

Lessons Learned from the Survivors Club

Did you ever wonder why some people survive and others don't? Why some stay calm and collected and others become highly stressed and unravel? How could some bounce back from adversity, while others collapse and surrender? What could be the cause, some natural ability, training and experience or is it just dumb luck?

I recently came across a book, *The Survivors Club* by Ben Sherwood, that cited many examples of individuals that survived all manner of adversity and, above all odds, survived. Like in life, businesses are faced with unexpected challenges, adversity and opportunities in addition to the everyday business activities that must be done. It is how owners and managers carry out those daily activities and respond to the unusual or crisis that determines the business' failure, survival or prosperity. Many businesses have survived the current recession and they are still looking at an uncertain future. The world is changing at an accelerated rate with a new paradigm shift around every corner. With the right tools and support anyone can improve their chances of survival, hold back, if necessary, and take advantage of the next opportunity, the next big thing or paradigm shift that presents itself.

Failure to Respond

In extreme conditions sometimes a person will freeze up and fail to respond in time to prevent injury. This happens when a skydiver, hurling towards earth, for no apparent reason fails to pull the deployment cord on his parachute to save his life. Skydivers call this "brain-lock." It is the cause of about 10 percent of all parachuting fatalities. This lack of reaction is brought on by the person trying to deal with impending fear and dread. The same inability to process and respond to a crisis or sudden event appropriately can also occur from a sudden distraction or the extreme focus on a task like texting in a moving vehicle. It is the ability to push through fear, hesitation or distraction that can mean survival or death, success or failure.

In the business world most people have time to respond but still fail to do so timely or appropriately. We have seen the printing and mailing industry move into digital and variable printing at a fast pace and respond to market pressure by blending printing and mailing services. Yet, we still we see many businesses in the industry have failed to move forward.

Last year, I spoke with a printer that was bewildered at the changing technology and the harsh economy. He was the owner operator and wanted to retire but couldn't because of the declining business climate and economic downturn. He has always been the only salesman and was comfortable with the services his business provided. He finally realized that he needed to invest in new more efficient technology in order to provide the services his customers and prospects wanted. At the same time, he was held back by the fear of unfamiliar equipment and technology and making costly wrong decisions. However, it may have been too late anyway. His capital was tied up in the business' building that he owned, it was in a declining neighborhood with real estate values at an all-time low, and banks were not lending. He saw himself stuck in a declining business, with no exit plan, little likelihood to sell and possibly headed for the business closing

Are you Lucky?

In life, some people appear to be luckier than others. For most people, luck is something that happens by pure chance. However, that is not necessarily so. Research by Professor Richard Wiseman has found that in reality things do work out consistently for some people and badly for others. He identifies luck as a “state of mind, a way of thinking and behaving and we have far more control of our lives and our luck than we realize.” Wiseman believes that “only 10% of life is purely random and the remaining 90% is determined by our attitude and behavior.” For instance, a passenger on an airplane that paid careful attention to the safety briefing, memorizing an escape plan and evacuating immediately without being told to is far more likely to survive a crash and be the lucky one to escape.

Lucky people are more aware of their surroundings and thereby increase their chances for survival and prosperity. Most people tend to be easily distracted and become very focused on tasks to the point of perceiving very little of their environment and miss what may be important to their survival and possible opportunities.

The lucky business runs lean, knows their business’ capabilities and flexibility, believes in the benefits of planning and is always on the lookout for opportunities. As an example, one “lucky” mailing provider at the onset of the recession reacted promptly and cut expenses and nonessential labor but still invested in new more efficient technology and added services. They invested in variable digital print including full color but instead of investing in costly computer systems, they went to “cloud” computer processing and keeping their staff of programmers. This gave them enhanced computer capability without the cost. The acquisition of a used selective inserter with document tracking systems gave them the ability to process statement mailings. This was a service that was out of their comfort zone and a stretch of their capabilities. The opportunity for new business presented itself when their sales manager called upon a large credit union and found that there was an opportunity to not only provide mailing services for marketing but also provide backup for their in-house statement processing operation managed by an outsourcing service provider. A short time thereafter, the credit union experienced performance failure by the outsourcing provider and looked to the mailing provider to support them. The mailing provider was able to respond quickly, drawing upon the full company resources to create custom programming and timely processing to handle the credit union’s unique requirements. This was a win-win for both the credit union and the mailing provider.

The Business Challenge

In good times it’s easier to be successful in business. In difficult times like the current recession, reduced buying, rising prices and tight credit presents a real test of the business owner or manager’s survival skills. Businesses are a reflection of the people that own and manage them and their reaction to the external forces affecting their business. Businesses tend to run quite well as long as everything is in balance. However, it never stays that way. There is always constant change and pressure from all areas that must be adjusted to constantly. Whether things go awry gradually or suddenly, for any number of reasons, the business that can recover, change and adapt will survive. A solid business plan can keep the business moving in the desired direction with everything in balance to stay healthy. It is the anticipation of adversity and the appropriate planning that will improve their chances of survival and beyond to prosperity.

The Business Assessment - The first step to improving the business' chances of survival is a Business Assessment. This fundamental business management tool focuses on understanding the needs of the business as a whole, its strategic direction, and identifies initiatives that will allow a business to meet their strategic goals and to take advantage of desired opportunities. The Business Assessment is a check-up that will also address the business' capabilities, searches out its weaknesses and determines the appropriate solutions to resolve those weaknesses. It identifies the business' strengths to build on, sets realistic goals and determines the appropriate actions to achieve those goals. For a first time assessment, it is always advisable to have an assessment performed by a professional industry consultant that has the capability to follow through with the appropriate solutions and planning processes.

Who gets into the Survivors Club?

Whether it's an individual or a business it's clear that there is significant evidence that survival is more than dumb luck. There is a surprising amount that can be controlled to improve your chances of survival. Membership in the Club is simple, however, to continue to be a member, Sherwood says, survivors must be "alert, engaged, and aware. They think, they plan, and they take action. The survival mentality is both a reflex and a habit that you can cultivate through practice and preparation. They are information seekers. They learn from life and from their mistakes. If they screw up, they take advantage of the experience for the next time. Survivors divide unwieldy challenges into achievable tasks, one goal at a time, one decision at a time and one action at a time." A business, as well, can adopt the survivor's mentality and use the basic business management tools to improve their chances for survival and success. The successful business "**PLANS**" to survive and puts those plans into action.

By Line Tag:

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