**You Know You’re in Trouble When…**

**Your Business Pre-Mortem**

“If you were gone, would you be missed?”

- Rob McDowell

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**Crime Scene Investigation**

Our family enjoys watching investigation dramas on television. It is fun to try to solve crimes before the investigators do. In fact, my wife and I compete as to who can solve the mysteries first.

After a murder there is always a “post mortem” on the crime. How did the murderer think? What led to his/her actions and how did they leave clues that the police discovered to catch them? A good CSI can spot the clues immediately.

The same is true in business. An organization that is about to become extinct leaves a trail of clues that almost anyone can spot… anyone except the people on the inside. They continue trying to breathe life into the corpse long after it is evident that there is no hope.

How can you tell your company or organization is in the throes of its final days? Is your post-mortem being written as you go along with business as usual? What are the signs you are dying on the vine? You know you are in trouble when you…

1. …Change the menu/offerings without regard to service. Recently McDonald’s announced both a change in its menu followed shortly by the firing of their CEO. They ditched many of the more popular items in some markets. The problem is McD’s has announced changes in almost everything it offers except the way it treats and trains employees. They push their items but punish customers with their policies.

   When your organization is lacking in sales and changes the menu without regard to customer satisfaction, you are in trouble. Customers are the lifeline of your business.
You are in business to make money from them. If they are dissatisfied, you will be dead in business. Sears has changed marketing and selections in vain efforts to discover what people want, while ditching the service and policies that made them a success.

Sears was famous for service agreements and standing by everything they sold… “Satisfaction Guaranteed.” But as competitors made inroads into their market, they moved away from quality service and repair. Now they are barely hanging on with almost no idea who their target market is.

2. …Make your business about you and your policies. You should be known for quality standards instead of your quirky policies. Are your employees trained in satisfaction over policies?

A specialty sandwich shop my son and I were in made an error. We both ordered the same items and made that clear to the young man behind the counter. When the food came out they left off half of one of the orders. He acted like it was our fault then admitted the mistake and offered to sell us more items. “That is our policy,” he told us.

My son worked for Arby’s several years ago. He told me their policy is to give food mistakenly left off orders to the customers. In a day when anyone is a restaurant critic through social media, you cannot afford to offend someone or not make it right.

If you train your people to adhere to your self-serving policies against what customers want, you will soon be extinct. Nobody cares what your policy manual says. Some companies have unwritten policies that continue to dominate their service. People don’t care about policies that protect you but make them feel punished.

3. …Discount essentials… then pull them back. Do you run a discount special that is only to attract people in your door, then “bait and switch?” Most discounts on “Black Friday” are on junky items that are meant to pull people into the store. You can get a better deal by staying home and shopping online… or shopping the day after Christmas where the real bargains are.

We loved getting our $1.00 morning coffee at a local restaurant. Notice the past tense. The company, without notice pulled many of its discounts without warning, but left the less popular ones on the menu. THEN, they reprimanded customers with the new rules.

If you are known for discontinuing special value pricing and then changing it frequently, it communicates a lack of direction and leadership to the world. Customers won’t tolerate frequent changes for no apparent reason. You can beat your competition
sometimes by just being consistent… even if you charge more for your product or service. Look at Marriott, Westin, Hyatt, Four Seasons and Ritz Carlton.

4. …Avoid generosity. If you want to go extinct then be greedy with your profits. Don’t be known for giving anything to people without overcharging them.

In New Orleans there is a French word used in the service industry called “lagniappe.” It refers to a gift the customer didn’t expect. There is a car dealership that adds “lagniappe service” for their customers. Many restaurants add “lagniappe” soup, dessert or salad to their meals.

“Lagniappe” is generosity. Check into a Doubletree and you get free chocolate chip cookies. Pay your bill at Olive Garden and you get free after dinner mints. Order online from many retailers and get free shipping. What can you do to extend the value and make people remark favorably about you?

5. …Oversell. I went by Radio Shack to purchase a hands-free headset for my mobile phone. As I went to pay I was asked what kind of cell phone I had. “A very good one,” I said. “Yeah, but I’ll bet I have a better one,” the salesman said. “No thanks,” I said. “So what kind do you have? We sell great phones!” he declared.

“Look, I am happy with my phone and the two-year contract I signed.” I plead. “Well how do you know you won’t like mine better?” he persisted. I tried to get him to just sell me the headset and let me go, but he wouldn’t let up. I went somewhere else.

As a professional who makes both cold and warm calls every day, I know when I am pushing too much. If the prospect doesn’t want to buy and has another plan, I don’t persist with them.

_I never bought anything by losing an argument._

_Conversely, I never sold anything by winning an argument._

Persistence when nobody wants to be pressured runs customers off. I won’t go into HH Gregg. I don’t want to be hounded by sales persons who won’t let you wander. I won’t buy from car dealers who play on my emotions, guilt or lack of intelligence by arguing with me. And neither should you. Time will put these people out of business.

6. …Ignore your consumer trends. Target Stores Canada announced in January 2015 that it was shutting down all operations. There were many reasons Target didn’t go over well in
Canada, but one that almost everyone agreed on was they failed to adapt to unique trends and buying styles.

Target made itself famous by being a nice one-stop shopping destination in the US. But when they tried to duplicate that model, they overlooked Canadians’ lack of desire to buy everything at one location. They didn’t stock enough items that were popular among Canadian customers, but stocked popular US items. As one Canadian said on Twitter, “The War of 1812 lasted longer in Canada than Target.”

If your customers are telling you (in large numbers) to do something out of the norm that you could easily do for a profit, do it! Don’t wait on your consumers to come around to your way of thinking on products and services. Come around to theirs and beat your competitors.

Your organization relies on a solid market reputation, well-trained staff, positive policies and openness to creative solutions to remain alive. If just one of these statements above is practiced you could go the way of Schlitz beer, Circuit City, Lehman Brothers and Blockbuster.

**Be Missed**

My pastor has a vision for our community that we would be a positive impact every day. He calls it “Being Missed.” Each week he asks, “If we were gone, would we be missed?”

So if your business was gone tomorrow, would it be missed in your community or marketplace? I hope the answer is “yes.” If not, see where you are failing and create a value people cannot live without.

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