



Ten Major Business

Blind Spots

***That Will Stall Your Growth and
Drain Your Profits***

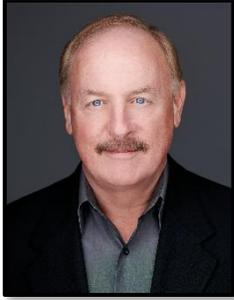
Learn how to spot them and be inspired to correct them!

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Steve routinely speaks to business groups, associations and private companies on topics that enlighten and inform people about how to improve their businesses, careers and life balance. He has written several 'How to' e-books and has hosted a number of business talk radio shows. His current podcast, 'The Business Wingmen' is co-hosted with his son, Travis Smith.

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Forward

Some of the greatest threats to the well-being of your business are the things you cannot see! It is not that these issues are not visible. To the contrary, they are visible to the people around you; your employees, your customers, your suppliers and the service providers that work with you. They all see the danger signs like flashing lights at a railroad crossing.

Blind spots are events or circumstances that happen without you knowing about them. Like the blind spot between your side view and rear-view mirrors on your car; anything in that space is not visible to you. The people behind you or to the side of you can see what's there and the potential danger that exists if you neglect to look before making a move.

In business, there are blind spots everywhere. Most of them are created because the owner possesses a certain mindset or viewpoint that eliminates their ability to see things that go against what they believe is true. You are undoubtedly dealing with your own blind spots, completely unaware of the effect they are having on your business.

In the 14 years, I have been coaching business owners and the previous 30 years working in the consumer products manufacturing industry, I have seen and assisted many professionals with blind spots they don't see but were wreaking havoc with their operations. Based on this experience, I have outlined ten major blind spots that can have deleterious effects on growth and profitability.

Once you determine if any of these areas are blind spots for you, your challenge will be to do what is necessary to counter their effects. I will provide some strategies and tips for you, but you will have to decide whether to act. No action equals no change. No change means no benefit to your business.

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Introduction

How much do you know about the workings and performance of your business? Reports only tell you what has happened, and memories are notoriously inaccurate. Worst of all, your perceptions about what you think is happening and how it will affect your future can be locked in a mindset of everything appearing fine in the moment. After all, who wants to go looking for trouble, right!

I grew up in the consumer food and drug industry. For all the remarkable things I was part of, I remember some sage advice that was given to me in my early managerial years. The senior member of my management team assigned to mentor me told me, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” His message was not to go poking around looking for things to inspect. Just let your good operators do their thing and enjoy the ride!

Years later, I realized that not being observant about your surroundings and occasionally challenging people to think outside the box, lead to stale perceptions and thinking about what was actually going on. In some cases, I witnessed senior executives falling on their swords trying to protect conditions that were no longer relevant or effective. Why? Because they had developed severe blind spots that prevented them from seeing what was changing and what was no longer productive.

This ebook will help you develop the insight to look for your own blind spots. It will also guide you through a set of actions so you can determine how best to resolve the issues you discover.

Not every blind spot mentioned will be something you are challenged by. Do not worry, if you can overcome just one of two key shortcomings in your perception about how your business runs, performs or is viewed by your employees, customers or 3rd party suppliers, you will have achieved a significant ability to lead an improvement revolution; one your team had been waiting for you to figure out!

How best to use this eBook

Check out the contents to look for specific areas you might be a victim of. Read these sections first as they will have the greatest relevance to your business. Then, look at the rest. Even though you may feel you do not suffer from some of these other blind spots, the insights and ideas you may draw will help you tune up other areas of your organization.

Blind Spot #1: Thinking ‘Vision’ is not Important

One of the biggest reasons a business plateaus is because the owner has no vision for the future. Every organization can reach a certain level of operating performance based on sheer energy and activity. At some point, however, the direction takes on a circular route of simply trying to duplicate what was done the prior year. Without a clear vision of the future, you have no target to shoot for. You can't hit a target you can't see!

Case in Point

Preston is the CEO of established shipping company. He enjoys a steady business in an incredibly attractive part of the world. Although his business has grown, he constantly worries about competitors poaching his employees and taking his clients. Every year, he creates goals for the upcoming 12 months. These goals are usually a repeat of the previous year whether he achieved them or not.

On several occasions, Preston has been approached by larger competitors wanting to merge and make him a partner of the larger business. While these offers are attractive to Preston, he declines because he values his independence most of all.

