

SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS



Your Complete Small Business Service Centre

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Reducing Holiday Stress

Strategies for Enjoying the Holidays AND Your Business

As we approach the season of mulled wine, colored lights, festive decorations, holiday music, gift-buying, and general good cheer, many small business owners' chests are starting to tighten as they anticipate the stress that inevitably comes from either a very busy, or a very slow time of year. The stress from either circumstance can make enjoying the season really difficult. Rather than doing all the things that make the holidays special, you spend your time worrying that you won't be able to handle the increased workload, or that you won't survive the lack of business. Add to that the pressure of finding classy but affordable gifts for you're A-list customers, addressing and sending out business Holiday Greeting cards, making your office look somewhat festive, and planning (and paying for) the staff party - and you've got a stress-laden month! If holiday stress has been a pattern in your business in the past, choose to do things differently this year. Here are a few ideas.

If the Holidays are very busy for your business . . .

Don't scrimp on staff - this is not the time to try to scrape by with your regular staff. You'll put added stress on them to work extra hours and they may not demonstrate the kind of cheer you want to give to your customers. Make sure your shifts are adequately covered and that your staff are working reasonable hours so they're as cheerful as Santa in meeting the needs of your customers.

Schedule time for holiday preparations - it's like anything else. If you don't schedule it, it doesn't happen. Holiday preparations simply become something you must do on top of everything else. Scheduling a half hour in the morning to do your greeting cards, or to go shopping, or to do that extra paperwork - can make all the difference. Those things actually get done, you don't really miss the half hour, and the result is a whole lot less stress.

Choose to do the important things - one of the most frustrating things for many small business owners during a busy holiday season, is feeling they have to give up the things that make the season meaningful for them. So this year don't give up, just choose wisely. You don't have to accept every single invitation, but do choose the ones you really want to participate in. Missing your kids' school pageant may not be an option, but not attending the Chamber holiday business mixer could be. Keep your sights on the things that are really meaningful for you, and DO those things. Drop everything else.

Get out of the office to enjoy the spirit of the season - during a busy season, the four walls of your office may be the only things you see. It's really hard to get into the spirit of the holidays without some outside input. Nothing gets me so geared up as a walk on crisp snow, or wandering through the mall listening to the music and finding that perfect gift, or strolling downtown and taking in all the lights and decorations, or having a special seasonal coffee at my favorite coffee shop. Your business won't fall apart if you sneak away for an hour at lunch, but you'll come back feeling more festive and ready to handle the stress you're facing at the office.

If the Holidays are very slow for your business . . .

Make the most of your time - as an insurance company, or a business that offers other services - you may find business slowing as people have a different focus in preparing for the holidays. Hopefully, you've prepared yourself financially for this slow season. If you have, try not to worry about the business slowdown. Instead, use this time to put your attention towards that list of things that just never seems to get done when things are busy. Organizing your office, filing, cleaning out your email, reading those articles - try to enjoy the time you have to take on these other tasks, knowing that when things do get busy again, you'll have crossed all those things off your "to do some day when I have time" list.



Give back to your community - this can be a really rewarding way to make use of extra time. Find ways that you can contribute to the hundreds of things that go on in your community at this time of year. It may be the only time during the year when you feel you have time to give - so do it! In addition to receiving a blessing for doing good things for others, you may also receive the benefit of having people in the community notice your business - and may reap the rewards of an increased profile in the months to come.

Don't feel guilty - when things are slow and there's not much to do, make a decision to enjoy your family and friends. Meet some friends whom you haven't seen in a while for lunch, take your family out shopping for a tree, write emails to connect with folks you haven't talked to recently. And while you're doing it, DON'T FEEL GUILTY! It's not like you're taking time away from your business in order to do these things, your business is giving you the time to do them! Live in the moment and enjoy this brief rest. It will eliminate so much stress if you can!

