

Ask SCORE

Though my wholesale building supply business is profitable, I can't help feeling we're not operating up to our potential. As the company's leader, what can I do to give us the needed push?

Successful small businesses come in all sizes and specialties, but their leaders all share one essential attribute—positive, can-do attitudes that transcend everything they do.

Believing in yourself and your ability to succeed does more than simply sustain you through the challenges of getting your business started. It also spreads through your company and beyond. When you “walk the talk” and follow through on your commitments, your managers and employees perform their jobs with more confidence. Vendors, customers and prospects know that you'll come through for them as well.

Among the ways you can make successful thinking contagious in your business is by emphasizing long-term potential over short-term thinking. Leaders of high-performance business innovate rather than hesitate, and shun the status quo as they seek to spark new interest and enthusiasm inside the business. They also encourage their staff to take risks, capitalize on successes, and make and learn from mistakes.

Sure, working productively will help build your business. But generating creativity and passion for what your business does, no matter how seemingly mundane, is a hallmark of a high-performance business. But these don't need to be grandiose concepts. Simply going out of your way to help a customer in an unusual fashion qualifies.

Emphasize the collective success of your business as a whole, not of any individual person, project or product. Then you can accelerate success by identifying a few profitable activities and making them happen ever more flawlessly and quickly.

Open the lines of communication. Generally, those around you need more information, not less, in order to feel successful. Let people know where you think the business needs to go, the problems it faces and what keeps you up at night. That makes it easier for you to involve them in finding solutions to your biggest challenges. Ask their advice about what you are doing right, what hurts and what needs fixing. That way, everyone has a bigger stake in your success.

And while it is often true that you shouldn't tinker with something that isn't broken, always be open to new ideas, even those that sound silly or outlandish. That off-the-wall suggestion just might be your “next big thing.” Make sure you reward people for extra effort with cash or non-cash incentives—like time off or a company lunch. And, what's the best way to find those preferences? Ask them!

This column is brought to you by the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of SCORE, with more than 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit www.score-manchester.org for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.

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