

Picking The Right Destination In Business and Life

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NOW WHAT? WHEN LIFE AND BUSINESS MEET AT THE CROSSROADS...

More and more, the successful entrepreneurs I talk and work with are asking this question: "I've reached the top of this mountain...is this all there is? Now what?"

This is a tough place to be, but not an uncommon one. As you take that long ride down the highway of life, needs and wants tend to change.

The symptoms are pretty clear in statements like:

- "I'm never happy"
- "I'm bored"
- "I'm tired of working this hard"
- "I've lost my passion"
- "I can't decide where to direct my passion"
- "I want more but can't seem to get there"

In addition to being a tough place, this is also a dangerous place. Dangerous because it causes otherwise sane men and women to do some weird stuff — beginning with taking their eyes off the road and focusing on everything *but* their core business. Searching earnestly for the magic that will return the jazz to their daily lives, they get into real estate development, take up mountain climbing, or study to be a Yogi.

Sounds like the typical midlife crisis, right?

"As you take that long ride down the highway of life, needs and wants tend to change."

Maybe yes, maybe no. This midlife crisis hits at midlife for the business. And it endangers not just the person, but also the business. While there is nothing wrong with diversifying one's interests (like enjoying motorcycling), when it becomes a primary focus, all too often people find themselves sitting on the side of the road with the business in the ditch. Or worse still, they turn around and find the business in somebody else's control — sold too soon — and wonder what happened.

Let's face it, when you're no longer in love with what you're doing, you need to expand your horizons. But in this danger zone, you can't see that far down the road, because the pressure cooker of daily business creates a force of habit where you walk in each day and continue the same theme you started the day before. And once those wheels are spinning, you don't feel like you can take the time to pull over and reflect. You simply keep on riding the same ride, day after day.

You are now at the crossroads of life and business and it's time for you to focus more on living than on business.

So how do you successfully navigate the crossroads to determine your right direction in business and life?

The secret is to find new finish lines.

Entrepreneurs and high performers thrive on finish lines. Like bikers, they are today's cowboys. They have a burning desire to carve their own path in this world, believe deep down in their soul they have a better idea and better way of doing things, and cannot live with themselves unless they are rolling toward that finish line.

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Business and biking are both about momentum. The right momentum propels you towards the light, but misguided momentum can propel you just as quickly into the ditch. The difficulty is figuring out which momentum you're chasing, because both involve tunnel vision that only clears near the end of the road. And, by that time it may be too late.

Finding the right finish lines involves three major elements:

- ✓ Life/Work Balance
- ✓ Potential vs. Success
- ✓ *The Question*

LIFE/WORK BALANCE

The definition of life/work balance is different for everyone. This is especially true in the fast-paced world of entrepreneurship.

In the early days of growing a company, the 9-5 life is a pipe dream. You do whatever it takes to survive and win. Once you've achieved a level of success and longevity, it's all about staying there.

But how much effort and momentum does it take to stay there? Are you still working long hours because you have to? Or, is it now a habit? Just what is the right balance?

In the mid-90's, I attended a speech by Tom Peters. Midway through, Peters addressed the issue of life/work balance. With the Olympics underway in Atlanta at the time, he used the example of the teenage girls competing on the balance beam.

Peters explained that the girls awakened each morning before dawn and went to practice. After practice, they returned home to shower and head off to school. After school, they spent more time training, then returned home to do homework, have dinner and go to sleep.

"Are you still working long hours because you have to? Or, is it now a habit?"

The girls did this every day. They didn't go to parties, they weren't in the school play, and they didn't hang out with their friends at the mall or at the movies. To the average person, their lives appeared to be significantly out of balance. Until you added in

one major factor: they were going for a gold medal. They were in total balance.

But what happens after you achieve your gold medal? What's next?

Even if it was the ride of your life, it's not the end of your journey. The trick now is to figure out the new direction you want to travel, because staying on the same road just isn't an option. "Been there, done that, got the black t-shirt."

Entrepreneurs are the embodiment of the age-old cliché that success is a journey, not a destination. To find new finish lines and determine the next right direction, you need to rethink your personal definition of success.

This is not as easy as it sounds. We are all creatures of habit, even if those habits are no longer serving us well. The process of changing direction comes with hard questions and even harder choices. It starts by asking how your definition of success has changed. If you could turn your face into the wind and ride, in which direction would you go?

"Been there, done that, got the black t-shirt."

But, before you answer that question, you need to wrestle with the question of *potential* versus *success*.

POTENTIAL VERSUS SUCCESS

Companies are measured by size and that leads most entrepreneurs and business leaders to be driven by growth at all costs. What about you?

Do you equate reaching growth potential with success? Are you growing for growth's sake? Are you growing because someone told you that you could or should be *THIS BIG*? Or, do you have a different vision of the kind of business you want?

Often, in my discussions with business leaders, one will say, "I need your help in taking this company to the next level." When I ask what that level is, they will invariably say something like, "Today we're \$10 million, but considering the market we're in, our current market position and our growth potential, we should be a (fill in your number here) company in five years."

