

... dealing with rejection?

AS LONG AS YOU'RE IN BUSINESS, rejection will be part of the journey. You may be turned down for a bank loan, a major retailer might decide against stocking your product, or a potential new client may reject your proposal.

The rejections you face will come in many forms but it's how you deal with them that will determine how you progress.

You're most likely to encounter rejection when you're making sales and it's here, because of its sheer regularity, that you really need to learn how to handle rejection.

If you don't learn to cope with the knock-backs, you can soon find yourself shying from trying to make those all-important sales.

Closing yourself off from the inevitable rejections is not the answer.

To overcome the fear of rejection, one of the first things you need to do is to change your attitude to what you perceive as rejection.

As a small business owner, you're intimately entwined with your business. This can often lead to a business rejection being taken personally.

If you're to stay sane and in business, it's crucial that you break this link immediately.

As perverse as it may seem, you should learn to embrace rejection.

If you're keen to grow your business, you'll need to make more sales and rejection is part of the sales process. So let's look at the positives of receiving a rejection;

1. It's better than a maybe. With a "no", you can move on and focus more time and energy on your next prospect.

2. It's an opportunity to learn. A rejection is a great chance to find out more about potential objections to your proposal/product/service.

A few well-structured questions will give you valuable feedback and help you to make improvements.

3. You're one step closer to the next sale. Calculate the number of rejections you receive, on average, for every successful sale.

When you know this figure, you can be confident that each rejection is taking you one step closer to your next sale.

In an early sales job, I once received 54 consecutive "rejections" in a single day. Although it wasn't an enjoyable day, I knew that I'd make one sale in thirty.

Knowing that I was due to make two sales in the next handful of calls helped me to retain a positive attitude and to pick up the phone the following morning. ■

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Surviving the downturn

Entrepreneurs need to make tough decisions

by Andrew Shapiro

In the current economic climate, small business leaders need to be proactive and ensure that staff are motivated and the business is focused

THE REALITY of today's business climate is that businesses are facing a very difficult time.

Spending and confidence are down and sluggishness and caution reign. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs are facing difficult decisions that they may never have come up against before. Should small business leaders hire or fire?

Should they cut prices to maintain market share? How can they discourage divisive internal politics? Making the right decisions will require leaders to balance what they wish to achieve externally, in the market, with the challenges that lie within their organisations.

The marketplace: narrow the focus

People often talk about retaining or marginally increasing market share when times are tough. Yet this can be misleading, particularly if it results in the chasing of all business at all costs — the good, the bad and the downright ugly. In reality, profitability and growth is achieved by companies that focus on the critical, the few priorities where most value is to be enjoyed.

To do this, business leaders need to set priorities based on customers' needs. They probably need to cut costs too and may even need to do so aggressively. But, whilst trimming costs is important, selecting what to cut is even more vital.

Some businesses cut voraciously, only to realise months later that they have cut the very capability they need to sell and deliver their business. Why, for example, would you cut sales associates immediately before launching a customer

experience campaign to boost flagging sales? That is, unless you wanted a rival to swoop in, increase its own sales expertise, and increase profits by 52% - as was the unhappy outcome for an electronics retailer.

Businesses that make the right



decisions develop a collective understanding of how their organisation creates value for their customers and make their operational and budget-related decisions based on this understanding. In this context, it is much easier to determine if and what products and personnel should be cut.

Making the right decisions will require leaders to balance what they wish

to achieve externally, in the market, with the challenges that lie within their organisations.

On the emotive issue of staff, small business leaders would be wise to consider all alternatives, such as salary freezing, if these are more useful to the business long-term and to internal morale.

The challenges within: even the most successful companies with the most vibrant culture must deal with the stress that workers feel in leaner times. When budgets are tighter, it is not uncommon that employees become defensive, territorial and competitive. Negative politics intensify at all levels, sapping valuable energy and focus on what matters commercially.

Employers should think about how they can bring about more co-ordination and alignment of different groups within

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STRESS CONTINUES to torment companies according to the Employee Benefits/ HSA Healthcare Research survey which finds that, although stress remains a key issue for all employers, it appears to be especially concerning for large companies and those within the public sector.

In fact, 47% of companies believe stress is a key cause of sickness absence.

This figure rises to 64% of respondents with more than 10,000 employees and goes up to 86% among public sector organisations, according to the research.

