

Life's Not Fair (Luckily, Business Usually Is)

by Jay Goltz

I have been writing these articles for a year now. It's not always easy. It is like going to therapy. You hash things through your brain. You sort it all out. In a way, it's cathartic. In other ways, it is thought-provoking.

I have talked about a bunch of little things, from management to pricing. What people really want to know is, "How can I really make money in this business?" or, in some cases, "How can I avoid going broke?"

It all boils down to this:

In some ways, business is the opposite of life. To illustrate this, let us first talk about life.

People who want to succeed at life, if it is possible, can do many things that will prove helpful in their endeavor. They can eat low-fat foods, brush and floss every day, give 10% of their income to charity, and volunteer at a homeless shelter. On their way home from volunteering, with their healthy teeth and low-cholesterol count, they can be helping an elderly person across the street and be run

over by a car. Life is not fair. (If you still think it is, go visit a children's hospital.)

While you are lying in the hospital, clinging to life, a lot of people will go out of their way to help you. Your boss will probably hold your job for you. Your family will hold all-night vigils. And when reports come out about what happened to you, people might donate funds to help offset your huge medical expenses. You see, life is not fair, but it is merciful.

Business, on the other hand, is unmerciful. When you lose a customer because your employee was rude to them, they might not give you another chance. And when they go to your competitor, they do not say, "Why don't you give the other guy one more shot?" When you cannot pay your bills on time and you start wearing out your welcome with your vendors, at some point they will stop giving you credit. And then, there is the IRS. When you don't pay your withholding taxes, the government is not going to say, "No problem. We know you are a good person. Take your time. When you can get the money together, send it to us." Business is definitely unmerciful.



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On the other hand, business is usually fair. What does that mean? If you take care of your customers, learn how to manage, buy properly, and price things intelligently, you will probably succeed.

I believe most companies go broke due to bad man-

While there are certainly instances

of people being put out of business

by forces beyond their control,

most of the time just the opposite is true.

agement. Now mind you, that is not what the person involved thinks. They think it's their competitor giving their product away, or their suppliers who charge a small fortune, or their cheap customers in the neighborhood who won't spend the money.

In fact, I never met anyone who went out of business that said, "Gee, I never did figure out what management was all about" or, "I'm fiscally irresponsible — I spent more money than we had and did not pay enough attention." Capitalism rewards people who do the right things, and punishes those who don't, which is why I say business is *usually* fair.

So, what is the thought for the day? You have more control over being successful in business than being hit by a car.

Watch what you're doing. ■

Jay Goltz started Artists' Frame Service in 1978 fresh out of college. Artists' Frame Service now employs 120 persons at its main location, a 35,000 square-foot showroom and production facility in Chicago. Goltz has received numerous business honors including induction into the Arthur Andersen and University of Illinois Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame (1992). He regularly speaks at business conferences on topics ranging from entrepreneurship to customer service. Goltz is best-known for his straight-talk on how to succeed in business.