



By Cynthia A. Brandt

Every business starts with the best of intentions and a great deal of enthusiasm.

Offentimes, however, key strategies for success are overlooked. If left unaddressed, they can be a formula for disaster. Successful entrepreneurs take into consideration most, if not all, of the following steps toward strengthening their business.

1. The Agreement

Businesses are often started with two or more people getting together to implement an idea. Little if any thought is given to the importance of having written agreements in place. A successful business will have written agreements right from the getgo that outline roles and areas of responsibility, delineate how profits and/or losses will be shared, deal with the handling of disagreements, and address the key issue of an exit strategy for each of the principals involved.

2. The Vehicle

Businesses frequently start out as sole proprietorships. As they grow, it often becomes important to establish a separate entity through which business is transacted. There are strategic advantages and disadvantages to each of those choices, and it is a rare entrepreneur that knows what choice to make. The successful entrepreneur calls on trusted financial and legal advisors that can help them through the maze of alternatives to make the best choice for their situation.

3. The Plan

Much is written about the importance of having a Business Plan and much time is invested in creating them. The key to a good Business Plan is ensuring that it becomes a working document, not an office decoration. Keep it simple, and share the plan with your team. Get their buy-in and make them a part of it. Without that, execution of the plan will be a formidable task.

4. The Funding

As businesses grow, they are often faced with a need to fund that growth, even before the business is able to produce consistent and recurring profitability. It is important for the business owner to understand what banks look for when approached by small, growing companies for a loan. It is also critical to learn what differs from lending institution to lending institution and what is constant.

Although banking is a regulated industry, there are areas where they can differentiate themselves and it is important to look for attributes that are compatible with one's needs.

5. The Help

There comes a time in the growth cycle of a business when the company can no longer sustain growth without the addition of employees. This brings a new set of challenges to the business and it is critical to dot the I's and cross the T's when taking this next essential step. Employees are a company's greatest asset if properly managed but they can become a liability if mis-managed. It is important to adhere to all relevant employment laws and coach, develop and request feedback from employees. Remember, they spend more time with you than they do with their families so you must continue to provide personal development if you want to keep them.

6. The Sharing

Entrepreneurs are very good at developing an idea or product. They usually have a high energy level, are self-starters and think they can do it all. In the beginning, this is sometimes true. However, there comes a time in the evolution of any business that, they simply cannot do everything and continue to do it well. It is important for the business owner to recognize what he or she does best. Knowing this, it is



then important to delegate the rest.

7. The Risk

It is said that there is a direct correlation between risk and reward. In an emerging business, many calculated risks must be taken, but none is more wrought with uncertainty than that associated with advertising, marketing and PR. Yet, the business will not reach its potential without the incurrence of this risk. That having been said, it is critical that every promotional endeavor, be it as simple as a yellow pages ad, or as involved as a multi-faceted public relations campaign, be adequately researched and continuously fine tuned. Effective marketing is critical to the growth of a business, but remember, the operative word here is "effective".

8. The Team

Finally, there is a common thread running through most entrepreneurial endeavors, and that is, loneliness. They say it is lonely at the top, and it is. One of the most critical things that a business owner should do is develop an advisory board, a group of individuals not involved in the day to day operation of the business who can provide feedback and advice. The group may include an attorney, an accountant, a banker, other business leaders. The important element is that it be a group of trusted individuals with the expertise to advise the business owner in key decisions.

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