Glenn Rhodes, from Healthplan provider HSA, which sponsored the research, comments: "Over the years we have supported this survey, stress has increasingly become an issue for organisations.

"Despite this, many seem to be burying their heads in the sand over the problem.

"This is especially prevalent within larger organisations, which suffer more sickness absence from stress, yet almost half have no strategy in place to tackle it.

"Companies need to plan for how best to support their employees' stress and could consider a simple and affordable Healthplan containing telephone and face-to-face counselling, such as those offered by HSA."

Amanda Wilkinson, Editor of **EMPLOYEE BENEFITS**, says: "The percentage of organisations citing stress as a major cause of sickness absence has risen for the third year in a row and now stands at 47%.

"Yet, a large proportion of employers (63%) still do not have a strategy in place to reduce stress in the workplace.

This would indicate that they are choosing to ignore what is a significant problem."

The annual benchmark survey was carried out in April among 502 readers of Employee Benefits magazine in the UK. ■

For further information visit www.employeebenefits.co.uk or www.hsa.co.uk.



Ian McFarlane-Toms

The way I see it...

How did we survive? If you were born after 1980, ignore this article. It does not apply to you!

KIDS OF TODAY are wrapped in cotton wool. If you lived as a child in the 50's, 60's or 70's, looking back, it's hard to believe that we have lived as long as we have...

As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags.

Our cots were covered with bright coloured lead-based paint. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors or cupboards; when we rode our bikes we had no helmets.

We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle.

We would spend hours building go-carts out of scraps and then ride down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times we learned to solve the problem.

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day — no mobile phones.

We got cut and broke bones and broke teeth and there were no law suits from these accidents. They were accidents. No one was to blame but us.

Remember accidents?

We had fights and punched each other and got black and blue and learned to get over it.

We ate cakes, bread and butter and drank cordial, but we never got overweight...we were always outside playing. We shared one drink with four friends — from one bottle — and no one died from this.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendo 64, X-Boxes, video games, 65 channels on pay TV, video tape movies, surround sound, personal mobile phones, personal computers or Internet chat rooms ... we had friends.

We went outside and found them. We rode bikes or walked to a friend's home and knocked on the door, or rang the bell, or just walked in and talked to them. Imagine such a thing, without asking a parent! By ourselves!

Out there in the cold cruel world! Without a guardian — how did we do it?

ENTREPRENEURS NEED TO MAKE TOUGH DECISIONS

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the business. Framing an agenda around key business goals and involving various staff members is crucial.

So, too, is the honesty to acknowledge the challenges the business is facing. Don't be fooled into thinking that the stereotypical 'strong leader' is best.

Suppressing the heat of contention may get in the way of making the right decisions and with the right level of 'buy-in' from staff.

Letting staff contribute and allowing a

We made up games with sticks and tennis balls, and ate worms and, although we were told it would happen, we did not put out very many eyes nor did the worms live inside us forever.

Footy and netball had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't, had to learn to deal with disappointment....

Some pupils weren't as smart as others so they failed an exam and were held back to repeat the same year. Tests were not adjusted for any reason.

Our actions were our own. Consequences were expected. No one to hide behind. The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke a law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law — imagine that!

This generation has produced some of the best risk-takers and problem-solvers and inventors, ever. The past 50 years has been an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility and we learned how to deal with it all.

And you're one of them. Congratulations!

You, and others, had the luck to grow up as kids before lawyers and governments regulated our lives..... for our own good. ■

One-minute tip

To create the life you truly want, you need systems that automatically carry you down-stream towards your ultimate goals. Design your office, your home, your schedule and your relationships so they "conspire" to help you get there! Talk with loved ones so they actively support you! Eliminate clutter and replace it with equipment, furnishings and tools that make you smile, that energise you and keep you focused. ■

certain level of emotiveness is both healthy and honest. Stepping in to manage that conflict and making clear how you intend to make decisions is more important.

Leaders need to make informed decisions that reflect what their customers want and value and set internal priorities accordingly.

Only then will you earn the respect from staff so that the business remains focused, the right decisions are reached, and the seeds are sown for the years of plenty — when that upturn comes. ■

SOURCE NOTE: For more information about the Forum Corporation visit www.forum.com

IF YOUR THIRST for sales tips still isn't quenched, try these **10 WAYS TO SELL EVEN MORE** from Robert Ashton's, 'ENTREPRENEUR'S BOOK OF CHECKLISTS'.

