

## Sound Advice (Part III)

Here are two more areas where making an unflinching assessment of critical data, and then taking action, will make your business stronger.

- 3. “Gonna” sales.** These are sales we keep telling ourselves are “gonna” happen. Next week. Next month. “Just trust me,” we say. “I can feel it. I know they’re gonna come in.” Well, sometimes they do come in. And when they do, life is good for a while. But, sometimes they don’t come in. Or, they’re delayed. When this happens, we can quickly dig ourselves into a hole so deep it can take months—or even years—to dig ourselves out. (See, “Paper-thin profits” from two weeks ago.) Continuing to run our businesses today based on sales we’re *hoping* will arrive tomorrow is not a good business strategy.

Building sales is a systematic and predictable function in any business. Over time, we can predict with a reasonable amount of accuracy what we can expect in sales in a given month or year...IF we stay aggressive with our sales activity.

It’s when we become complacent, or when we take our foot off the sales accelerator pedal for any reason and rely on hope as a sales strategy, that we start to depend on “gonna” sales. Well, “gonna” sales won’t build your business.

If you’re planning to increase sales this year over last year, then ask yourself what you have to do differently this year. What are your customers’ expectations this year? Do they expect to need more or less of your services this year? Why? Is their company’s market soft or strong? Is your service to them sagging? Do you have a competitor who is gaining a larger share of their work? The best place to gain this invaluable “real data” is sitting at a conference table or lunch table with

your customer, asking her these questions.

**4. Partners.** Here I'm talking about the traditional definition of a partner: someone who has an ownership interest in our company. Sometimes we choose our business partners for reasons we might later regret. They were childhood friends, they had a stack of cash to invest in our cash-strapped company, they're our spouse, or they're a member of our gene pool. If this is the case in your business and it's working for you, congratulations and keep up the good work. When these situations work (and they often do), they can be enormously rewarding.

But, often we discover too late that the main thing that qualified us as partners was fond memories from the past, and we find ourselves faced with a situation that isn't going to go away simply because we wish it would or because we choose to ignore it.

When this is the case, we have three choices. We can resolve the issue and move forward together (usually the best choice). We can bury our feelings and learn to live with it (never a good choice). Or, we can part ways. With this third choice you can be fairly certain of two things: the resolution will be painful, and it will cost money. But, you'll probably be better off in the long run.

When we make business decisions based on hard evidence and solid data rather than on wishful thinking, we *are* going to make some good decisions. And although these decisions won't always be easy to make, we will usually come out the other side of the decision with a stronger company than we went in with.