“Do I Have to do Everything MYSELF!?!?”

By Caroline Jordan, MBA

The air in my client’s office nearly crackled with her irritation. A scheduling snafu had left a client without important services. “I guess I just have to do everything myself,” she ranted.

My calling as a small business consultant requires that I maintain objectivity in the face of a client’s frustration and anger. My calling as a human being and a small business owner myself leads me to empathize with what she was feeling at the moment.

It often seems, as small business owners, that we do indeed have to do everything ourselves. No one understands our business like we do, no one has the single minded dedication that we do. But here is a simple truth: If you have to do everything yourself, you’re not doing it right.

Now, my client knows this and because she does, she operates a growing, successful company. But, we all have our moments.

You see, in the beginning, your business is you. You are the president, the bookkeeper, the janitor, and the one who makes the product or performs the service. It is at this crucial time that you can best impact the future of your business. If you don’t separate yourself from the day-to-day aspects of your company, you will run yourself into the ground.

Taking the approach of “I have to do everything myself” is a great recipe for burnout. How do I know?

GULP! Well, uh, um…it happened to me—yup! ME. Big know-it-all smarty-pants small business consultant. I walked right up to the trap and stuck my foot in it. And suddenly, I found myself so depressed and frustrated, I was ready to walk away from the business I had spent years building.

How did it happen? Did I lose my passion for helping small businesses succeed? Not at all. I still cared very deeply. So, what was the problem? I asked myself this question over and over as I repeatedly banged my head against the wall.

The problem was this: I was trying to be “The Solution”. I was trying to do everything for everybody and still work on my own business. What’s wrong with that? Being the solution is what business is all about, isn’t it? If my customer has a need shouldn’t I step up and try to fill that need?

Look at it this way, I’m a consultant. My job is to teach others how to do what needs to be done. A small business doesn’t need an MBA to do the payroll. A small business needs a payroll system that works long-term. My job is to set up systems that work, to develop systems that are sustainable and workable solutions for the business at all stages of growth.

Once a system is working, it then becomes my job to teach others how it works. Then, the System becomes "The Solution." I am merely an "Interim Solution." I learn, I teach, I get out of the way. Only then have I truly taken care of my customer.

Apply this to your own business. Are you performing tasks that take you away from your most important functions? Are you focusing on the long-term growth of your business or are you spending all your time on activities for which you are merely an "Interim Solution"? By focusing on what is truly important, you're better able to find the balance between what is best for your customers and your business.

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