



## **Breaking Bad Business Habits**

### ***How to Make your Leadership Recession-proof***

“Stress comes from knowing what is right and doing what is wrong.” -Larry Winget

What would your business look like in two years if you didn't fail at anything you did? How much money would you be making? Would you be dominating your market? If your answer is “yes” then you know what the greatest obstacle is in growing your business – you. You are your own worst impediment. Your fears; your belief in your own inadequacy; your failure to commit. If you could get out of your own way, you would be overwhelmingly successful. So what is stopping you?

Here are the Top Ten Bad Business Habits leaders fall into that prevent them from being successful and dominating their markets. They aren't secrets. Most of them are obvious. The problem is that we either haven't seen them for what they are or we are afraid to do the work to correct them. So what are the Top Ten bad habits we practice regularly that inhibit our growth? Find out what they are and what you can do to change them.

1. Blaming the economy. “There is no such thing as money problems; there are only idea problems.” –Ford Saeks

I was speaking in Canada last month and stopped in to see a client in Toronto. I noticed in reading the Globe and Mail (Canada's nationwide newspaper) that the Canadian economy was doing much better than the American economy. I asked my friend if Canada was experiencing the same recession fears we were. She said, “No. Our press isn't trying to convince us that our economy is bad.” Hmm. To be truthful, most of the present economic problems America is facing are brought on by fears. Our GDP is growing and we haven't had one quarter as of this article of decline. So why are prices going up and jobs being lost? The simple answer is fear. Fear of our own inabilities. Fear of failure. The successful people I network and socialize with choose not to participate in talk of fear and recession. I am having the best year ever in my business because I believe that if you work hard there is always enough money circulating and you will receive an ample amount of it. Senior leadership that won't spend money on improving customer service and educating their employees and boards will pay dearly when the present “crisis” is over and they find themselves without customers...and a job.

## 2. One time motivational meetings and training.

Sales is a process, not an event. Customer Service is a process, not an event.

Managing people is a process, not an event. So who came up with the idea that a one time event would turn these processes around? I am constantly contacted by business leaders and meeting planners to come in and do a keynote presentation for their corporation or organization. "What is the purpose of the meeting?" I ask, before accepting. Invariably the response comes back, "We want our people motivated to work better, make better sales, treat the customers with respect." Do you think a one or two hour presentation is going to do that? "Uhh. Yes, we think so..."

Look if it took several years to get this way, what makes people think you can cure it in one morning? But year after year, we have a big annual corporate meeting where we bring everyone in at great expense to hear a few motivational speakers (yes, I know I am one) and they leave pumped up. Two weeks later nothing has changed except the degree of apathy. The resistance to change has increased while productivity has decreased to new, low levels. Another year, another rah-rah meeting with little to no results. "Oh, that guy we had last year was great; everyone laughed and we had a great time." But what really changed? Nothing. Why not hire one person to come in and work with our employees and leadership over a period of time and get real results? "Oh, that costs too much!" So let's have another meeting with a bigger name, or a sports figure to inspire our people to hit a home run, go the distance and carry the ball all the way! Are you as frustrated reading this as I am?

## 3. Uneducated boards/committees. "The person who knows HOW will always have a job. The person who knows WHY will always be his boss." -Diane Ravitch

I spent years in non-profit organizations which had very supportive, but uneducated boards. You can't run a multi-faceted company with a group of people whose primary qualification is that they won a popularity contest. Don't misunderstand me. I believe that boards are important to managing certain organizations. They keep unscrupulous employees in check. But if you answer to a board of directors or to a committee, you need to spend a lot of your time educating them in what you need to do your job the best way you can. I hear Presidents complain that they can't get the funds to do what they know needs to be done because the board is afraid to spend money. A friend told his board one evening to let him do the job they hired him to do and fire him if it didn't produce outstanding results. They did and he did. If you can't get permission to do your job, then you haven't done a good job educating your board that you are competent.

## 4. Out of touch with your employees. "You've got to circulate to percolate." -Cavett Robert

The early 1980s produced a series of books by Tom Peters on excellence in business. They "introduced" the concept of Management By Wandering Around." I worked with a CEO whose daily routine began by coming in a back, secret door to his office and only coming out to get coffee. He feared dialogue with his staff and employees because he didn't feel comfortable with them. He called me

because he wanted customer service training for his staff. They weren't being friendly to his customers. His cold style was being passed along to his team. The speed of the leader determines the speed of the team. He needed leadership training that would influence his customer service (most customer service problems aren't the employees fault – rather the fault of poorly trained management). Which leads to the next bad habit...

