



MOVING PAST FEAR TO SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

One of my clients is in a transition stage with her business. Her practice has become so successful that she no longer has the time to do her administrative work or even the marketing work that helped her become successful. I am working with her developing a plan to hire administrative and functional staff that will allow her to continue to grow her business and enjoy her work life.

One of the issues we are facing which affects many business owners is that if she doesn't have time to do what she's already doing, where will she get the time to hire new employees, train them and do the marketing that is needed to justify the new employees? She keeps coming home to a pile of work and it has created a huge block to her growth. We just returned from a business trip where we learned new ways to grow the business and improve operating efficiencies. During the meetings and initially afterwards my client was incredibly excited about the possibilities. But then something disconcerting happened.

I've seen this happen before. In fact, it's happened to me many times and probably has happened to you as well. As my client started looking at the work that she would need to do to match the new vision she had, she went from excited to overwhelmed. This was painful to witness. I want to see my clients succeed just as much as parents want their children to. Watching her, I saw the excitement fade and fear and resistance mount. As we condensed our notes from our business meetings, the resistance became stronger and stronger and I heard resignation in her voice as we talked about what was needed. The list we had created was long and contained tasks that comprised weeks of work. And in her current mood, she wasn't about to do it.

As her consultant, it is my job to make this project work for her. What I realized was that she was in the middle of the classic change cycle. Whenever we go through a change, we go through this six stage cycle.

Loss—Whether good or bad, the change will bring about a sense of loss of what “was”.

Doubt— You doubt yourself, the project, the facts, the timing—and you try to find reasons to not move forward.

Discomfort— Or more specifically fear— This is the danger area. If you can't move beyond the fear, the change will be impossible.

Discovery—The light at the end of the tunnel. Options and possibilities open up and optimism builds based on your new choices.

Understanding—You now really understand the change and are proactively involved in it. You see its benefits and know its usefulness.

Integration—The change has stopped being a change because it has now become a part of you and you have integrated the challenges and successes into your life.

The critical stage in this process is the discomfort or fear stage. If you can't get beyond the fear, you can't move forward and you will be stuck. I've found that the most useful thing that we can do is acknowledge that we are scared. It's not easy for most people to say that they are scared of a change at work or at home, especially when they can see the benefits that the change will bring. But speaking up and saying that you are afraid is the most important part of moving ahead.

You may be afraid to speak out the fear because it may seem “silly”. It may be the fear of the unknown, the fear of success, or the fear of failure. It may be an insecurity that you aren't good enough and the change is going to expose your weakness. You can't hide from the fear. Dig deep and get it out of you. Put it on paper and take a good look at it. Remember the saying that FEAR is False Evidence Appearing Real. Now give it to friends, associates, and co-workers and let them help you. They can give you perspective on the change and how it will help you and how you can overcome the fear.

This will also help you with stage four, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. As the fear dissolves, you will start to see options and possibilities and become optimistic about the change. And now you are moving forward again embracing the new.

Understanding the six stages of change and especially the critical Fear stage is important for any business's long-term success. We have to embrace change and be proactive to stay competitive and be profitable. Whenever your business is faced with a change, minor or major, be aware of this and work to help everyone involved to move as quickly as possible through the fear stage and into the abundance the change will bring you.

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