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If It's Broke...Fix It

You've heard the saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That little nugget warns us not to change things just for the sake of change.

But what about something that isn't working, that isn't giving us the results we want? Surely, that points to the need for a change. But, amazingly, some people remain resistant to change even when everything is falling apart around them. Or they change the wrong things.

In working with several companies during my career, I've seen change from many vantage points. Sometimes I was a change agent, and at other times I was only marginally involved. Many times I've been on the receiving end, either flowing with or fighting the change. Through these experiences, I've learned a few things about what goes into making changes that truly fix what's broken.

Here are eight of them:

1. Know what's broken, if anything

Have your customers or candidates been complaining? Have sales plateaued or, worse, taken a nosedive? Those are clear signs that something isn't working...and that something needs to be done. Of course, there are other valid reasons for making changes, such as taking your business to the next level by adding services or features. But if your business has gone into a downward spiral, it's high time to take action.

2. Avoid the blame game.

Unfortunately, the first reaction when business wanes is to find someone to blame and show him/her the door. But a personnel change rarely solves the problem. More often than not, the next warm body to fill the position will succumb to the same problems that plagued the previous occupant...and, perhaps, be less equipped to cope with them. Personnel changes should typically be the last resort.

3. Find constructive ways to cope with stress.

If business isn't going well, you're bound to experience stress. Unless you manage that stress effectively, it can lead to poor

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judgment, ill-conceived decisions, and/or emotional outbursts at inopportune moments. To avoid making a bad situation even worse, exercise, get counseling, work with a business coach, meditate, or take a short trip to clear your head.

4. **Uncover the culprit.**

When a business isn't thriving, there are many factors that may be to blame, from ineffective marketing strategies to poor management. So how do you know what needs to be changed? Often the issue is marketing-related, so that's a good place to start. Review your marketing materials and practices and decide what needs to be improved. If the issue isn't related to marketing, is it something about your services that's no longer competitive? Are sales about the same, but profits are suffering? Maybe you need to increase your prices or downsize your overhead. Before making any changes, be sure you're fixing the right thing.

5. **Communicate.**

If you're planning to make changes, inform those who will be most affected by them -- and do it before you implement the changes. No one likes to be blindsided, especially your candidates or customers. If you're considering a change in your services, prices, or marketing materials, getting customer reactions in advance might save you a lot of time, money, and effort.

6. **Plan first, then implement.**

Changes in one aspect of your business are bound to affect other areas, so it makes sense to plan accordingly. Know what those cross-over effects will be before you take action. Do you need to phase in the planned change gradually or is it best to do it in one step? Have you done a cost/benefit analysis so you'll know if the change makes sense from a financial standpoint?

7. **Is it fixed yet?**

How (and when) will you know if the change has had the desired results? For that matter, just what results are you expecting?

Unless you've identified your goal, how will you know if you've reached it? It's not enough to say you want to increase your profits. You need to establish dollar amounts and time frames so that you will be prepared to make adjustments...before it's too late.

8. **Plan B**

If your change doesn't fix the problem, don't give up. Be prepared to find other solutions. In fact, having a Plan B on the back burner can make the difference between failure and success.

9. **Expect problems**

We live in a fast-paced world, with technological advances coming at us with breakneck speed. Even if something isn't broken, it's bound to become obsolete. So, expect your business to encounter problems. Plan for them. Then, if something is broken (or obsolete)...fix it. Just do it right.

- Sandi Corbitt-Sears

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Sandi Corbitt-Sears (publisher@StaffingU.net) is Director of Communication for StaffingU, the leader in providing relationship-building techniques guaranteed to grow your business. For information on StaffingU's programs and services, including TeleClasses (live telephone-based classes), Virtual StaffingU (web-based courses), individual and group coaching, on-site training and speaking, and consulting visit www.StaffingU.net or call 866-SU-WORKS (789-6757).

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