

Turning Obstacles Into Opportunities

By Zelda Greenberg

Success is not going to come banging on your door screaming, "Open the door – I'm here!" You have to actually seek it out. Being successful, or at least staying successful in the world today, is a tough challenge here in the United States as well as abroad. How we tackle the challenges we face will determine our future success or failure.

My family owns and operates 100-year-old fresh fruit and vegetable delivery company that was directly hit by a tornado in 2004. The thought as to whether we would rebuild wasn't even in our thought process. Rather, we began to think about how we could build our company to be bigger and better than before. Thus, we began to explore all types of ideas for expansion. We researched how trends of the twenty-first century.

Today's youth and baby boomers alike are embracing a healthier, "greener" lifestyle. Our company sells a health product – fresh fruits and vegetables. We were in the ballgame with our product line, but who else could we sell this product to? We were already in restaurants, schools and food service providers. As we looked further we realized that the majority of decision-makers were women. The challenge of how to reach a woman consumer was the issue. We found women in large companies across the country. All we needed to do was create an office delivery service to complement their existing coffee and snack food services. We were going to offer the healthy snack alternative – and thus expand the business to reach greater sales and greater profitability.

So, how can you find a solution to the tough economic climate we are all facing? Open your eyes and ears because opportunity is all around you. Often, we are so busy staring at the missed opportunities that we fail to see a new one emerging. Hindsight is indeed 20/20, but if you dwell on the challenges and missed opportunities then you will be blind to the new ones that are right in front of you today. This doesn't mean to jump at every idea that comes your way but rather to explore all the options that might be viable solutions to your business challenges.

How does one ride the wave of a tough economy? Companies in the U.S. are not the only ones that are facing the challenges of the world events. There is hunger, homelessness, and jobless people across the world.

In Pakistan, the Prime Minister is encouraging Chambers of Commerce to help facilitate solutions. In Australia, the government is holding a summit where policymakers are working towards strategies that will tackle solutions 10 years and more into the country's future. The government in Australia is encouraging a wide range of people to contribute their ideas for solutions. All ideas are on the table from 15-year-old teenagers to soccer moms and dads to the policymakers. When you involve more people in the decision making process, more people will buy into the solutions.

So now you might be wondering: what can I do now to meet the challenges that my business faces today? How can I eliminate some of the pain by fixing today's problems not with a bandage

but with practical problem solving solutions? Here are a few suggestions that your company can start with:

- Keep up with technology. There is always a new product, software, machine, etc. Ask yourself: Will any of these new methods of technology help you in your business? Perhaps a software program that is industry-specific can help you process orders faster. This might help elevate some overtime from employees or help you make products faster. Is there a new piece of equipment that will help you make a better quality product or make things run more efficiently? Does your Website need new technology to drive customers to it? Know what technology is being developed so that you are on the cutting edge.
- Expenses must always be less than your income to produce a profit. Transportation and logistics companies face a rough challenge with fuel prices skyrocketing every time they turn around. In our company's industry on a local level it was not the norm to charge a fuel charge but with ever increasing fuel costs we had no choice. A few customers voiced their opinion at first – then they saw how much more our competitors were charging for fuel and the voices tapered off. Sometimes you just have to make slight changes to keep expenses in check. Look at ways to you can cut expenses to keep profit levels acceptable. Put all ideas on the table, and then look at the savings for each item on the list. All those dollars can add up to thousands in a short amount of time.
- Add value to your service or product. Expansion is a solution for some companies. Our family's company took an existing product and figured out a way to sell what we already had in stock to a new customer base. Start slow to work the bugs out of a new idea, and then market it to a new target customer. For example, Realtors could consider offering home staging services as part of their options to serve new listings. Retail companies might offer product demonstrations. Determine if you can use the existing product and support and expand without incurring additional expenses.
- Partner with suppliers and other businesses to create excitement. You can bring in expert speakers, host a product demonstration to showcase your products or services. Atlantic Laser of Jacksonville Beach, Florida sells office products. They hosted a tradeshow in their warehouse with some of their customers and suppliers being the exhibitors. They had Axxess Telecom their telephone provider, Microsoft Vista Representatives, Avery Representatives and others displaying their products. Each exhibitor invited guests to attend the mini-tradeshow.
- Tough times mean it's time to step up the marketing strategy. A great way to keep your name in front of your existing customers and prospects is with promotional products. Ed Alterman of Alterman's Business Gifts recommends using inexpensive yet highly effective products like polo shirts. The cost is just pennies for a great amount of exposure. Other favorite promotional products are coffee mugs, water bottles, pens and T-Shirts.
- Are you more of a hobby than a business? Perhaps you have been working very diligently over the past few years but the results have not been very good. Have you made a profit

for at least three out of the past five years? If you answered no, then rethink your business model. Sometimes we have to know when to hold them and when to fold them. These are tough choices to make, but you must decide if you are in business for fun or profit. This will be the deciding factor in determining if you remain open.

Solving today's challenges isn't an easy task. It requires a lot of thought if you are to find true long-term solutions. But the new solutions are the opportunities for growth in the future. How will you compete in the world today and tomorrow? Everyone has made mistakes in the past but you can't let those errors cloud your thinking. You must be diligent in searching for the opportunities in life. After all, difficulty and challenges will never go away. Open your eyes, your ears and your mind, because you never know what opportunity you may find today.

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