So this holiday season, whether you're run off your feet, or find yourself twiddling your thumbs, make some choices to reduce the stress, and you'll come out the other side wondering how you ever survived the holidays before!

The Power of TEAM

Creating a Dynamic, Peak Performance Team

Inspirational guru, Mac Anderson describes teamwork like this:

"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. It is the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to obtain uncommon results."

When you think of your team, do you nod your head and say "Yup, that describes us all right!" Or do you sigh and think, "If only my team worked like that. My business would be so much more successful." A dynamic, peak performance team doesn't just happen. It takes a lot of work - mostly on the part of the team leader, at least initially. Anderson says "Teamwork separates the business winners from the losers." If your team isn't functioning the way you'd like it to, it's up to you to create what you want. Following are some guidelines you might want to look at to begin forming that peak performance team you long to lead.

Share Your Values

Anderson believes that without shared values, peak performance from your team is not possible. Have you taken the time to share your business values with your team? Have you given them the opportunity to interact with those values and make them their own? Do you daily demonstrate those values in order to establish a corporate culture based on those values? Dynamic teams work so well together because they are all pulling in the same direction. They believe and completely buy in to the company's values. If you haven't established a set of core values for your business, it's time to do it. It's the first step in creating your dynamite team.

Lead by Example

Walking the talk is probably the most effective way to get your team to buy in to your values. If you say you value one thing, but demonstrate the opposite with your behaviour, they'll believe what you do rather than what you say. And they'll behave the way you do. Leading by example also means recognizing the innate talents of your team members and empowering them to work for you in those areas. Many small business owners struggle with trusting their team members to do anything right. You can't expect peak performance by micro-managing, and if your team members sense you don't trust them to do a good job - they will stop trying to please you.

Encourage 360 Degree Leadership

John Maxwell has written a fabulous book called 360 Degree Leadership. In it he debunks the myth that you can only lead if you're at the top of the ladder. He explains how you can lead from anywhere within the organization - you can lead up, by being a valuable resource to your boss; you can lead sideways by supporting and valuing your team mates, and you can lead down by providing quality supervision to those over whom you have authority. People who understand 360 degree leadership suddenly feel empowered because they realize they are not powerless to have a leadership impact no matter where they are placed in the organization. Encourage your staff to demonstrate this kind of leadership, and assure them that their place in your company is of great value; that the contributions they make are significant. You will notice a difference when people grab on to this concept and begin living out this principle. Peak performance is a natural outflow of people who feel they have influence and significance in their jobs.

Prepare to Win

Just like an athlete who prepares and trains to win the big race, you need to prepare to win at every level of your business. Two things are important here - your team needs to understand what winning means, and must have the appropriate training in order to help them win. What does winning customer service mean? What does a winning sales force mean? What does winning quality mean? Define those things so everyone is clear about what winning means to you and your company.

Visualize with them what winning looks like. Then be willing to train them in any areas that are deficient.

Foster Positive Attitudes

Dynamic, peak performance teams have a zero tolerance for negativity. If you've got people who whine, complain, gossip, or routinely walk around with giant rain clouds over their heads spreading gloom in your workplace, deal with that immediately. Make it clear you are fostering a positive work environment and be an example of that positive energy every day. As your team begins to function at a higher capacity you'll notice a new energy, a buzz, an excitement as people perform better and grow stronger together as a team.

Make the Best Use of Synergy

Synergy is defined as "the working together of two or more things, people, or organizations, especially when the result is greater than the sum of their individual effects or capabilities." It's that moment when everyone on the team realizes that together, you are better than each individual is on his or her own; that together you can create something you couldn't do individually. When that really takes hold, your team will be unstoppable! When you see synergy happening - whether it's among a small group working on a project, or your entire staff pulling together, putting in 120%, you'll know you've got everything you need to be great.

Creating this kind of team takes work. Lots of it, but once you start to create a shared vision, once your team members take hold of the power they have to positively affect your company, once you get rid of negativity and see people cheering one another on toward the common goal, you'll know it was all worth it. Your team will be so powerful you'll probably find other businesses knocking on your door asking you how you did it!



