

# SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## Why Most Training Doesn't Work for Entrepreneurs

July 16th was the anniversary of my father's death. He died forty-seven years ago. My father died of a massive coronary - a heart attack - while vacationing in Greece in 1960. I can't tell you "why" he died. But, I believe I can tell you "how" he died. I am sure the reasons given were many and complex ranging from blocked coronary arteries to poor health and dietary habits to significant stress to a genetic predisposition.

Why my father died at such a young age of 35 is an altogether different story and may be of interest to many of you - especially those involved in the procuring or delivering of training to your employees. Because this was not his first heart attack, but his second, exactly two years after his first. He was young in his business career. As a graduate from Yale Law School near the top of his class, he left the practice of law to become a sales executive as the son-in-law to my maternal grandfather's large and successful family-owned business.

Young, successful and ambitious, he had the support of a large family franchise to work for following his recovery from the first heart attack. While he made some of the necessary lifestyle and dietary changes to adjust to his circumstances, what were missing from his life were the ongoing education, support and accountability needed to sustain these new behavioral and lifestyle changes.

And, that is precisely what's missing in most training programs. As a 20-year veteran business consultant and personal coach with significant experience in training, financing, managing and growing small businesses from 5-150 employees, I graduated over 600 adults through an entrepreneurial training program during the 1990's and had over 150 business owners go through my coaching program during these past several years. What I have found with the training graduates is that a much smaller percentage of them utilize the materials or lessons learned in the training program in the years following the training. The coaching clients,



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on the other hand, feel they have made at least significant improvements and see consistent gains in their productivity, incomes and effectiveness because they are still enrolled in the coaching relationship.

Thus, without ongoing mentoring, accountability and support, training simply doesn't have the last impact or

effect that coaching has. In other words, most training programs don't work.

What's wrong with most training programs today are that they are treated as an event - a one-shot deal - leaving the trainee to fend for himself after the training takes place.

For a small business to build a strong organization of emotionally engaged and committed employees, continuous training is a must. And, without ongoing training that focuses on the reinforcement and repetition of the materials and skills previously covered, most training programs are simply just ineffective. While new skills are being learned, other older skills may be being forgotten.

Evidence of why training with reinforcement is needed is found in the stories of most heart attack victims. Like my father, these victims don't have the ongoing support and accountability required to make highly needed lifestyle changes. With countless bypass surgeries and angioplasty procedures annually, many patients could avoid the return of symptoms and the need to repeat surgeries - not to mention arrest the course of their disease before it kills them - by switching to healthier lifestyles. Yet very few do.

In a May 2005 Fast Company article by Alan Deutschman, Dr. Edward Miller, the dean of the medical school and CEO of the hospital at Johns Hopkins University was quoted as saying: "If you look at people after coronary-artery bypass grafting two years later, 90 percent of them have not changed their lifestyle. And that's been studied over and over and over again. And so, we're missing some link in there. Even though they know they have a very bad disease and they know they should change their lifestyle, for whatever reason, they can't."

"Changing the behavior of people isn't just the biggest challenge among heart attack patients. It's the most important challenge for businesses trying to compete while simultaneously struggling with the human condition," wrote Deutschman. "The conventional wisdom says that crisis is a powerful motivator for change. But severe heart disease is among the most serious of personal crises, and it doesn't motivate - at least not nearly enough."

Similarly, most young, less experienced, or less successful entrepreneurs need ongoing skills training in subjects ranging from sales and marketing to finance and operations. And, often overlooked as important in their training are soft skills training in leadership and people management. The problem with some small businesses today is that they are small because their owners think small.

Ongoing mentoring in sales, marketing, leadership, and people management along with strategic planning, strategic focusing, goal setting and accountability is often required to increase success levels. To understand what type of training (or coaching) is recommended to the owners of small businesses, let's review some of the top challenges faced by established entrepreneurs and managers.

While most established entrepreneurs start a business with the best of intentions to achieve more freedom, financial success and personal fulfillment, and, while most want to

feel the pride of being an independent business owner in control of their own destiny, most owners fall short in meeting their objectives. Unfortunately, for most business owners, after a few short years the entrepreneurial dream starts to warp into a partial nightmare.

