

IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS IN 30 DAYS: ONE TIP FOR EVERY DAY OF THE MONTH



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Staff Tips

1. Employ the right people.

Far too often, when I have been called in to help a business get back on track, I find that too often the wrong people have been hired.

Then they compound the problem; instead of accepting that a poor decision has been made and amicably parting company with the employee, they persist in trying to fit a round peg into square hole.

Before employing any new person, first sit down and write a job description, that clearly defines the role that the new appointment will fill.

Next workout what skills will be required to fulfil that role.

You can now write your job ad and start sifting through the applications looking for those people that have those skills.

However, let me make this point as strongly as I can: while skills are important, attitude is everything.

You can always train a person with the right attitude who lacks certain skills, but you can never train a person with the skills but a poor attitude.

I've seen many cases where people have successfully learnt new skills, but I can only recall one occasion where an employee had a complete attitude change.

2. Have controls in place so that you can see what is happening in the business.

One of the most common problems experienced by small business owners is that they micromanage their employees. The reason for this is that they have not learned how to manage the business in a hands-off manner.

These days, there are tools available to small business owners that allow you to exercise that same

level of control but without looking over your employees' shoulders.

One useful tool that you should look at is Asana, an online task management system: www.asana.com.

This app will allow you to break up your employees into teams and manage their activities at both the team and individual level. An advantage is that it is also free.

Another useful piece of software in the quest to remotely manage your business is the MAUS KPI Dashboard.

For further information about suitable software, email us at admin@yourbusinessfreedom.com.au.

3. Learn how to effectively delegate.

You can delegate to an existing team member, a new on-site employee or even someone remote.

The art of delegation is a very broad topic and can be disastrous if you do not learn how to do it well.

I have done a number of videos on the subject of delegation, which can be found at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRkAiyvkjxnuTrCijth-6lQ/featured?disable_polymer=1.

While this is a tough art to learn, if you don't you will never ever be able to effectively grow your business. Even worse, you will drive yourself into the ground.

In short terms, the key is to identify someone with the appropriate skill set and prepare a clear set of procedures (this can either be written, or preferably videoed), before they commence the duties.

To begin with make sure you build into your process a system of checking, until such time you're satisfied that they are competent enough to do the job without close supervision.

As mentioned in the previous tip, you can use Asana and the MAUS KPI Dashboard to manage this process.

4. Happier staff give better customer service.

I believe the Chinese have a quote that says “a man with a sour face should not open shop”.

If you are not a happy person at work, then your staff will not be happy at work. If you and your staff are not happy at work, you will drive customers away.

The most costly part of doing business is to actually get people into your place of business, on the phone or online. If you then put them off because of a miserable attitude, then you are burning through a lot of money.

This is one of those things where you could get somebody at random to contact your business, either in person, on the phone or online, and then report back on their experience.

This tip is far too important to ignore.

5. Hire the best person for the job.

I want to come to this one from a slightly different angle. I’m not talking here about the more mundane work that might need to be done in your business, but the role where intelligence is a definite advantage.

Frequently I find that small business owners shy away from employing people who are smarter than they are.

They tend to feel that, as the business owner, they should have all the answers, and employing somebody more intelligent than them may compromise the situation.

The thing to remember is that it is your business, and, at the end of the day, you will be the one who will look good or bad, depending upon the decisions made within your business.

So, if you are employing people smarter than you, there is every chance that better decisions will be made, and your business will become more successful.

For a senior role, I always look for people smarter than me, because they end up making me look good.

Recent graduates will often be very grateful for the opportunity to demonstrate their ability.

They may not have the practical skills that you're looking for, but they are generally extremely keen to work hard and learn.

Yes, unless you can continue to grow them, they will move on to bigger companies who can offer them a career path, but, in the meantime, you will have benefited from their knowledge and abilities.

6. Treat your staff well.

It almost seems like a waste of time mentioning this point, as it is so obvious.

However, it's been my experience that this is not always the case in every business.

In some businesses, the owners take the attitude that the employee should be grateful for the job.

They seem to feel that they have kept their side of the bargain by paying them.

Now there may not be anything malicious in the owner's intent, but it is most certainly a dangerous practice.

We must never lose sight of the fact that frequently the future of our business lies in the hands of our employees.

Frequently, our employees are the link between our business and our customers.

If our staff are not representing our business as we would wish, then it will cost us money and possibly even our business in the long run.

So, treat your staff as you too would like to be treated.

7. Share your goals and priorities with your staff.

Some business owners treat their staff like mushrooms. They keep them in the dark and feed them on manure.

Now, again, there may be nothing malicious about this at all; it's just a failure to understand why this is so important.

In a team sport, if only the captain or the coach knew what the team was trying to achieve, winning would be very difficult.

