

Betterment and Accountability
by Garry A. Jones

We all like to think that we are improving. At least that's what a professional or business owner should be thinking: continual improvement. It is a worthy goal that can consume a lifetime without being accomplished. Over the years I have performed informal studies of human nature. Observing business owners on their quests for business betterment has become a fascination. Why can't all businesses improve and prosper? What elements distinguish the successes from the failures?

In larger business environments there is a layering of hierarchy that may contribute to success. Smaller businesses shy away from this multi-tier environment because it is perceived as slow, cumbersome, and inefficient. And it may be. But there are characteristics that are quite beneficial; some elements are accountability, meeting goals, and the need to justify one's actions.

In smaller businesses the focus and struggles are different. Daily operations are the challenge with little time left for goal setting or performance measurement. Many times there is little to no direct accountability since the owner is the chief executive officer, shareholder and the Board of Directors. They are their "own bosses". Often that may have been a motivational factor for them to start up their business venture.

That independent spirit is a great attribute if properly focused. The company moves forward, conquering new markets and providing a strong future for the shareholders and employees and paying creditors. Over time something can happen; personal goals or weaknesses actually

replace or dominate basic business goals, diminish the corporate performance and compromise the future. Why? – because humans left unaccountable will generally migrate to their favorite activities or avoid unpleasant obligations.

A timely third party reality check, sort of like an early warning system, can be invaluable. It exposes the operations-immersed business owners to real world ideas and triggers a reassessment of purpose. It can be accomplished informally by discussing issues with other business owners or more formally through consultants or by forming an executive committee.

So it seems that many small businesses need a dose of what many of the owners fled from, structure and accountability. Not the full corporate program but a lighter version. It helps the "unaccountable" keep on track to success.

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