



Goltz by Jay Goltz On Business

To Be or Not To Be... What?

I've been giving speeches and writing articles about how to grow your business for about seven years, presumably to people who are interested in the topic. Lately I've had the opportunity to sit back and analyze some of the results. The people I've spoken to have had enough time to put my strategies into practice... or not. I have had numerous people come up to me at trade shows or send me letters thanking me for having a dramatic impact on their business: taking a losing business and turning it around; taking a marginal business and making it profitable; or making a profitable business more profitable or easier to run.

I am thrilled and appreciative to get those kinds of responses. But there is a darker side. I have occasionally heard that the practice of my "business fundamentals," as I call them, is not applicable. It's either because the framer thinks it will only work in Chicago, or my company doesn't do framing as well as their company does, or I'm a retailer first and don't have the same level of commitment to the customer as they do.

Even if all of those "arguments" are true, it doesn't change the fundamentals. And for the record, I stress the phrase "even" if all of those things are true." Good business practices are good business practices. My quality of framing is better than most, but not as good as some. And,

while I'm on it, my commitment to customer service is better than almost anybody's.

The fact is my business fundamentals don't work for everyone. This is not because of any of the above reasons, but for another set—which have nothing to do with business. They have to do with you. And me. And every other person out there who thinks they want to be more successful. People have limitations, whether self imposed or otherwise.

Growing a business is not easy. You have to get out of your comfort zone and stretch. And adapt. And then adapt some more. There are many hurdles along the way. Financial stresses: cash-flow squeeze, accounting issues, pricing dilemmas. Marketing questions: Who is the customer I should go after? What's the

best way to advertise? What's working? What's not working? And the management pandemonium: hiring the right people, firing the wrong people, dealing with the everyday nuances of having people work for you—training, mistakes, accidents, theft, and sex scandals (not me, calm down).

Here's the rub. Some people can't or don't want to deal with it. Every level of business that you aspire to is going to require a new set of abilities, or perhaps stresses. This remains true for many levels above you and many levels above

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me. I, for instance, have decided that I do not want to have to deal with what goes along with owning a large chain of stores: leases to sign; managers to deal with; multiple inventories; multiple problems. That is too far out of my comfort zone. But I have to tell you, it took me years to figure that out.

There is a definite advantage in understanding your limitations, which reminds me of something someone told me a long time ago. When I was in my late 20s and had a successful business (especially for someone at that age), I joined a business group. I became friendly with an investment banker who gave me some valuable insight although at the time, I did not find it valuable at all. He said, “Everyone gets to a point in their life when they realize they have limitations. It usually happens in their 40s.” At the time, I said to myself, “That’s pathetic.” Now I realize that it was prophetic. Most people have limitations. That is not necessarily a bad thing. As a matter of fact, it is only a bad thing if those limitations keep you from getting what you want.

There’s a bigger point to this, which addresses the three arguments I mentioned earlier. There is some pain involved in following my business advice. You might have to take more time in checking references of potential employees. You might have to fire somebody. You might have to give a customer less discount than they would like; and you might have to watch them walk. You might have to say no to certain kinds of frame jobs that will lead to nothing but aggrava-

tion or losing money. You might have to advertise in such a way that does not result with someone walking in with a coupon in his or her hand to prove to you that your advertisement brought someone in. You might have to spend some money to fix up your store without having the guarantee that it will result in more sales.

The point is, those three arguments can easily be used as cop-outs to explain why you don’t want to do some of these things. I’m here to tell you that you don’t need a cop-out; just opt-out. Maybe you don’t want to do it or you can’t do it. It doesn’t make you wrong and it doesn’t make me wrong. It’s a lifestyle decision—which is okay. Just like the decision I made when I decided not to open a chain of stores.

The key to all of this is to separate what you want to be from what you need to be. “Need to be” for your own satisfaction or income level to support your lifestyle. There have been numerous times in my career when I had to take a pause and say, “Maybe what I’m trying to do is not possible given my circumstances, or maybe I’m just not smart enough.” Going through the growing pains of business is frustrating and many times daunting.

There is some good news to all of this. It should get easier. The same things that once overwhelmed me, I now handle on a regular basis—easily. Since I started my business at age 22, the business perpetually grew faster than my brain could. It took me many years before I felt competent run-

ning the business I had grown and comfortable dealing with the day-to-day stresses. During these extremely stressful times, or growing pains, I believe it is a question of ignorance, inability, or unwillingness. Ignorance can be fixed. Inability can’t. And unwillingness is a life choice—many times a wise one.

As a matter of fact, that is why many framers went into business for themselves. They enjoy being their own boss and doing something they love to do. Many people in our industry are perfectly happy with what they do for a living and how much money they make. Making more money is not always the answer. It’s a question. At the very least, most are happy with what they do for a living but would like to make more money. From my experience there are far fewer unhappy framers than there are unhappy lawyers. Good for us. ■