Until recently, Preston worried constantly about where he was taking the business and why it was so difficult to make decisions about which way he was going. Up to this point, he had no clear vision for his company. He had not thought completely about what was important for his future or that of his employees.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

Without a clear vision that everyone understands, you and your people have nothing to strive for. This is the real danger to your growth. Most people want to belong to a winning team; one that has purpose and direction; one that is led by someone with vision. With a clear vision and frequent communication about how to get there, your people are more likely to focus on helping you achieve your future goals.

When you are perceived as not having a clear vision, your best people will get frustrated with where things are going and eventually leave. Others will resort to infighting, bad habits, sloppy work and a short timer's mentality. Your suppliers may not be as flexible with service, price or other considerations important to you. Your contract service providers may not see a long-term investment in your business as important as other companies with growth potential.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

You do not have to hire an expensive consulting firm to commandeer this process. You simply must take some time to think about what you want for the future. Think about the advantages of working towards this future point and how your customers, employees, industry or marketplace will benefit.

Start by asking yourself the following questions. Then sit with your stakeholders; partners, employees, major customers to solicit their feedback.

- Why did you start this business?
- What do you care about most?
- What value does your business provide that others also value?
- What legacy do you want to leave?
- How will your marketplace or industry benefit from your efforts?
- When your future arrives, what exactly do you expect to see?
- Why is it important for you to achieve this future?
- What will your business look like once you get there?
- Do you believe you are capable or worthy of achieving this level of results?

Once you have evaluated all the input, create a document that outlines what your vision is, why it's essential to your future success, who will benefit and what major milestones need to be met to insure you get there.

Pay close attention to the detail and your time horizon. There should be enough detail about what the result will look like to be able to picture it in your mind. Make sure the benefits to you, your employees, your customers and your community are clear. This is what gets others excited and involved in achieving your vision.

Action you should take

Now, communicate, communicate, communicate to your employees, your customers, your suppliers and your 3rd party support people. Your community will only believe it and buy into working towards it if you make it a continual topic of conversation; in your planning meetings, management updates, goals setting, weekly monitoring and performance review feedback sessions.

Key observation

If you have no vision or have not developed a formal statement that everyone knows and understands, make the commitment to get this done. Your future growth and operational smoothness depends on it.

Additional resources

To help you get started, here are a few resources that provide some great insight about what to do and how to do it.

[What is a vision statement](#)

[In Business, The Results You See Are the Results You Get](#)

[Vision Statement Examples and Inspiration](#)

Blind Spot #2: Believing You Need to be Involved in Everything

This blind spot is characterized by owners who feel that they must be in the middle of everything taking place in their organizations.

I'm not referring to prudent management oversight, I'm talking about doing the employee's work for them! Despite their efforts to hire capable people, they insist on making every decision, checking every aspect of work and frequently going behind the employee's back to redo what has already been completed.

Case in Point

Several years ago, I worked with the owner of a well-known insurance company. She had experienced a colossal amount of turnover and an inability to get her people to work independently. Consequently, she never took time off, even to the point of not taking vacation for 12 years.

Soon after we finished the diagnostics portion of my service and began interviewing vital team members for input into the problems she was experiencing, the core of the problem surfaced.

Early in her operating the insurance business, she relied on a few people who gave her really bad advice. From there, she came perilously close to losing her license and the business. What she learned was you can never trust or give over control of anything to anyone. Not the right conclusion to draw but understandable given the gravity of the situation.

Twelve years later, she was consumed with every aspect of her business and had managed to drive away most of the people she hired to help her.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

The first major consequence is that you cannot do it all and while you are doing what you are paying other to do, you're not using your time on your highest, most productive areas of the business.

Second, you give the impression that you don't trust and value the abilities of others you have hired. Eventually, these folks will give up and let you do it all, there by reinforcing your thinking that you are the only one that can do it anyway.

One of the greatest benefits to giving people responsibility and authority to do their jobs is so you can work more on strategy. When you are in the weeds, strategy goes out the window as well as your ability to grow the top and bottom line.

Finally, people will become disengaged. They will no longer advise you of impending operational, customer service or financial issues. Why, because they have figured out that you don't care about them so why should they care about your business!

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

First, recognize that you hired bright, ambitious people for a reason. They want to perform well and be part of a winning organization. Don't let a poor experience tarnish your opinion of every future hire you make. Take the time to get to know your people, their ideas, their challenges, their aspirations. Be willing to share information and be open about what the company could do better.

