinking it's their job to convince or talk their clients into buying what they're selling. Nothing could be further from the truth. Convincing usually ends up in desperate attempts at manipulation, which deter most customers from buying. It's normal to feel a little desperate when your sales have been slumping, but ask yourself whether you've been spending more time lately trying to convince people to buy from you. Your job as a sales person is to reveal to the buyers what their needs are, and how you can meet those needs. Revealing makes your customers much more receptive to what you have to say. Reveal their problem or need, reveal the benefit of your product or service, and reveal how easy it is for them to solve their problem with your product.

4. Work on building relationships rather than rapport

Someone once told me that rapport is about getting people to like you, building relationships is about getting them to trust you. While initially, rapport is important to make people feel comfortable with you, you will never build customer loyalty if you stay there. Get to know your customers – what they like, what they want, what they do in their spare time, where they spend their money – because it's in that process of building relationships that those 'aha' moments come to you. Suddenly you see how a need connects to a customer's interest and find a pragmatic way to meet that need. It takes a bit of risk to venture into relationships, but the payoff is big.

5. Customize your sales proposals - one size doesn't fit all

A mistake that many sales professionals make is thinking that once they've hammered out a decent sales proposal, they're done and can hit the streets with it. They feel it doesn't matter if they're talking to a local shoe store or a national trucking company – the facts are the facts. Nothing could be further from the truth. Taking the time to customize proposals for individual prospects or customers makes a big impression. Adding their logo to the cover of your presentation, using statistics and information on their industry right in your proposal, identifying needs that are unique to them and proposing a way to meet those needs – all work towards your credibility. Your knowledge and desire to truly meet their needs will move them towards the buy.

If you need a boost in your sales success, try these five strategies and see whether they help you get back in the saddle again, and closing those sales at record rates! One success leads to another – so get back on track quickly and you'll find yourself naturally fitting into the groove again.

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5 Leadership Mistakes to Avoid

Mark Sanborn in his excellent article, Why Leaders Fail says, "In the recent past, we've witnessed the public downfall of leaders from almost every area of endeavor—business, politics, religion, and sports. One day they're on top of the heap, the next day, the heap's on top of them. Of course, we think that such catastrophic failure could never happen to us. We've worked hard to achieve our*

well-deserved positions of leadership—and we won't give them up for anything! The bad news is: the distance between beloved leader and despised failure is shorter than we think.” Truer words were never spoken! When we think of the rise and fall of leaders in every arena of life, we can probably all think of some who seemed impervious to failure, but who fell from great heights anyway. No matter where we are or what position we hold, leadership is a fragile, tenuous gift, and if we are to remain in those positions which have been entrusted to us, we would do well to continually seek ways to maintain our integrity, vision and focus so that we don't experience that “short distance” between “beloved leader and despised failure”. Here are five things that can get us into trouble if we're not careful.

1. An inability to appreciate and adapt to other people's styles

It's hardly possible to hold a management or leadership position without at some time having taken a course, read a book or studied in some way, personal behavioural styles. True Colours, Meyers Briggs, Relationship Strategies – just to name a few – all provide information on how to identify and better relate to people with different styles. As a leader, you will have a certain amount of “Type A” or risk-taker within you, or you probably wouldn't be leading, so certain styles will rub you the wrong way just because of how you (and they) are wired. Not appreciating what those other styles contribute to your workplace (and to you personally) is a big mistake, and can lead to a very lopsided team. If your natural style is to be driven and task-focused, you need those people to whom relationships are important – to remind you that people are more important than tasks. If you're a flexible, spontaneous and impulsive fun-seeker, you need those slower-thinking, process-oriented folks to help you avoid making mistakes you may not see as you're jumping off the cliff. They can learn from you too to take more risks and worry less. Look at others on the team who are different than you not as irritants, but as people who see the world differently, and have much to contribute to your life and your business.



2. Over or under managing

On the one side, you've got leaders who are too controlling, feeling as if they have to have their hand in every pie and who micromanage their employees to death. On the other, you've got leaders who so empower their employees to make decisions and work on their own, that they abdicate their responsibility to maintain a cohesive and solid team by providing direction and guidance. Both extremes are dangerous. Over-managers have employees who are afraid to try anything, who feel as if they can't do anything right, and whose productivity suffers because they are afraid of the ever-watchful eye of the manager. Under-managers have employees who think they can take the company in any direction they please, and while very empowered, don't always have all the information and vision necessary to make those big decisions. Find your balance between providing solid leadership and direction, and allowing people the freedom to make mistakes and discover things on their own. It is there you will find the synergy you need for success.