5. Out of touch with customers. “There is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down simply by spending his money somewhere else.” –Sam Walton

A good leader knows what his/her customers want and satisfies them. You need to know the #1 complaint of your customers. Maybe you do. Maybe it is keeping you up at night. Solve it and you will do two things: dominate your market and sleep more. Your customers are the lifeline of your business. A Ford Motors Company advertising executive was quoted several years ago saying: “We had to divert 120 million dollars to online advertising because as much as we tried to discourage it, people kept going online to look at our cars.” Huh? If your customers want something from you that is reasonable and will make you more money, why wouldn't you want to satisfy them? Stop saying you can't do something when what you really mean is you won't do something. Shop your business. Find out what the customer experience is like. Then do something about it. Every airline executive ought to be a regular passenger on their planes to see what their customers go through. Every bank executive should call in to their customer service line to see how prompt the service really is. Every doctor should be a patient in their own practice. Imagine the possibilities if senior executives really knew what the average customer had to put up with to get served by their business.

6. Not training employees. “Train everyone lavishly. You can't overspend on training.” -Tom Peters; “Training is expensive, but stupid employees are more expensive.” -Larry Winget

7. Keeping bad employees. “It is better to pay a good attorney, than a bad employee.” -Larry Winget.

Disclaimer: This is not legal advice. Having said that, one of the biggest mistakes employers make is hiring fast and firing slow. We don't check into people enough to find out if they are competent and can produce the results we need. And that is what it should be all about – the results. If someone isn't producing results you require, they need to be set free to find a position where they can produce results – not here. The average workplace has a scale of workers that don't produce. The top twenty percent are usually producing most if not all of the results. They aren't necessarily coming in early or staying late. They are simply getting the job done better than the other eighty percent. The bad news is, you are paying everyone to produce the results that the few are accomplishing.

Yes, I know. That person is knocking themselves out day and night and you just can't bring yourself to let them go. Meanwhile your result producers are getting tired of being held back and will, eventually, find another place to work. So why not keep them and get rid of the "sludge" that isn't producing or contributing to the bottom line. If you judge people base on their results and no other reason, it will amaze you who is really doing their job and who isn't. I know another speaker who brags about how hard she works every day and every week. Yet she only has about one client per month. On the surface she looks busy and productive, but at the end of the day (or month in this case) very little results from her efforts. Start looking at the results and see who is at the top and who isn't.

8. Putting off necessary tasks, decisions. "A good idea implemented today is better than a perfect idea implemented tomorrow" -General George S. Patton  
Procrastination is the big killer. You can come up with a myriad of great ideas. You can be so motivated to get the task done, but putting it off will kill it. Most of the time we let other, less important matters get in the way. Then after a while we realize that nothing got done. I have an acquaintance who plans some of the greatest ideas for her business. She wants to send out a newsletter to her prospects. She wants to get on the phone and call new prospects. She wants to get her manuscript published. She wants to update her web site. She wants to work with the top CEOs in Atlanta. She wants to make this her "breakout year." My assistant noticed one day, though, that she never completes any task she begins. She spends most of her time planning and talking about what she is going to do...later. But later never comes.
9. Leading everyone the same way.  
People are different. They have different talents, different communication styles, different motivations, different speeds of work and thinking, different needs and different goals. You can't assume that anyone is similar to the other people in your organization (and especially you!). If you have been trying to motivate everyone the same way or force them to adjust to your style and you...how has that been working for you? Let me guess; not so good.

The days when the boss made everyone dance to his tune and they did very effectively are gone. Say good bye to them. They aren't coming back. People can and will find another job that pays them just as well. How long an employee stays at a company and how productive she is there, is determined by her relationship with her immediate supervisor. It was reported in a recent Gallup Poll, "The #1 reason people quit their jobs is dissatisfaction with their supervisors, not their paychecks."

10. Meetings with no point, purpose or goal.  
Work is hard enough. Everyone has a job to do and on top of that we stack meetings often just to have them. The first problem is that meetings are held on a regular basis. The weekly staff or sales meeting has to be held on the same day at the same time. So even if there isn't a need, an agenda has to be created. Petty problems are discussed. Sales goals are evaluated with little or no change.

Contests are announced and no one cares because the same people win them every time. Meanwhile, the top super producers are spinning their wheels waiting to get back to work. Are they out making calls? Are they supervising their teams? Are they thinking up new ideas? No. They are sitting in a useless meeting hearing how everyone else is doing or being told they need to be motivated more by supervisors who have no clue what they are actually doing.

How do I know this? I spent 23 years attending weekly meetings for various organizations that produced nothing. My best ideas were great, then shot down by people who didn't want to be outpaced. I also worked in a sales environment and was the top producer. The biggest waste of my weekly time was the sales staff meeting. The sales manager knew it, the sales staff knew it. But there we sat week after week hearing the same "Rah-rah" message and no one was more motivated.

Take a long hard look at your leadership style. Is it falling victim to these habits? Is it moving forward? What can you do to catch these habits before they get bigger? Don't put it off. Start today. Let this be the new beginning of your successful future.

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