

Expert Tips & Tactics

Selling: Business Future

I was chatting with one of my education leaders recently about my strategic plan for our business and as we talked it became apparent that we were talking about the life and death of the business.

We were talking about what happens when I'm gone....like, REALLY gone!

Additionally, I have been involved with a similar type of discussion concerning the development of a strategic plan for the continuation and growth of an organization for which I am a member of the Board of Directors. The basic premise with which we are working is that most of the current leaders are in middle age and there will come a time when the business system will need to be passed to younger souls. If they are to be in place when the time comes, we need to be building them NOW.

The fact of the matter is that many of our [martial arts] business systems and organizations are run by a charismatic (for want of a better word) figure head. Unfortunately, when the figure head either dies, retires or sells the business, the whole house comes tumbling down.

When systems loses a charismatic leader, power struggle can ensue amongst the remaining upper echelons of leadership that cost everyone. I have been a part of organizations that were held together by a strong visionary leader, but when the leader was deposed, resigned or retired a power vacuum sucked in all the would-be rulers, and for a while at least, mayhem was the result.

None of this is to presuppose that systems, organizations and schools should not survive or indeed prosper once the originator, CEO, grand poobah, head honcho or big cheese shuffles off to a well-earned retirement or environmental recycling program. So why do businesses have difficulty after the death of the founder? Why do organizations collapse into political power struggles? And, why do businesses so often fail when the owner sells the business or leaves?

I believe that the heart of the problem is a lack of structured planning, a lack of an over-arching strategic plan that goes beyond the originator of the vision.

If you examine Judo as a throwing system, it survived the death of Jigoru Kano intact. While national Judo organizations might bicker and feud, any Judo dojo in any country in the world is pretty much the same. Unfortunately you cannot say the same for Aikido or Hapkido, to name two other throwing arts, with which I am familiar. Aikido can point to Morihei Ueshiba as its founder and Hapkido practitioners frequently point to Young Sool Choi for the origin point of *modern* Hapkido. Individual Hapkido and Aikido schools are, however, remarkably variable with regard to technical curriculum. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing; it is just an observation of the obvious: both systems have fragmented, diversified and evolved.

So let's bring the discussion home your business.

What happens when you no longer run your business? Do you have leaders in place who have learned the business systems and can run your business as well *or better* than you?

We talk about building leaders and creating opportunity for the people we have on payroll, but if we are truly doing this our businesses would not fail when we sell, retire or die.

I run my business because I get a thrill from watching people succeed and we provide a service within the community. If what we do has enduring value, it should survive...well, me. The only way it will do that, is if

- I have infected my instructors with the vision of what we do,
- Been a mentor for my employees
- Created opportunities for them to surpass my own training levels,
- Given them *all* I know and *also* given them room to grow in their own way,
- Given them the freedom to fall over *and* the freedom to fly,
- Allowed them to take power and manage authority
- Treated them as peers and inheritors of something worthwhile,

So how are you doing as a business owner?

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