Protecting Your Business from Disaster

The potential to be dramatically affected by a natural disaster exists from shore to shore in Canada. Whether you live under the constant threat of earthquakes on the west coast, raging forest fires across the country, killer tornados on the prairies, wild winter storms in Ontario and Quebec, or hurricanes on the east coast, your business could be devastatingly affected by a disaster over which you had no control, and for which you had no time to prepare. Having a disaster plan for your business is as critical as having business insurance. You may pay into it for the entire life of your business and never make a claim, but if you ever do need it - your business survival could depend on whether or not you have it. The same goes for a disaster plan. Something as simple as a city-wide power outage could have a major impact on your business if you're not prepared to deal with it. Jon Toigo, a disaster recovery expert at Toigo Partners International says, "The bottom line in disaster preparedness is to protect your most irreplaceable assets - your people and your data." Do you have a plan for your business if disaster strikes? Here are a few things to think about.

People

Your business survives because of people: the people who work for you; the people who supply to you; and the people who buy from you. At each level you should have a plan to protect those assets.

Employees - communicate your disaster plan with them. In fact, involve them in the process of creating and putting together your plan. If only the pilot on an aircraft knows what to do during a disaster, chances are things will be a little rough on board. But if all the attendants on the aircraft are trained in disaster protocols, they will be able to quell any panic and assist with handling the situation appropriately. Let your employees know that if a disaster occurs, you will need their full cooperation and clearly outline what roles will be assigned if that should happen. Capitalize on their strengths; take a survey as part of your disaster plan of what skills people have outside of their job. You may be surprised at what skills are represented, and how you could put those to use in a disaster situation.

Suppliers and Customers - Toigo recommends having at least five points of contact for every person with whom you will need to communicate. Business, home or cell numbers, email, fax, pagers, messaging, etc. The more ways you have to contact people, the more likely you will be able to get a message through when it's really important. If it's possible to maintain your business, even on a reduced level, you'll recover much more quickly. And, it's a good idea to have those contact lists in several different places. While it's great to have a copy on your computer, if the power fails or your computer goes down - it won't help you to have your list only there. Routinely print hard copies of your contact list and keep one copy off site so you can access it when you need it.



Data

Nothing will affect your business more than a massive data loss. "You may be astonished to learn that 20% of small businesses do not back up their data." says Toigo. "With business relying on technology now more than ever, it's my job to remind professionals that if you lose your data, you can lose your business." Do you have a data protection plan? Are you regularly backing up your database, applications, emails, projects, proposals, etc? At the very minimum, you should have an external hard drive, separate from your computer on site where data is backed up regularly. However, with online storage technology getting more affordable, small business owners should seriously consider subscribing to such a service. Toigo Partners International says that one in four businesses experience a significant crisis in a given year, and of those who experience a disaster with no emergency plan, only 43% reopen. It's not difficult, and it is an expense, but just like insurance, if you suddenly need it, you won't for a minute regret spending those dollars! Imagine the difference you'd feel on the eve of a critical disaster, knowing that all your data is lost, versus knowing that as soon as possible, your data can be restored and you'll be back on track.

Other Preparative Measures

Although people and data are your most important concerns, there are also a few other things you can do to up your preparedness for disaster.

- **Purchase a generator** - these have become quite affordable, and having a small generator on site to restore power to your most important business resources may make the difference between maintaining at least some level of productivity, and being "down" for a long period of time. You can also purchase uninterruptible power supplies that hold a charge long enough after a power outage, for you to save key data and/or turn off your computer without the dangerous results of a power surge.
- **Have a disaster kit on site** - here on the west coast, with the threat of "the big one" looming large every moment, businesses and homes are always being encouraged to have up-to-date disaster kits. Imagine that a disaster struck and no one could leave your building for a day or two. Do you have enough water, an emergency medical kit, blankets, canned or dry food, flashlights, a battery-operated radio, etc. to get you and your staff through those few days?
- **Fire-proof safe or lockbox** - investing in a small fireproof safe to keep all your most valuable business documents or other important items is also wise. Imagine if your business burned to the ground over night. Given that your people and your data are safe, what other items would you consider irreplaceable (or perhaps replaceable but with great difficulty and inconvenience) that you could put in your safe? Again, it's a small investment that could pay great dividends if something terrible were to happen.