Actions you should take

- Get to know your people so trust can be built.
- Be clear about what you expect and how you will help people accountable.
- Learn to delegate better so you can extend trust their way while staying connected to the things they are doing on your behalf.
- Be more accessible for questions, discussions and problem solving.
- Be less concerned about being right and more concerned about be successful as a team.

Key observation

Correcting this blind spot takes longer than just about all the rest in this book because it requires changing what others think of you. Consistency is key if you are going to gain trust and get people to give you their loyalty. Surprisingly, your good employees will be on-board faster than you think! The idea of being able to do the job they were hired to job will be uplifting.

Additional resources (found on my website)

Here are a few articles to help understand the impact this blind spot has and ways to change so you get better participation from your organization.

[The Real Reason Leaders Don't Delegate](#)

[Learn to Accomplish More by Doing Less](#)

[The Single Hardest Thing You'll Do as a Business Owner](#)

Blind Spot #3: Thinking Your Business is Still Relevant

Markets are constantly changing. Customer tastes change, client needs change, and competitors come and go. What was in demand last year may be completely irrelevant now. The more time you spend in your business, the more convinced you become that what you know about what you do is all anyone needs to know to do business with you.

The fact is people do most of their research on the internet before making a purchase. If they find you, their only question is, “can I trust this business to treat me fairly and honestly?” Often, this question is answered by what they find on you and your business.

Case in Point

Jennifer owns a chain of medical uniform shops. Her merchandise serves a specific niche of healthcare workers. She has competition from other stores as well as a growing threat from online retailers.

Jennifer prides herself on offering personal service to her customers and larger accounts. Despite getting feedback about cheaper prices and better selection from online websites, Jennifer is convinced she can remain competitive with her personal relationships. Unfortunately, the managers in her other 4 stores don't have the same desire to work hard to overcome the competition that has degraded their store sales as well.

Due to the variety, service and prices offered by the online suppliers, Jennifer is finding it harder to keep customers. Many of her institutional accounts are also ordering more from companies online.

While Jennifer's product lines are well regarded, her business model is fading fast. Her lack of online presence and aggressive internet merchandising is allowing her customers to abandon her for easier, cheaper alternatives.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

Unless you are in a business that offers something no one else has (I've never seen a business like this, by the way) you must understand what customers want. You can only figure this out by living in their world long enough to know what they buy, what they support and what they complain about. Understanding how they make purchasing decisions in addition to how your product or service offering stacks up in your market will enable you to know what needs work.

Without a clear understanding of how you are perceived vs. your competitors and what your customers really think is important, you will lose ground and most likely revenue, without even knowing it.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

Getting feedback in the #1 objective here! Start by asking your employees what they see and hear from customers. To insure you get honest feedback, you must have a culture/ atmosphere that promotes openness and honesty.

Next, have someone do a complete search of your business on the internet. Take note of everyplace you show up. Then do a general search of your business category (i.e., plumbing) to see where your competitors show up. You will be surprised at the difference!

Then, check all the review sites that pertain to your business category. Look for unfavorable competitor reviews (1 & 2 stars) and read the comments. If you look at 40 to 50 of these across multiple sites, you will quickly learn what customers hate about do business with companies like yours.

Finally, invite a hand full of loyal customers to breakfast. Tell them, you are upgrading your service and want their complete input on how you are doing as well as other similar businesses they patronize. This is literally a goldmine experience. Be careful, however. The truth is valuable, but it can really hurt! I always suggest that the owner not be present. Have someone else head this meeting. It will create a much more objective discussion.

Action you should take

All the new learning is of little value if you don't do something with it. Take all that you have learned and compile it into a report that draws similarities and 'hot spots' to focus on. Gather your team and share the information with them. Then create a revitalization plan that focuses on the key issues and your employee's involvement.

Here are the areas of your business that will likely be affected:

- Your marketing will be more focused
- Your product selection will change
- Your customer service will be more attentive
- Your sense of how you are perceived as a business will heighten
- You will get some old customers back along with lots of new ones!

Key observations

The more time you spend looking outside your business, the less chance you have of missing new trends and opportunities. You will also avoid losing ground to new competitors or products that can eliminate the need for yours! Staying in touch with your customer base, your competition and your market trends is critical to staying relevant and it's your responsibility as the owner of the business.