An insidious form of imprisonment sets in. The owner is trapped on a treadmill, working harder and harder but making little progress. They find it increasingly more difficult to focus on their goals because most don't have any. And, they don't know what their most important activities are because they have stayed involved in doing everything. Many of these business owners are faced with the same challenges: resisting their technical tendencies, fighting busy-ness, lacking in leadership skills or experience and being ineffective at delegating, weak or inadequate business systems and escalating business complexity.

### **Technical Tendencies**

Too many entrepreneurs are former technicians now masquerading as owners. They think they are entrepreneurs, but they don't act that way. As once accomplished technicians, they have a hard time letting go of such expertise and familiarity. They remain trapped in a technical comfort zone, mindset and work approach. Technical expertise is woefully insufficient for managing a business. And, technical tendencies make poor leaders. As such, they fail to develop the visionary, strategic, and leadership skills necessary to run a successful business.

### **Busy-ness**

Many owners and managers confuse activity with accomplishment. They confuse busy-ness with results, hard work with smart work, perspiration with purpose, and efficiency (doing things right) with effectiveness (doing the right things). Instead of working smarter, many owners hold tight to the delusion that working harder and harder is the solution. They keep trying to shift into higher and higher gears. The more the business grows, the harder they work, the more imprisoned they become. No matter how much energy you expend, however, wrong strategies inevitably lead to poor results - less freedom and more headaches. It is like trying to catch fish in a pond with your bare hands. No matter how many hours you work or how deep you wade, a poor strategy leads to poor results - no fish dinner!

### **Ineffective Leadership & Delegation**

Far too many small business owners are by default small leaders. Instead of leadership, they excel at doer-ship. They are micromanagers that like to touch and control everything. They trust no one but themselves. They believe "no one does it as well as me". They seldom delegate, if at all. They mistake such busy-ness for business leadership. Instead of thinking and leading like owners, most think and behave like employees. Instead of reflecting and planning, they excel at sweating and doing. They act like they have a job instead of owning a business. To lead effectively, one must trust others. Not developing their leadership potential costs them dearly.

### **Inadequate Business Systems**

A vast majority of small business owners don't know how to design a new business or re-engineer an existing one to be more systems-oriented and professionally equipped with plans, procedures and policies. As a result, entrepreneurs don't create and document the processes (specific and repeatable ways to do something), procedures and policies that allow for well organized, smoothly running, easier-to-manage companies. That's why owning a franchise is a better solution for many inexperienced and first-time entrepreneurs. Without defining and documenting the specific work that needs to be done,

owners can't delegate effectively and eventually remove themselves from their technical roles. As a result, owners are forever feeling "out of control". Tragically, most entrepreneurs have unknowingly, reactively and accidentally created an owner-centered and owner-dependent company. As a result, they are trapped!

### **Growing Business Complexities**

A growing business with its increasing number of customers, transactions and problems will eventually crush a business not properly designed and prepared to handle such growth. Without effective leadership and adequate business systems (an integrated web of processes), a growing company does not stand a chance. Growing pains are unavoidable. Producing predictable and consistent results will be nearly impossible. By failing to plan for growth, you are by default planning to fail.

Untreated, these challenges will eventually lead to frustration and in some cases may be fatal. Programs that draw attention to these challenges offer resources and support to overcome these tendencies and revisits to the lessons learned are recommended.

If my father had the proper training that combined the emotional support from others and self-accountability to make the behavioral and lifestyle changes following his first heart attack, he might still be alive today. But, then my career in personal and business coaching along with my personal development path and commitment to live a healthy lifestyle might never have gotten so far along. Jonathan Goldhill, CEO of The Growth Coach, runs a business coaching company dedicated to helping entrepreneurs and small business owners grow their businesses. He can be reached at (818) 716-8826 or [Jon@TheGrowthCoachLA.com](mailto:Jon@TheGrowthCoachLA.com).