This is equally as true in business.

The more your team understand what the goals are, and the order of priorities, the greater the contribution they can make towards the outcome which you are seeking.

For many years, I have made it a practice to have a weekly team meeting, where I set out what we are trying to do.

We work from a 90-day action plan, through to daily task management.

When your team have this sort of information, it is easy for them to prioritise their own work, so that they fit in with the overall aims of the business.

8. Inspire staff to not put a ceiling on themselves.

Many employers have this false assumption that it is not a good idea to inspire their staff to be the very best that they can be.

Many refuse to spend money on training their staff, helping them get better qualified.

They have this misguided notion that if they train them up, they will either want more money or leave and go to one of their competitors.

The great speaker, Tom O'Toole, from Beechworth Bakery, used to say "what if you don't train them and they stay".

From my own experience, spending money on employees and helping them grow is one of the best retention tools you can use.

If you want your business to grow, both you and your team members must grow first; the business will then grow as a consequence of your team's growth.

9. Hold regular meetings with your staff.

Even in the smallest of businesses, and even if there are only two of you, get into the habit of holding regular team meetings.

The reason for this is that communications play a vital role in any business, and yet they are frequently handled so badly.

Regular team meetings give you the opportunity to make sure everybody is up-to-date with what is happening within the business.

It also gives your team members the opportunity of bringing up matters that have the potential to cause problems further down the track.

You should always make sure that you have somebody who is taking notes and who will circulate those notes to all the team members within 24 hours.

These notes should also include any actions that need to be taken, by whom and by what date.

How frequently you hold these meetings will depend upon the sort of business you are in. In my previous business we used to meet every 2 weeks; in this current business, we meet weekly.

Customer Tips

10. Always ask “how did you hear about us” every time a customer or enquiry calls you.

This is a common mistake made by many small businesses.

They have no idea where their business is coming from.

If you're spending any money at all on marketing, then you must be aware of what is working for you and what isn't.

If you know where your customers are coming from, then you can ramp up your marketing in that area and probably cut back your expenditure on the marketing that is not working.

If you don't know what's working for you, then you're wasting money and opportunity.

11. Keep customers informed of what you're doing.

You can't expect your customers to guess what new things you are doing.

The least expensive customer is the one that has already done business with you.

So, make sure there is somewhere in your process where you capture their details, so that you can keep them up-to-date with any new developments in your business.

12. Get written testimonials

One of the things you need to recognise is that most people will intend to give you the written testimonial, but it will all get forgotten in the business of their days.

The trick here is to write down the comments that the client made as soon as you finish talking to them, type it up, send them a copy, and ask for their approval to use it.

Most people will be more than happy to give you the approval; in fact, they will be pleased to help you.

Written testimonials are a powerful endorsement of your service and can be used, not only on your website, but also on your ads, where appropriate.

13. Listen to customers; they are your lifeblood.

We should, on a regular basis, survey our customers to see how well we are performing.

Often, we think that we are providing the service or product that they are looking for when they are really looking for something different.

It is very easy these days to set up a simple confidential survey, to gain valuable insight into our performance.

One simple tool that is on the market is Wufoo. This is a tool that we use quite frequently when we are seeking honest feedback, as the people respond anonymously.

For further information go to www.wufoo.com. I am pretty sure that they have a free version.

14. Build a customer database.

We must know who customers are, and we must know how to contact them.

Once we know who they are and how to contact them, we must then ensure that we are in contact with them on a regular basis.

Although sending out newsletters with your latest offerings is better than nothing, there are better options.

In this day and age, where so often we are reduced to merely a number, anyone who takes the trouble to treat us as a person will always be a step ahead of the competition.

When you start to build a client/customer database, see if you can segment it, so that any communications you have with that client will be meaningful.

The large players these days have developed this to a very fine art. They seem to know more about us than we do ourselves.

So, if we wish to remain competitive, we must learn the same lessons that they have. There is plenty of material about this issue on Google, so spending a bit of time in this area will ultimately pay dividends.

If you don't already have database software, then I suggest you start with MailChimp, as it has a free option.

For further information on MailChimp go to www.mailchimp.com.

Strategy Tips

15. Develop an action plan, and then action it!

Good intentions will not get the job done. You need to lay out a plan, in writing, record the action, who's responsible for the action, when the tasks will be started, when it should be finished and, finally, when it was actually finished.

You need to review this action plan on a regular basis, at least weekly, and hold everybody accountable for their actions, especially you.

If you would like a copy of the action plan template, then email us at admin@yourbusinessfreedom.com.au and put in the subject line 'action template'.

16. Look to increase your average value sale.

One of the hardest things to do in business is to actually get in front of a customer, whether this is in person, on the phone or online.

However, once we are interacting with the customer, we must make sure we make the most of the opportunity.