Additional resources: (found on my website)

[Does Your Marketing Appeal to the Customers You Want?](#)

[A Resourceful Way to Rescue Your Business](#)

[The Value of Surveying Employees and Customers](#)

Make a Commitment

Write down the things you plan to do to understand how your business is viewed by your customer base and the market overall.

***“If you don't like change, you're going to like
irrelevance even less.”***

- General Eric Shinseki

Blind Spot #4: Believing Your Company Culture is Inspiring

This blind spot is especially detrimental to your staff. While you interpret your hectic workplace as 'busy' or the stressful atmosphere as part of how this business operates, your employees are agitated and disillusioned.

I frequently see evidence of this when visiting clients. The first hint comes in the form of silence. There is no engagement, just heads down hard at work. Another telltale sign is the frequency of closed door sessions with the HR manager. If your workplace activity is anything but upbeat and energized, you have a problem!

Case in Point

I was asked to help a paper manufacturer improve teamwork and collaboration among the management team. The assumption was that everyone had the resources and support they needed. Due to the exhaustive approach to hiring, everyone on the team was expected to perform at an extremely high level. Despite the owner's assurance that his employees were a big part of the company's success, the place was plagued with turnover and lawsuits.

A more in-depth discussion with the owner and individual meetings with each manager revealed that performance was driven through various fear and intimidation tactics. Secretly, the owner acknowledged that when his people felt their jobs were on the line, they worked harder.

What he didn't count on was that his people viewed the workplace as hostile. The good ones chose to leave. The rest hung in there as best they could, waiting for the environment to change.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

Your culture governs your employee engagement and productivity. It also influences loyalty and limits bad behavior. A healthy culture must be defined and nurtured. Otherwise, your culture will be dysfunctional and work against your own financial interests.

For most companies, your employee costs are one of your largest operating expenses. The ROI you get from your people is affected by the environment they work in. Create a more dynamic, predictable culture and watch a whole host of employee problems fade away.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

First, begin observing how people go about their day. Culture is basically the way a business flows; decision making, managing processes, handling problems, communicating, provides feedback and providing individual development. How are these areas performing in your business?

Next, meet with your HR folks to understand employee concerns. Do not make judgments at this point, just listen and take notes. Be careful to focus on the issues, not the people bringing them forward.

Then, invite a few employees at various levels to sit and discuss their ideas for improving how the business operates. Make sure you cover all the important areas of your business. Also, select employees known for being positive but straight shooters. You want critical feedback, not negative complaining.

Finally, do some research on cultures in other successful companies. While there are many with a wide variety of workplace guidelines, you will get a sense of what your business could embrace that would solve some of your newly recognized problems.

Action you should take

By now, you should have a clear picture of how your employees view the environment they work in. It is important at this phase to seriously consider your own views about the things they struggle with.

After you decide on the importance of making improvements, assemble a team of employees to formulate a plan to improve the way things work. Recognize that most of this improvement should focus on the interpersonal activities of the people involved.

Areas that should get focus:

- Your core values (these should support your new vision statement)
- What are your performance expectations?
- How are new ideas and recommendations handled?
- What are the rules for solving problems and conflicts
- What opportunities are there for individual development
- How to ongoingly improve the culture

Key observations

Once your employees understand that your company's culture is as important to you and it is to them, they will help you police it, maintain it and improve areas that make your business THE place to work. Remember, creating an inspired workplace begins with your involvement; your ability to see what's happening, your desire to invite feedback and your commitment to make positive change happen.

Additional resources: (found on my website)

[4 Ways to Improve Your Company Culture](#)

[How to Fix a Toxic Work Culture](#)

[Turn Employee Reviews into Highly Valued Performance Discussions](#)

Make a Commitment

Decide what steps you will take to begin understanding the condition of your company culture and best ways to improve it

“To win in the marketplace you must first win in the workplace”

Doug Conant- CEO Campbell's Soup Co.

Blind Spot #5: Keeping Important Information in Your Head

I run into this problem with business owners who have recently reached stability all the way to running \$20MM companies. It is partly a lack of systems and data management but it is also a desire on the part of the owner to control who has the knowledge about the business. Either way, not using technology to capture and store vital information about your business can be perilous if something happens to you. And despite your feelings of not wanting others to know what you know; they probably already do. And their information is more accurate!

Case in Point

I recently worked with a private mortgage company whose owner kept all the operating costs in his head. When I asked him how much it cost to run his business each month, he spit out a very precise answer. Then, we had his controller run a 6-month costs analysis. Turns out, he had underestimated his costs by \$32K per month!

