

Are You a Reluctant Manager?

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When was the last time you had an "aha moment" in your business? You know that moment I'm talking about. The one that comes along and knocks your socks off. It is that moment when inspiration strikes. When the puzzle pieces suddenly come together. When you realize an underlying truth that will change how you do business forever...

One of the most rewarding aspects about working with my business owner clients is that I get to facilitate and be a witness to those moments. When it happens (and it happens a lot) I know that I have the best job in the world.

Take for example, Rick, a physical therapist client of mine. Last month he had an aha moment that will transform his business in a very profound way. It wasn't about his vision for his business or his entrepreneurial aspirations; nothing as glamorous as all that. This revelation was about something very practical and often overlooked. It was about management. Yes, Rick had an aha moment about how he was managing his employees.

For a long time Rick showed up in our coaching calls complaining about how hard it was to work with his team. He didn't consider himself a good manager and I sensed that he didn't want to be 'the manager' any longer. His common complaints:

- I can never find the 'right' people.
- I'm uncomfortable interviewing employees.
- My employees don't understand what I want them to do.
- Even when I know it's the right thing to do, I have trouble firing people.
- I'm not sure when to give employees raises or how much of a pay increase they should get.
- When I've tried performance reviews in the past, they led to more trouble than they were worth.

Sound familiar?

Guidelines for the Reluctant Manager

Rick felt burdened by the idea of being a manager. He had zero interest (nor did he particularly excel at) managing people. When we explored the concept of management, he was full of grumbles, "blahs" and sighs.

Rick is a strategic thinker. He's an entrepreneur at heart. He thrives on the *thinking* and the *dreaming* behind his business, not necessarily the *doing*. Given this, I suggested that he might have more success if he simply approached the whole idea of management from a strategic perspective. He could be 'the manager' in the sense that he could create a management *strategy* for the business, without actually doing the management *work*. And there was the aha moment. Ultimately, Rick only needed to define the management work that needed to be done; then he could let others do the managing.

But first, Rick had to get clear on exactly what it was that he wanted from his employees. He also needed to examine what his employees needed of him. He had to take a few steps back to look at things objectively. This process was uncomfortable for Rick, but he persevered. We worked through lots of ideas, and it took some time, but ultimately he determined the exact results he wanted to achieve and the standards that would guide his actions.

Here are two examples from his quite exhaustive list.

Hiring

Result: To attract the right people to grow and succeed with the business.

Standards:

1. I will only hire when I'm sure the position is really needed.
2. I will only hire if the company's payroll budget allows for it.
3. I will only hire people who are aligned with my vision for the business.

Employee Development Meetings

Result: To establish clear and open communication and productive working relationships between employees and managers.

Standards:

1. Every manager will meet one-on-one with their reporting employees on a weekly basis in an Employee Development Meeting.
2. Employees and managers will establish a clear agenda for the meetings and use them to stay on the same page and stay on track.
3. Employee performance evaluations will be a part of the Employee Development Meetings, and all effort will be made to keep employees informed about their progress and eligibility for appropriate raises on an ongoing basis.

You might think these things are simple, or go without saying, but they aren't... and they don't!

Business is busy. Life is busy. Standards and guidelines keep your business moving forward.

For Rick, if he's thinking about hiring a new employee, he now has a place he can go to do a "gut check." He has written standards that remind him how to do it properly and in keeping with his management strategy. He now sets the tone of the employee/employer relationship right from the very beginning. He has a strategy for hiring, establishing payroll and providing appropriate raises for employees that is integrated into his financial management of the company as a whole. He has stopped giving inconsistent and ineffective employee performance reviews in favor of ongoing Employee Development Meetings that keep managers and employees informed and on the same page about where things stand all the time.

Rick's growth as a leader and manager highlights some important points that all business should be aware of:

1. As the business owner you are the one who is most accountable for creating a high performance environment and positive company culture!
2. Your business is a systemic organization. All areas of the business--including employee management and financial management--need to be in alignment.
3. The most important thing a business owner can do is make time to think strategically about how the business needs to work as a whole, recognize the changes that need to be made, and then to have the courage and confidence to make those changes happen!