3. To consider things impossible if they themselves can't do them

It may seem egotistical to assume that if we can't do it, it can't be done, but many leaders struggle with this very thing. Someone comes up with a new idea, and because you don't see a way to make it

work, you dismiss it as impossible. Leaders who exhibit this characteristic have squashed many great ideas, and those leaders have lost out on a huge source of creativity and inspiration. If something comes up that you think you can't do, let someone else see if they can find a way. You may be surprised at what different perspectives, different personal styles and different work experiences can come up with when faced with what appears to be an impossible task. Show strong leadership by always welcoming impossible ideas, and giving others the opportunity to give those ideas legs. If, after all the brainstorming and idea-generating, there still appears to be no way to accomplish it, put it on a shelf. Notice I didn't say throw it away. Two years down the road you will have a completely new set of perspectives, more experience, new technology, different staff, and what seemed impossible then, may suddenly be possible!

4. Not lending a helping hand wherever they can

One of the greatest dangers for successful leaders (and business owners in particular) is to get so caught up in the things they must do in order to keep the business running, that they have little or no time to help others. It is so easy to get too busy – working until the late hours, getting to the office at the crack of dawn – and while there may be times in your business cycle when this is necessary, it is important to remember that life is more than work. Finding a way to contribute to the health and welfare of others in your community is a huge contributor to overall success. Those great leaders, who have truly achieved the pinnacle of success, will often be found rolling up their sleeves to help a local charity, or establishing foundations that have a wide reach to help others. No one is ever too busy to stop and lend a hand. This is a quality of true leadership.

5. An inability or unwillingness to delegate

Call it pride, call it control, call it ego, if you're in a leadership position, chances are you have struggled with not letting your 'self' get too big. Leadership by definition means you have people looking up to you, admiring you, respecting you, and seeking your counsel. It's not uncommon for that sense of importance to go to your head. It is especially unhealthy if it leads to feeling you can't let go of anything – after all, the team is looking to you aren't they? The hallmark of a good leader is wise delegation. You may be able to do it better, but that doesn't mean you have to do it. Taking on too much and not allowing others to participate in your leadership will weaken your business in the end. You'll find yourself putting in too many hours, you'll find your stress level too high, you'll find your relationships will be at risk, and in the end, you won't be as successful as you think you will by trying to control everything. Wise delegation will get you farther than doing it all yourself – even if it's not up to your perfect standards. Delegation instills confidence in those around you. It fosters a stronger sense of team. It allows you to let go of the lesser things and focus on the important things. Don't make the mistake of becoming a controlling leader. No one wins in the end.

So if you don't want to find “the heap on top of you”, keep these five things in mind when you examine your role with your team. As a business owner, you can't afford to make mistakes that will jeopardize your leadership integrity. Your business will pay the price.

**You can read Mark's article at www.leadershipnow.com*

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Making Room

Several weeks ago, I was searching for images to complement an article I was writing, when I came across the one you see below. It immediately resonated with me because I had been going through a phase of imbalance in my life. Too much work, not enough room for anything else. I'd go to sleep at

night and find it hard to turn off my brain, so it took more time to get to sleep. I'd wake up often in the middle of the night, and find myself staring (in my mind of course) at the document I'd been working on or the proposal I was writing. I began waking up more and more often and every time would see things I hadn't finished, things I hadn't started, things that were in progress. My nighttime became an extension of my daytime. My work was taking over my life. There was no room for anything else. My relationships weren't getting the attention they needed. My personal life was shrinking at an alarming rate. Time for me was non-existent, never mind time for others. As my sleepless nights continued I grew more fatigued and daily tasks began to overwhelm me. I realized that something needed to change.

I know I am not alone in this, and I'm certain many of you reading this are nodding your heads in understanding. It is not an uncommon struggle among small business owners. Running a small business is a challenge. It's demanding and if you allow it to, it will eat up every waking moment you have. Sure, there are times when you will be required to be busier than others – businesses have cycles like that. It's when a pattern emerges where all your attention is placed on your business and everything else gets squeezed out, that there is a problem. My life had started to feel like a very cluttered closet. Every time I opened the door stuff fell out. I couldn't put one more thing on the shelf without something else falling off, and just looking at it all stressed me out. "I need more room" I thought, "but how do I create room in all this mess? And what is *room* anyway?" Those thoughts led me to think about a time when there was more room – and what that looked and felt like. I realized that in times when there was more room, I paid more attention to the small things in life, the important things. We can make choices every day to create room, even in very busy lives. It's even possible in the life of a busy small business owner.

The consequences of not making room can be enormous. We get less sleep (or a more restless sleep). We start to lose our ability to focus as everything feels overwhelming. It's like juggling a whole bunch of balls – when you're trying hard to keep them all in the air, you can't focus on just one. We get irritable and short with the people we live with, causing friction and stress in our relationships. We start forgetting things, and making mistakes. We eat poorly (usually on the run) and don't exercise, and we don't deal well with stress. All of this leads to things falling apart piece by piece. The end result is a very unhealthy business!

So, how can you make room? What does making room look like for you? It will be different for each of us but I've compiled a list of things that have helped me and other business owners, to create room. They may not all be a fit for you, but hopefully you'll find a few that will work. Even uncluttering one shelf in that closet will help you to function better. If you're struggling in this area, apply one or two of these a day and see what a difference it can make.

