

COVERING ALL THE BASES

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TEAM

A couple of months ago, I was working with a client who felt like he had neglected certain aspects of his company. He had been spending the last year heavily focused on sales and marketing, particularly driving a e-commerce platform. Previously, the company had just offered web services to existing customers and this was a whole new animal. The focus paid off. The company grew their online sales to previously unregistered customers from essentially zero to approximately \$250,000 in monthly revenue. This was a heck of an achievement and the growth shows no signs of slowing down. This business development has been impressive, to say the least, but at what cost?

This foray into the digital commerce world has been a joint effort between the CFO, who doubles as an operational officer, and the president of the company. Their combined skill sets have developed a very respectable piece of business. Unfortunately, other areas of the company began to backslide. Inventory management was not as sharp as it once had been. Vendor relationships had not been attended to. Operating expenses were not kept in check. I think you get the drift. For months, my client and I had spoken about the dangers of putting so much time and effort into one aspect of the business. It was bad enough that it had consumed the president, but this initiative had also consumed another key executive in the organization. Digital success was like a drug. They had become addicted to the feeling of power when they were able to lure one more fish up to the boat. Something had to change.

Fortunately, I have the opportunity to work with some great clients and this person was no exception. The nagging feeling, and probably some of my nagging, had caught up with him. Things weren't going right with the rest of his responsibilities and he needed to reengage with other aspects of the organization. This wasn't easy. The digital marketing discovery was fun. It was intellectually stimulating. The technology sparked both curiosity and creativity. How do you put down that magic wand and go engage with the operational side of the business? Like a kid who hates to eat his vegetables, this was going to be tough to swallow.

Knowing that he had to reengage with other elements of the company, we needed to make a plan that insured enough attention, but didn't lead to an all consuming smothering of those working in the departments. There is a fine line between supporting and smothering. Before getting into the coaching nature of the new direction, we decided to create a weekly plan to cover the bases. The first assignment was to line out all the areas that the president would need to touch.

In our initial attempts, we just brainstormed. The list was a bit long:

1. Inventory management
2. Purchasing
3. Vendor relations
4. Selling skills
5. Technology
6. Recruiting and talent acquisition
7. Freight and fulfillment
8. Financial management
9. Personal wealth

As you might notice, we didn't cover marketing because that was the drug

we were trying to ween him off of. The initial goal was to work on two of these areas each day. First half on one area, the second half on another. Seemed logical and very methodical. The goal was to meet with a department leader during their designated time slot and then devote some time for personal research and thought. Using this simple method, each team leader would get face time with the president and benefit from his energy and ideas. This schedule lasted about a month.

One of the greatest benefits of the plan was the departmental interaction with the boss. My client is a charismatic leader. He likes to coach and is one of those bosses you want supporting you. This is something that leaders need to take note of. If you are a supportive leader, your people want to feel your presence. They like the face time. As leaders, we are taught to empower our management team and to let them feel autonomous. While I agree with the principal, I have seen too many leaders take this to the area of neglect. Just because a team leader is running their department well, it does not give us the right to leave them out on an island.

Years ago, I had a client that would take 12 weeks away from the office during the summer. He didn't totally neglect the company. He was always checking his email and would return phone calls promptly. I recall one of his key managers talking about his absence. She said that the company could function well enough, but it was always better when you knew he was in the office. Even if he wasn't meddling in their affairs, his presence was noted and needed.

Although the plan with my client brought new attention to the neglected aspects of the business, he started to feel the strain of the structure. He was a creative creature and this box was a bit too confining. It didn't give him the flexibility he needed. It didn't allow him the out of office personal time he needed to remain healthy. He missed the excitement of the digital world. Ultimately, it was too rigid.

The current solution has been modified to focus one hour a day on an aspect of the company outside of sales and marketing. In practice, he spends the first hour or so totally focused on the department or initiative he has chosen. He still meets with team members, but releases himself from the task after a short duration. They may be some days that he spends more time on a task, but he is careful not to allow the activity to be too restrictive. By scheduling his days out, he has been able to touch more pieces of the business and feels like he is not neglecting his responsibilities. So far, he has found balance.

About the Author:

Jason Bader is the principal of The Distribution Team. He is a holistic distribution advisor who is passionate about helping business owners solve challenges, generate wealth and achieve personal goals. He can be found speaking at several industry events throughout the year, providing executive coaching services to private clients and letting his thoughts be known in an industry publication or two. Last year, he launched his first podcast, Distribution Talk. Episodes can be found at www.distributiontalk.com and most podcast applications. He can be reached at (503) 282-2333 or via email at jason@distributionteam.com. You can find additional resources on his website: www.thedistributionteam.com