"Are you growing because someone told you that you could or should be THIS BIG?"

Rather than jumping immediately into the issues that may be delaying the company's growth, I'll begin to ask questions about their personal vision for success.

I ask about the state of their life, both in and outside of the company — assuming they *have* a life outside the company. I ask how many hours a week they work. I ask about the age, size and commitment of the workforce and the number of hours *they* work. I ask about outside pressures — spouse, family, health, vendors, regulations and competitors — that drive daily decisions.

Then, I then ask him/her to consider this scenario:

Put the potential of your company aside. It is now five years down the road. Your world has gone exactly as you planned it.

- *What does your life look like?*
- *What does your company look like?*
- *What are you doing differently?*
- *What are you doing that's the same?*
- *What are your employees doing differently?*
- *Where does your family fit in?*

It's an instructive exercise, and certainly, many would like a week or more to do it justice. However, I find an initial gut reaction usually produces answers closer to the truth, and that's what I'm driving toward.

More often than not, I get responses like:

- "I want to spend more time with my family"
- "I want to coach my kid's soccer team"
- "I want to be there when my son (grandson) graduates"
- "I want to enjoy four-day weekends on a regular basis"
- "I want to travel more"

If I hear responses like these, I know my client has a major disconnect between their company reaching its potential and their personal vision of success. When I point this out, it's usually not that big of a surprise, because they recognize the thought — it's been lurking in the back of their head, as if such a notion is somehow taboo.

"I find an initial gut reaction usually produces answers closer to the truth."

This disconnect happens because entrepreneurs are an aggressive bunch. They focus on winning, so it's reasonable for them to equate the business reaching its potential with ultimate success. For many, however, that is far from *their* particular truth.

They launched their company with a great idea or product, combined with the passion and stamina to succeed. If the stars align, they wake up 10 or 15 years later with an organization of people that grew up around them.

Rather than feeling successful, they feel the weight of responsibility and the obligation to keep it going — not necessarily for themselves, but for their employees. And despite their reservations, they feel compelled to pursue that "next level."

In the quest for success, they have lost sight of the fact that they built the company to work for them, not the other way around. They've lost sight of the fact that they built the organization to deliver the lifestyle they always dreamed of.

Often it can. But, there is a catch. To realize that lifestyle, they may need to re-define their dreams of success and take action to hold themselves true to that dream.

When this disconnect shows up, I tell them it is absolutely okay if their dream of success conflicts with the company's ultimate growth potential — whatever that is. But, until they reconcile the conflict between reaching their company's potential and achieving success (their dream), the chances of them reaching *either result* are slim.

"It is absolutely okay if their dream of success conflicts with the company's ultimate growth potential."

I also remind them that success is a moving target. As conditions change, success must frequently be re-defined. Just like on any long road trip, you'll approach many exits. The key is recognizing the one that's right for you.

How do you get to your true definition of success?

THE QUESTION

There's no better way to get to that true definition of success — the right destination for you — than to use this powerful question.

“It’s five years from now and your life has gone according to plan. Every challenge met, every obstacle overcome... it worked like a charm. What does life look like?”

Start your answer with an outline of your thoughts and be as specific as possible:

- List everything that’s important to you
- Describe what you absolutely want to experience
- Take your time and paint the picture of where it is you want to go

Once you have an outline, write your answer in the form of a story, as if you are describing it to someone else.

The end result can be as short as a couple of paragraphs or as much as a few pages. The more detail, the more vivid the story.

And, there’s something magical about putting it down on paper. It creates gravitas when you put it out there for the universe to see and act upon.

“There is something magical about putting it down on paper.”

THE RIGHT DESTINATION

Size does matter! Defining and reaching the right size for your company, regardless of its potential, is the true measure of success. Because that's your ride. That's where you want and need to go.

Once you've figured it out, simply turn your face to the wind and keep the rubber side down. Because happiness follows when you turn your passions into performance.

MEET THE MAN BEHIND THE BIKER'S GUIDE

"I'd rather ride my motorcycle and think about business than sit in a meeting and think about riding."

Dwain M. DeVille is the founder and CEO of WaterMark International, Inc., a consultancy that serves business leaders. Watermark's approach centers on the Art of Navigation, an innovative process Dwain developed to guide businesses — small and large — through the challenges they face when they are trying to reach the next level of performance.

As much as Dwain DeVille loves the challenges of business, he loves to ride his motorcycle even more. And after decades of enjoying both, he's grown equally at home in the boardroom and in the saddle. A couple of years ago, Dwain was riding a Moto-Guzzi back to Florida from Canada when a germ of a thought started to form. After he rolled up a few thousand more miles in the saddle, conducted dozens of business workshops and chatted up business owners and entrepreneurs who love to ride, Dwain's idea began to take shape. Last year, while enjoying a high-country Colorado tour, Dwain decided the time had come to combine his two passions. The Biker's Guide to Business was born.

To learn more about The Biker's Guide to Business, visit

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