

# Shape-Up Your Business to Stay Ahead of the Pack

Jack Welch, former CEO of GE said, "If change is happening on the outside faster than on the inside the end is in sight." So, here are some action steps to take to make changes on the inside.

There are benefits to a recession. One is that it has a tendency to weed out the competition. And, it forces you to get back to the basics of revenues and expenses while simultaneously spending more reflective time thinking creatively about your business and business model. It's a great time to get closer to your current customers, deepen your relationships with clients, vendors, partners and referral sources. And, finally, you must focus on your company's talents and the talents of your people.

Ask yourself, "What have I done to improve my situation? Getting rid of poor performing employees was your first step. But did you make cuts deep enough? Increasing your marketing and training budgets was next. But did you have the guts to spend more or more wisely here?"

To stay ahead you have to invest in promoting your brand and improving your people. And, now more than ever this is vital to a strong business. To get your business into shape involves much of the same discipline as a strict exercise program to get the body fit. I've created a list of helpful suggestions to help you shape up your business. By following these ideas, we can get you well on your way to creating a life of fulfillment.

1) Commit to "Letting go and Enjoying Life" more. Tell yourself that you are going to "Let Go" a little more this year. You will no longer accept the "no pain, no gain" belief about your business. Choose to see your work as your passion that brings more pleasure to your life. Don't succumb to reading about and talking about how bad the economy is with other people. Find simple activities that give you joy and don't cost much. Take part in these activities and enjoy life. A business should give you greater life and freedom, not less. If you are trapped in your business or not having fun in life, engage a coach to help you let go.



## THE GROWTH COACH

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2) Plan sufficient breaks from your business to recharge your passion and energy. Working too many hours leads to "burnout" and poor productivity. A little contrast in your life is great for coming back and gaining more perspective on your business. Check out the musical recommendations I am making below to learn what I'm listening to on my breaks!

3) Spend more time in strategic planning and less in day to day operations. As part of your business plan this year, commit to making your business "systems" dependent and not "owner" dependent. Don't buy into the belief that you are so irreplaceable that a solid system can't take care of things while you are away. Take time to map out and improve upon your sales and marketing processes as well as your client fulfillment process.

4) Improve your sales ability. Your effectiveness as a sales person or organization depends upon how good a process you have and how well you follow it. Most small businesses neither have a sales process nor understand what I mean by a sales process. But, suffice it to say, I mean how systematic or organized are your selling activities? If you don't have a process or you are not systematic in it, then get one. We teach a simple one that is easy to learn and practice.

5) Boost your marketing activities. Marketing is one of the two key areas to be increasing your spending in right now. However, many things can be done to fix your marketing program and don't cost much money. If you are marketing a service business (e.g., landscaping) focus on fixing your service. Work inside your company to fix the service experience that a customer has. Figure out what hasn't been working well in the past and fix it. Change the customer experience. Then be systematic in asking for referrals. You can't

ask for referrals if your service stinks!

6) Invest in training. Spending money on improving yourself and your managers can really add to the long term success and profitability of your business. Business is a marathon, not a sprint. So spending some money now will pay dividends in the years to come. Give yourself and your managers the advantage that comes from knowing more about what is expected of an owner and a manager. Do they know their roles? Do they set

and measure performance regularly? Are they motivating their team to stay positive, focused and excited about the future? We offer programs that help business owners and managers become more focused on their roles, more effective in reaching their goals and more strategic in their activities.

The greatest thing about the marking of a new year is that we give ourselves the chance to reinvent ourselves. We can wipe our imaginary slates clean and start again new hoping to be more effective and gain greater clarity about our lives and companies. Hope, however, is an illusory belief in action. Write your plan and be more accountable to it.

As a fellow business owner, I understand the desire to earn more, work less and enjoy life more. I also understand that for a business to get in shape, the owner's attitude has to shape up first. To do this, we have to take

ongoing and consistent mental inventory. Observe when negative self-talk makes its way into your business mindset. Rid yourself of the old beliefs that are no longer serving the best interest of you or your company. By getting our business in shape for 2009, we also give our attitudes a workout about what is possible, probable and achievable. Seek support and be patient, but diligent in your aspirations.

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