We all hope that nothing tragic will ever happen, but we live in a world where we know that's not the case. Will you be one of those 43% whose businesses cannot recover from a disaster? A disaster plan doesn't come into being overnight, so start thinking today about how you will proceed. Strike a committee of your staff to begin creating and implementing your plan. It may be the most important thing you ever do!

Exceeding Your Clients' Expectations

How to Create a "WIN" Every Time

I often teach a workshop on customer service, and one of the exercises I do at the beginning of the day is ask people to tell me about their worst customer service experience. You wouldn't believe how anxious people are to share their horror stories about bad service. The energy around the room gets pretty high as people commiserate with each other about their similar experiences, and always have one to top the previous story. Then, I ask them to tell me their most positive customer service experiences, and the mood changes right away. People tell their positive stories with such enthusiasm they're almost glowing with the good news! Sadly however, there are always more bad stories than good ones. As a small business you have an opportunity to set yourself apart from the rest. You can create a "win" situation with every client, every day. If you can differentiate yourself from your competitors by exceeding your clients' expectations, they'll be talking about you all over town. Exceeding expectations isn't as simple as you might think. There are some key components to creating this kind of experience for your customers, and they require some work on your part before you even sell them anything.

Define Success With Your Client

How can you exceed expectations if you don't know what your customers expect? You can assume you know what they consider to be great service, but if you don't ask, how can you know for sure? Before you make the sale, ask your client to define their version of success. "Mr. Client, before I even show you the advertising rates for our magazine, I'd like to know what will make you feel as if purchasing this advertising is a good move, and will bring you success." One client might quote a percentage increase in sales, another might say it was an increase of traffic to their store. Another might even say that they'd feel successful if they heard people talking about their store - that is increased visibility in the community. If you don't know how each client defines success, you can't possibly meet or exceed their expectations. It's all about understanding needs.



Define Your Deliverables

The client begins thinking about success when you make your proposal. As you're talking about what you can do for them, how your product or service will benefit them, they're beginning to imagine what that would look like. If you promise to lasso the moon for them, they'll believe you can do it, and anything less than the moon on a platter will appear to them as a failure to deliver. The great news is that you're in control of those deliverables, and you can in fact, set your clients up for a big surprise when you over-deliver! Always present realistic, moderate deliverables, and

then, go the wall and deliver more than you promised. It works every time, and clients are thrilled that you not only gave them what you promised (which by their own definition equaled success), but that you gave them even more! If that doesn't get people talking about your business, nothing will.

Define Future Business

Nothing helps you to up sell, resell, future-sell and get referrals like creating success for your client. Once you've over-delivered and your clients couldn't be happier with the way you've helped them grow their business, that's the time to create future business. Let's say Mr. Smith's advertising campaign with your magazine was so successful he more than doubled the sales increase he'd hoped to achieve. You can then take it one step further. "I'm so thrilled that your ad campaign was so successful Mr. Smith. I think we made the perfect investment decision 3 months ago. I am looking into the future now and thinking that based on our previous success, we can increase the monthly investment by 25% to grow your business to the next level." Or, you could ask Mr. Smith, based on his success, whether he might have any colleagues or business associates who might also benefit from a similar ad campaign. Keeping an eye on their future, as well as yours, and building on your success with them creates a win/win situation for both of you.

Recognize the power you have to create a winning strategy with every client, every day. Meet and exceed expectations that you and they together, have set, and there will be no end to the future business you can create.

