

It's all about you; the business owner matters

Written by Warren Harmer



Small business gurus espouse Turn Key Operations as the pinnacle that all business owners should ascend; businesses that are systemised, replicated and rolled out to the masses. It's the business model made famous by Ray Kroc at McDonalds and the case study flogged at business seminars. If this approach was as simple as it sounds, building a mega business would be like building a machine: just put the parts together as per the instructions, start it up and sit back to collect the cash. There is one thing missing in these how-to's: the business owner.

The business owner matters. She can't be discounted in any discussion of business growth; in fact, it is contingent on her. Ray Kroc was a very clever determined man, not just a man with a machine. The business owner is a unique species that brings very specific attributes to their business; a unique set of personality traits, combined with a particular set of work experiences, attitudes, education, motivations, values and perspectives. Such a complex set of factors applied to a specific business at a particular time cannot be replicated.

The business owner as an identity and foundation for business success is not given much airtime, but counts for a lot. No-one else is engaged as much, cares that much, loses that much sleep or sacrifices as much. The unshakeable values of the owner pervades the business. Sometimes they can be detrimental attitudes like selfishness, hard-headedness or insensitivity; whilst positive attitudes like attention to detail, caring for customers and creativity flow through to build success. Poor skills and knowledge can strangle a business, when financials, marketing or customer service are not managed from the top. Conversely, obsessions to detail in any business function are platforms to build. There are many famous examples of obsessive business owners, whose influence pervades their companies, such as Steve Jobs and Rupert Murdoch.

When businesses are small, owner control is assumed and he can talk to every staff member,

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see every order, work actively in the marketing and every other part of the business. But growing businesses with more people, bigger clients and more locations dilute control, as others take over hands-on roles. In successful businesses, owner control becomes owner influence. In so many of my clients' businesses I see this difficult transition of letting go and seeing themselves as leader, visionary and overseer rather than the technician.

Business owners are the greatest asset to their businesses so need a lot of investment in ongoing development, coaching, training and education. As the business grows, so must skills and leadership ability; not to be rowing the boat, but steering the ship. Influence is vitally important. It's also necessary to let go a little and accept that the business won't be exactly the same as it was with the owner doing everything, but it might be bigger.

Dr. Warren Harmer

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I am a cultivator of great small businesses. I have a Ph.D in science but fell into the world of small business by accident and discovered my passion. My experience owning and consulting to small businesses now spans over 17 years. I like to solve problems using a scientific approach; looking objectively at businesses to see what is happening and applying first principles. In small business, outcomes reign over theory.

Practical, hands-on advice for small business owners is sorely lacking, since most 'experts' have never owned one. Most business information is targeted to big business and their employees.

My objective is to offer instructive, 'how to' information to make business ownership easier, less stressful and more enjoyable.



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