Everyone knows about McDonalds' "would you like fries with that", but I'm not sure that everybody is aware of how much this adds to McDonalds' bottom-line.

If you have a look at all the big players, they all have some strategy to increase the value of the sale.

You need to do the same. Get together with your team and see what additional offering you can make, to increase the value of your average sale.

17. Think profit & cash flow, not sales.

More sales do not necessarily equal more profit. In fact, sometimes they can equal less profit.

If you do not have good systems in place, as well as well-trained staff, then more sales can often result in chaos.

In fact, in my 40 odd years in small business advice and management, I've seen increased sales bring about many businesses' failure.

The cause of the failure may be a result of a lack of systems and well-trained staff, but it also may be a result of running out of money.

So, before you go and crank up your sales, make sure that your systems, your staff, and your cash reserves, will cope with the increase in business.

Before embarking upon any major increase in turnover, always run the numbers and make sure they stack up.

If you're looking for a simple cash flow projector template, then email us at admin@yourbusinessfreedom.com.au and put in the subject line 'cash flow template'.

18. Don't stick to one single idea.

Play with different ideas and see which ones are successful and profitable.

You don't want to have too many "irons in the fire", as you can easily lose focus; you also need to be careful that you are not a "one trick pony".

When testing different ideas and products, make sure that you stay within your core business.

19. Create a marketing plan.

These days marketing is as important, if not more so, than product development.

There is no point in having the best product and the best service at the best price, if nobody knows about it.

Without a marketing plan, what will happen is you will tend to dabble, and this is a great way of wasting money.

What tends to happen without a formalised marketing plan is that we try this and we try that without any clear objective behind what we're doing.

When we are trying to optimise our marketing, we should be clear on our approach and continually checking our analytics, to see what is and isn't working.

Having no clear marketing plan is a recipe for failure.

20. Networking is the key to success.

Networking used to involve us attending functions and trying to meet as many people as we could. This was a very time-consuming process and some of us were better at it than others.

Today, we have other opportunities available to us.

One of my favourites is LinkedIn. We can sit at our computer, or for some of us at our smart phones, and connect with those people who we would seek out at a networking event.

The beauty of this is we are not restricted geographically or even chronologically. If you're a bit of a "night owl", you can even do this late at night or at any time that suits you.

However, if you are going to use LinkedIn to network, please remember that what you are looking to do is to build relationships.

One of the cardinal sins that people make with LinkedIn is that no sooner have you agreed to

connect with them that they try and sell you something.

This is the fastest way to destroy any hope you have of creating a relationship with your new connection.

Of course, LinkedIn is not your only option these days; there is also Twitter, Facebook and Instagram that you can use to build connections and relationships.

The old-fashioned way of networking by meeting people in person of course remains, but when it is convenient.

21. Visualise what your future is to look like.

I once heard a racing driver explain how they were able to avoid some of the accidents that an amateur would end up in.

His explanation was that racing drivers concentrate on where they want the car to go, whereas amateurs look at where they're going to hit.

To put it another way, the professional looks at where he wants to go, but the amateur looks at what he doesn't want to happen.

Most top sports people these days spend a great deal of time visualising the outcome they are seeking. They spend no time visualising what they don't want to happen.

We as business owners must take a leaf out of their book and spend some time visualising what we want the future to look like.

What would it look like in one year's time, in 5 years' time, maybe even 10 years' time?

The more detail we can put into this, the more likely it is to happen.

The best thing to do is firstly write this out on a foolscap sheet of paper. The act of writing seems to have a more reinforcing affect than typing.

Once you have it in writing, keep polishing until you reach a point where you think it represents a clear picture of the future for you.

Remember, you are doing this for you, so you don't need to worry what others may think about it.

Once you have it written out to your satisfaction, start spending some time each day visualising it.

22. Balance watching expenditure with investing for your future.

I've already talked about the need to monitor your expenditure and make cuts wherever possible.

However, you also need to be investing in your future.

To get this mix correct is a very fine balancing act.

My advice to ensure that you can to keep the balance right is to work off a percentage of sales, gross profit, or possibly net profit.

The reason why I have mentioned 3 different options is because it will depend on the nature of the investment.

Will this investment make you more efficient and thereby cut your costs?

Or is it the sort of investment that will allow you to increase sales?

It may be an investment, in either yourself or a staff member, that will help you, in the future, to run your business better, as a result of better training.

All of these investments are very valid and well worth spending money on, but you must make sure that the business can afford the expenditure at this point.

Attitude Tips

23. Be honest and upfront.

I remember reading many years ago that, if honesty did not exist, then business would need to invent it.

In the very crowded business world in which we operate, being honest and upfront can really set you apart from the crowd.