You make room when you:

- go for a walk and really stop to notice the beautiful things around you
- clean off your desk and get yourself more organized
- spend committed, quality time with your spouse, significant other, or good friends
- listen to music
- enjoy a great meal with



- someone whose company you enjoy
- read a good book
 - find a way to step back from your work and delegate tasks
 - ask people for help, and listen when they offer to help you
 - spend time doing something you love, something you're passionate about
 - laugh
 - share your stresses and struggles with someone
 - spend time outdoors
 - do something kind for someone else
 - prioritize
 - realize relationships are more important than getting things done
 - lighten your load – give something up – even if you think it will fall apart when you do
 - simplify your life
 - unclutter your home or your office
 - walk your dog or cuddle your cat
 - give and receive hugs
 - make healthy choices
 - talk to people you admire
 - set goals and commit to achieving them
 - see others as just as capable as you, and treat them that way
 - ask someone to help you find a way to make room!

These 25 ideas are just a start. You get the picture. Add to this list whenever you find something that creates room in your life, and practice it! You'll be amazed at how your business will benefit. As you create room, you become more equipped to manage it better. May your sleep be more peaceful, and your rest more complete, as you learn to make room.

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The Rule of 5

I'm in the process of reading Jack Canfield's recent book titled "The Success Principles – How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be". So far it has brought about many a paradigm-shift for me, and has challenged me to think differently about how I am working towards reaching my goals. Jack Canfield is the co-author of the wildly successful Chicken Soup for the Soul series. He talks about the beginning of the process that eventually led them to publish a best seller that has sold over 8 million copies in 39 languages, not to mention all the spin-off Chicken Soup books that succeeded the first. When he and Mark Victor Hansen first published the book, they were overwhelmed with how to begin the process of reaching their goal of getting it on the best-seller list. They enlisted the help of a mentor, Ron Scolastico, who gave them this advice. "If you go out every day to a very large tree and take five swings at it with a very sharp axe, eventually, no matter how large the tree, it will come down." From this, he and Hansen developed what they called the Rule of 5. Simply defined, the Rule of 5 means that every day, you do five things that will move you closer to your goal. They used this simple rule day by day to move themselves to what Time Magazine called "the publishing phenomenon of the decade".

I was encouraged when I read that, because even I, in my insanely busy world, can do five things every day, to work towards the achievement of my goals. The trouble with goals sometimes, is that they can get overwhelming. There is so much we want to do. So many things we want to achieve, places we want to go, money we want to earn, people we want to spend time with. Our problem often is that facing too many goals leaves us overwhelmed and we just give up trying to reach them. It's too much – I'm too busy – I don't have the energy – are the usual cries. But then, when year after year those goals fall by the wayside, we are discouraged that we didn't try harder. This is especially

true for small business owners. It can become a vicious cycle. So how might you apply the Rule of 5 to your business?

1. Determine Your Priorities

This often isn't as easy as it sounds, especially when our goals all seem super important. Some of them will be business goals, some may be personal. The most effective method of determining priorities that I've ever come across is the process of comparing them to each other. Here's how it works. Write down a list of all the goals you have in mind. (Make separate lists for personal and career goals). Number them 1 to however many are on your list (let's say there's 5). Then compare #1 and #2. If you had to choose one of those two, and only one, which would you choose? Put a checkmark beside the one you choose. Do the same with #1 and #3, then #1 and #4, and #1 and #5. When you are done, begin with the #2 and compare it with #'s 3-5. Then compare 4 and 5. When you look at your list, the number with the most checkmarks is your highest priority, the one with the second-most checkmarks is second, and so forth. You may be surprised when you actually compare things that are apparent priorities with each other, that one really will rise to the top. Once you know what your order of priorities is, you can move to step 2.

2. Determine your 5 steps for each priority

Let's say that out of the previous exercise, you decided to focus on the first 2 goals as priorities. (The last three didn't really score high enough for you to pay attention to them at this time, so you put them on a shelf for now.) Determine what specific 5 things you will do each day to move yourself toward your goal. Imagine that your business goal was to increase your sales by 30% in the next 3 months. Your five things might look like this:



1. Send out flyers to 10 prospects I have not yet approached
2. Follow up on every contact I have made in the last month by phone
3. Create one custom proposal for Client X
4. Make a list of other businesses in my area that I can approach with my idea for a reciprocal marketing campaign
5. Read one chapter in the sales book I bought last week

Each of these things is one small step towards reaching your goal. Now do the same for your personal goal. You may need to revise your list every day as things happen and you move closer to your goal.

3. Do it!

The last step requires being committed to the Rule of 5. It means disciplining yourself every day to do those five things. Those five things are your five swings with the axe. Eventually, if you are persistent, your tree WILL fall.

This simple, but powerful rule will make a huge difference in your success in goal attainment. Prioritize first, determine your 5 steps, and then do them. It's that easy. Anyone can do just five things. After all, 5 things a day led Canfield and Hansen to super-stardom in the publishing industry.

What can it do for you?

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