Low Cost Ways to Improve Trade Shows

10 Tips to Increase Trade Show Effectiveness

Not every small business participates in trade shows, but if you do, you know how costly it can be, and how often your time, resources and energy put into the show have not paid off and met your expectations. There are some tricks to the trade, as they say, and ways in which you can minimize the amount of time and energy wasted, and maximize the impact your business has at a trade show. The great news is, most of them are not very expensive, but can make a big difference in whether you are successful and achieve your objectives at the show. It's not always about flash and snazzy displays, although you'll want to do your best to present yourself in the most professional manner that's within your budget. Sometimes it's about paying attention to the little things that will make your business memorable - things that will make it stand out from all the hundreds of other businesses who have attended. Here are a few ideas to help you achieve greater success at your next trade show.

1. **Do your homework.** Make sure the trade show you're attending is one that will reach your target audience. Check out past attendance, and ask trade show organizers if they have a breakdown of the types of people who attended. If you're a commercial plumber trying to reach contractors, you may not be best placed at a home show mostly attended by people looking for decorating or renovation ideas. This could save you big bucks in the end.
2. **Send invitations to key customers or potential customers ahead of time.** If there are key people you want to attend your show, send out invitations and invite them to come visit your booth. You may even want to offer a discount coupon or some other incentive to encourage them to stop by.
3. **Have a lead collection strategy.** Don't assume you'll be able to track all your leads from memory, or that you'll just write it all down. If it's a successful show you'll be too busy. But do have a strategy prepared before you go. Have people put their business cards into a draw, or write down their email addresses to win a prize. If you don't think about it before you get there, you'll find yourself scrambling.
4. **Make yourself (and those who may be working the booth with you) presentable.** Dress appropriately in neat and tidy business attire. Pay attention to small things, like making sure your hands are clean, that you have breath mints on hand, that your booth is tidy and garbage is neatly stowed away out of sight. All you have at a trade show is the opportunity to make a good first impression. If you don't, you've wasted your money and your time.
5. **Give yourself plenty of time to prepare.** A major trade show can take from 6 to 18 months of preparation. There are so many details. Don't think that you can whip something together in a month or two. You may be better off waiting another year than heading into it unprepared.
6. **Practice your approach.** Memorize the questions you want to ask people to qualify them at your booth. Look in the mirror while you practice your presentation or demonstration. Make sure you aren't demonstrating any annoying or distracting habits.
7. **Be friendly, personable, knowledgeable and polite - ALL DAY.** This may seem obvious, but if you've ever been to a trade show near the end of the day, you'll notice all kinds of people with sagging energy, just a little grumpy and anxious to get home. If you can maintain your energy until the very last moment, you will stand out. And NEVER sit down and read a book even if it is quiet! Be professional at all times.
8. **Thank people for stopping by.** Make sure you thank anyone who has taken the time to stop by and talk with you. Some people find having a bowl of wrapped candies or chocolates that people can take with them when they leave really makes them stand out in someone's memory. "Oh yeah, he was the guy with the Hershey's Kisses!" Or, put it in your budget to have a giveaway of some kind. A fridge magnet with your business information on it, pens with your business phone number, etc. These types of things can usually be acquired fairly inexpensively when you buy them in large quantities, but they do tend to increase top of mind retention with people who take them.
9. **Make sure you have enough copies of your business cards, brochures or other important hand-outs.** Nothing is worse than running out of your important information half way through the day and not having anything to give people. Check with trade show organizers to get an estimate of the number of people they expect based on the previous year's attendance. Then make sure you bring 25% more than they estimate.
10. **Define your goals ahead of time and keep them in front of you all day.** Know before you go what you want to accomplish, and don't be distracted from that goal. Don't let what someone else is doing in the booth next to you take you off course. Stick to your plan and you'll achieve your goals.



Before you go running out to your next trade show, take these tips into account and improve your success at the event, and in the future.



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