Selling is not just about technique. There are some additional ways you can improve your sales performance. Here are some that are often overlooked:

ASK WHY — If your prospect turns you down, ask them why.

You want to know their reason. You also then have an opportunity to change their mind.

ASK WHO — The moment you have the order is the best time to ask for a recommendation or referral. Too many people wait — do it straight away.

DROP CARDS — Business cards are cheap advertising. Always carry cards and never hold back from presenting one.

GET ABOUT — Show an interest in your industry or sector.

Attend the events your customers attend. Ask good questions of speakers you hear. Be noticed.

BE MEMORABLE — Some of the best business people have a physical 'trade mark'. Branson doesn't wear a tie, others always wear a bow tie. Stand out from the crowd.

READ EVERYTHING — Once you develop the habit of reading press articles, office notice-boards, even invoices on your customers' desks, you will become more aware of who else you might do business with.

NEVER STOP — Customers have a home life too. When you bump into people you do business with, wherever it is, make a point of speaking to them.

SAY YOUR NAME — Whenever you meet someone, say your name as you introduce yourself. People only recommend people whose name they remember.

SIGNS — Sign-written vans and other 'point of delivery' advertising makes it easier — particularly when you sell to householders — for neighbours to contact you. ■

Managing

Are you a crummy boss?

See if these qualities hit home.

By Jessica Leveo

A RECENT POST on Monster.com asked: *how can you spot a bad boss? Let's just hope these job candidates weren't talking about you.*

More than 100 people weighed in with their responses and competing horror stories. But the resounding response was this — future hires make their decisions based on their "gut instinct."

Here's a few ways not to make them queasy:

Gut Instincts 101

When a job candidate makes a gut instinct, they pay more attention to how they 'feel' than what they saw or heard. After an interview, a job candidate might ask themselves: do I feel upbeat and warm after speaking or meeting the boss? Or do I have nagging doubts and irritations?

"Picking up on the feelings or impressions is a great sign of things to come," one respondent said. "Most people love to talk about the bad stuff, so being able to get exposure to see what the 'feel' of the atmosphere is in a particular working environment has helped me."

Bottom line, says one participant: listen to what your gut says. It speaks the truth. And when you're thinking about hiring someone, this technique works for you, too.

Internal chaos

One job candidate warned candidates of this in the office: seeing copies of the **SERENITY PRAYER** posted on cubicles. Not to mention, "Everyone deserves to be treated with respect," "Treat people as you want to be treated," and "This too shall pass" throughout the office.

Not great signs. New hires will pick up on this and on the atmosphere of the office.

"Pay attention to the way the place feels and looks," one participant said. "Is there an undercurrent of coldness, heaviness, or frenetic overwhelm? Do people look tired and closed off? Is the place sloppy, or too perfect?"

Candidates will want to make sure they're walking into a healthy, friendly and relaxed environment. And if they can hear your employees laugh amongst themselves, that's the most inviting sound of all.

Be on time

This kept popping up on the discussion board: Don't waste a candidate's time. Plus, it's your first impression — they've got nothing else to do except wonder why you aren't there. And if you are running late, be apologetic.

Watch your mouth

Sure, your company culture might be similar to a Rod Blagojevich conversation, but don't curse out an employee during an interview.

"On a recent interview, the person I would have been reporting to kept cursing," a responder said. "And pretty harsh language, too. I am not a prude, but he really didn't know me like that. What if I was very religious or something? I got the sense he was a line-crosser and didn't know or care to know about social norms and etiquette." ■

Don't badmouth your candidate's current or former companies. At an interview with a law partner, one candidate shared this story:

"During the interview, this partner badmouthed my then-current firm's shareholder," the respondent said. "He had used the firm on a case. He beefed about the firm's treatment of his case. As someone who was on the inside, I appreciated and agreed with his points. But I thought his beefing about my firm to me, whom he just met — and during a job interview — was out of line. It gave me a bad vibe."

Here's a quick list of what an employee might be watching for during your interview:

- There is no clear job description or expectations;
- The interviewer is abrupt or rude;
- No eye contact or their eyes are focused on a specific body part;
- The interviewer is bored, with little to no interaction;
- They don't bother to read your CV or refuse a copy when offered;
- Your resume/education/experience is roughly questioned without relevance;
- The interviewer or recruiter has no regard for appropriate notice to your former employer;
- They want an answer now or offer you the job after a few minutes of a one-sided conversation;
- Illegal or irrelevant questions abound;
- They talk down to you;
- No one can answer simple job or company related questions;
- Hostile vibes;
- Unrealistic expectations. Expecting miracles without acknowledging core problems. ■

SOURCENOTE: manageBETTER.