By being honest and upfront, I don't just mean not telling lies, but I also mean telling people when you do not believe that your product or service is in their best interest.

Even if you miss the sale, people will remember you and either come back to you when you do have an offering that would suit them and/or tell a friend or acquaintance of the experience.

Although it may be a sad reflection on society that we can use honesty to set us apart from our competitors, it nevertheless is true.

24. Never go back on your word, even if it hurts.

We've all had those circumstances in business, where we made a promise which we then found very difficult or expensive to deliver on.

It does not matter how much personal pain you may suffer, if it is within your power to deliver on your promise then do so.

Over the years, I've been counselled many times on what many perceive is my lack pragmatism; however, I've never changed and have no intention of changing, because, once I have a customer, they stay with me for years.

The cost of keeping a promise, in the long-term, falls into insignificance, when compared with the business that I have received back, as a result of the loyalty of the client to me and my business.

25. Enthusiasm is contagious.

If you're running a business, one of the greatest characteristics that you can display is enthusiasm.

In the same way that negativity can spread like wildfire throughout a company, so can enthusiasm and positivity.

Often people will justify negativity, by saying that that they're just trying to be realistic, but, in most instances, it just produces an air of negativity.

Enthusiastic people are always keen to try new ideas, whereas negative people always know why it won't work.

If you're the sort of person that is not naturally enthusiastic, then research some strategies to help yourself in this area.

I know that, as an engineer, I can get caught up in the "just being realistic" mindset, so I've developed a little strategy that I use each day, where:

- **every morning I write down 5 things for which I am grateful**
- **every evening I write down 5 things I've achieved that day.**

Between these 2 actions, I manage to stay in a positive mindset.

26. Focus. Focus. Focus.

One of the most frequently seen problems when consulting with small business owners is that they are involved in so much that they don't ever focus.

I use the analogy of taking a sheet of paper outside, holding it in sunlight and asking what the effect would be. The answer of course is nothing much.

If we then take that same sheet of paper, along with a magnifying glass, and concentrate the sun's rays, I ask them what the effect would be. Their answer is that the paper would catch fire.

I then ask them what the difference is; it's exactly the same sun's rays. The answer of course is that those rays have now been focused.

In the first example, the sun's energy is diffused. In the second example, the energy is concentrated on a spot.

Exactly the same thing happens to us. If we defuse our energy, it has no impact. If we concentrate our energy we catch fire.

27. Procrastination is the enemy of growth.

Procrastination, is unquestionably a business killer.

We live in a very fast paced world today, and those businesses that delay taking the action that they know they should be taking, will slowly die.

There is no doubt that as small business owners we need to speed up not only our decision making, but also our actions taken.

We need to become a people of action.

We no longer compete on a local or national stage. We have been forced to compete on the international stage as well.

So, it is no longer the person just down the road, who we have to compete against, but quite likely somebody in India or China, or in fact anywhere in the world.

We must become light on our feet, and swift in action, out-thinking and out-implementing our competitors wherever they may be.

28. Always be punctual.

We used to call this a common courtesy, but regrettably it is becoming less and less common.

It doesn't matter what the occasion is, whether it is a meeting with a customer, a team member, a supplier, or anyone else, make sure you are the one that is on time and ready.

Being late puts you at a significant disadvantage, if the other party is already there, ready and waiting.

From this point on, you will be forever scrambling trying to catch up.

You're also giving the other party the impression that their time is not important, while yours is.

Now we all understand that there are moments when being late is unavoidable, but in these days of mobile phones, there really is no reason for not alerting the other party of your late arrival.

I know some people are habitually late, and this is because it has become a habit and a bad one in that.

Some make a resolution to always be on time for any sort of meeting in the future.

29. Learn from setbacks - they are the stepping stones of life.

Setbacks and diversity are a fact of life in general. Everybody suffers from them.

The difference is, for successful people, they look for the lessons in the setback and then move on.

Winston Churchill once said, "success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm".

We often think that famous people don't suffer the same trials and tribulations as we do.

This is far from the truth, what they have learned to do is to deal with life's reversals much more effectively.

If we have any aspirations towards achieving anything significant in our lives, then we too must establish similar habits.

30. Walk the walk as well as talking the talk.

When I was growing up and I would complain about some restriction that my father placed upon me. His favourite saying was "do as I tell you, not as I do".

I thought then, and still think now, that this is a real copout.

How are you going to respect someone and the decisions that they make, if they don't follow the same rules?

I know, when I work with small business owners, that the hardest people to get to change are the owners themselves.

They will often continue to follow shortcuts, even after we've agreed on a set process for everyone, but they know that there is no one to haul them into line.

Simply put, they do not demonstrate accountability, so how can they expect that from their staff?

**For more information, feel free to contact us at
admin@yourbusinessfreedom.com.au**