

## The Reluctant Leader, Part IV

I'm afraid of succeeding.

Most of us are familiar with failure. We know what failure looks and feels like. Some of us even have advanced degrees in it! But many owners are unfamiliar with the face of success, and unfamiliarity can make us fearful of what success might bring.

The whole concept of fearing success might sound strange to some, but I've seen this fear debilitate owners far more than the fear of failing. The fear of success is much more subtle, so it can be harder to identify than the fear of failure.

We may have the fear of leaving behind those we've come to know and love if we grow professionally or climb the socioeconomic ladder faster than they do. This can include not just falling out of touch with them physically (moving to a different neighborhood, company, etc.) but also losing their approval. Success could label us one of "them" — people who've become high and mighty or too big for their breeches.

Some fear that if they become successful they'll lose their sense of self: their personal values, direction, and self-image. We spend our entire lives formulating our self-image. In business, it manifests itself in the industries in which we choose to work, in our leadership abilities, and in our sense of fairness, discipline, and purpose. So it follows that some fear achieving success might tempt them into becoming someone they're really not. A rudimentary scan of the professional sports or entertainment landscape provides abundant examples of this happening to other people, so perhaps this fear has some merit.

If the picture of success we describe with our words exceeds the picture of ourselves that we've painted in our minds, we'll engage in whatever activities are needed to bring them into alignment. Sometimes this

means that we'll kick things in the rear end to catch up with our self-image, and sometimes it means that we'll pull back on the reins until they come back into alignment. Either way, when our company's success is out of alignment with the image we've painted of ourselves, something has to give.

Another form of fearing success is when we fear the unknown world that might be out there if we succeed. This is not the same as choosing not to grow because we're aware of the increased challenges and we deliberately choose not to go there. This has to do with not knowing what threatening things might be out there and being paralyzed by this fear. This is similar to the child who quickly jumps into his bed at night and pulls the covers up over his head because he's afraid of the bogeyman who might be lurking in his closet or under his bed. Covering himself with his blankets is similar to a business owner retreating to the familiar and comfortable confines of his smaller business.

A good question to ask ourselves is, when we reach the end of our working career, what things will we feel we've left undone? Rarely will the answer be completing the next job or closing the next sale. Instead, it will probably involve doing the things we could have done and being the person we could have been.