One-minute tip

More success with cold calls

"Warm up" a cold call by letting the prospect know in advance that the call is coming. A letter by itself is not sufficient, since it is too likely to be thrown out. But a letter with a gimmick may stick in the prospect's mind. And a corny gimmick is fine if it makes an impression — such as a bag of grass seed with a note saying you can help the prospect cultivate new customers. Also effective: A free offer of some kind — such as a research report — that the prospect can obtain by taking the call. ■

SOURCENOTE: Brian Jeffrey, sales trainer and consultant

The Institute for Independent Business

FOUNDED IN 1984 in the UK, the Institute for Independent Business (IIB) is now one of the world's largest international networks of business advice providers.

As of 1 April 2009, 5,530 carefully-selected men and women have been accredited worldwide as IIB Associates.

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Managing

Hold your own annual communications audit

Pricey consulting firms charge companies tens of thousands of pounds to conduct "communication audits."

THEY COME IN and interview employees to figure out where communication is breaking down in the organization.

But you can do the same thing for nothing with your team or department of employees.

Once a year, bring everybody together. If you can swing the budget, hold it off-site so that people aren't distracted by the day-to-day grind. Ask the following questions and encourage people to discuss their answers:

1. When I communicate, do you generally understand me? Are you clear about the directions I give?
2. Do I favour one method of communicating — such as e-mail — when another method would be more appropriate?
3. If you could improve one thing about the communication within our team, what would it be?
4. Do you feel you have enough opportunities to offer me feedback? Do you feel I am open to that feedback and act on it?
5. Name at least one thing I need to improve on as a manager.

Your goal: constructive criticism. To achieve

it, you have to create an environment where employees feel comfortable talking openly about your flaws.

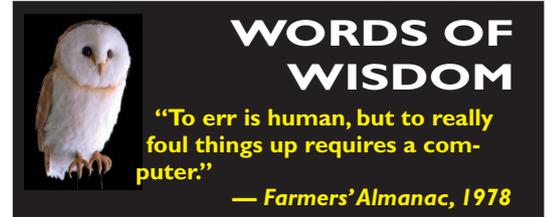
Start the meeting with a short speech about how you want everyone to speak candidly about any problems they're experiencing.

Tell them if they don't speak up with honesty, then they've forfeited their opportunity to design a better manager.

Let them know in no uncertain terms that there will be no recriminations.

In fact, you can even offer a "contract" that guarantees this — signed by both you and each employee.

Once folks have that piece of paper in their hands, they'll feel a lot better about participating. ■



The cultural significance of names

TO PROMOTE BETTER UNDERSTANDING among people at work from different cultural groups, ask them to share in small groups the meaning of their first and last names.

"This exercise is especially useful for discussions between Westerners and East Asians," says consultant Peter Vaill, "since each group has names that the other finds unfamiliar, hard to pronounce, often hard to remember and literally meaningless until made more real by a discussion of the cultural meaning."

Vaill suggests these questions:

- What does your name mean in your culture? Does it say that you're any special type of person (strong, wise, beautiful)?
- What nickname if any do you have? Does it commonly go with your name (such as Bob goes with Robert) or was it given to you personally?
- How common is your name? Is it found mainly in your culture, or in other cultures as well?
- Does your name have any religious significance?
- Is your name given only to boys or girls in your culture, or to both? Is a variation of your name given to the opposite sex?
- Do you have any reminders that you tell people to help them remember your name?
- Is your name used in any songs, jokes or children's rhymes in your culture? ■

SOURCENOTE: Peter Vaill, LEARNING AS A WAY OF BEING. — STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL IN A WORLD OF PERMANENT WHITE WATER

Have your say!



Add your voice to those of other business people on important business issues. Each issue of Business Alert will feature a statement on which you can voice an opinion. Simply select the view that reflects your opinion and email it to me. Your opinion will be submitted to the Institute for Independent Business for inclusion in its continuing business research.

The Statement:

"The biggest problem I face is lack of talented employees"

Please email me with the letter (A-E) expressing your opinion from the following choices:

- A. Strongly agree
- B. Agree
- C. Unsure
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly disagree

MY EMAIL ADDRESS IS:

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