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

There are many vital areas that generate information which can help you understand and improve your business's performance. Trying to keep it all in your head might make you feel 'all knowing' but you'll appear very scattered when trying to retrieve it for evaluation purposes.

Your mind can store unfathomable amounts of detail, but the recall process is not good enough to make major business decisions. Having systems that allow you to store, process and analyze financial information with marketing plans, revenue results, operating costs, employee performance and areas of exposure are all necessary for objective, reliable insights into how your business is performing.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

Begin by taking stock of all the usual forms of information gathering in a typical business. Most businesses would have an SOP or Standard Operating Procedures manual to work from. Then consider other areas where legacy information might be stored or available: financial reports, employee files, business plans, workplace behavior guidelines, job descriptions, etc.

Next determine where you will now keep all this information. Most established businesses have a server or cloud hosting system that stores all information related to the business. Someone in your organization needs to oversee what goes in it and who has access to it.

Once you have a full list of the information types and sources, create a plan for formatting and uploading this information. If your organization is large enough and you have dedicated IT people, they should take the lead on this project. Another way is to assign project lead status to your HR person and contract an outside resource to gather and upload the data for you.

Action you should take

This is an assignment that will take some time, may be a year to complete.

Once you determine what you need to capture and what you will use it for, create a master plan that includes the data you want to organize, the people involved with it now, the system that will house your data and the reports you will need from it as you move forward.

Here is what to start with:

- Create a team of employees who will participate in the project.
- Share your mission for organizing your business data to get buy-in from them.
- Assign one individual to oversee and coordinate the project.
- Consider whether you need an outside vendor to assist you.
- Work on a system for retrieving vital reports from the system once it is in place.
- Set benchmarks for completion.
- Have the team update you regularly on their results to date and other issues they see.
- Determine who will have access to what parts of the system or level of data.

Key observations

Most opportunities and issues in a business can be foreseen with a robust data collection and analysis system to evaluate trends, success, failures, and any other activity that affects the flow of the business. You will be able to sidestep potentially massive mistakes with better information management that's not in your head.

Additional resources (found on my website)

[Importance of Information Systems in an Organization](#)

[How Information Gives You Competitive Advantage](#)

[Top Ten Reasons for a Good Information System in Your Business Today](#)

Make a Commitment

Take your first step by deciding what consolidating your business’s information using a data management system is important.

“The goal is to turn data into information, and information into insight.”

– Carly Fiorina

Blind Spot #6: Ignoring Bad Behavior

If you don't understand why some of your people make subtle comments about the behavior of others in your organization, start paying attention to this one! This blind spot is responsible for a whole host of dysfunctional working relationships, mistrust, loss of motivation and believe it or not- lawsuits!

With all the emphasis on proper engagement rules in the workplace over the last 20 years, I'm continually surprised when I run into businesses filled with people who act disrespectful, make off-colored or inappropriate jokes, foster social clicks or bad mouth everyone around them.

Case in point

While helping the owner of lubricants manufacturing company with his leadership and management practices, I was introduced to several of his key people. It did not take very long to see how several of them behaved as they very candidly talked about how incompetent their boss was. One person even went as far as to admonish a fellow coworker for his laziness and perceived low work ethic.

Part of the owner's problem was spending too much time mitigating disputes between department heads and getting his people to work together on important projects. What the owner failed to see was the harm being placed on workers who were being targeted as well as others who just felt uncomfortable being in the same room.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

When people feel uncomfortable about the environment they work in, they tend to pull away first. Some will even drop hints to supervisors or the owner in hopes that the source of the bad behavior will stop doing what is offensive. When some people act inappropriately at work, it can be viewed as surprising at first followed by resentful if it continues. If allowed to continue, the blame goes from the individual behaving badly to the boss who condones it.

Failing to address bad behavior hurts everyone. Ironically, the primary contributor may not even realize that what they do is offensive. Others will find ways to work around this person which erodes teamwork. And you, the boss, will eventually be viewed as suspicious, your motives called into question for allowing this behavior to continue.

When people feel uncomfortable with others behavior or feel threatened by it, your complaints to HR go up, you could lose valuable people and in increasing numbers, someone will file a lawsuit to try and stop it.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

First, start listening to the workplace chatter. If you display visible concern about questionable behavior, the people who are most loyal to you will let you know what's going on.

Meet with everyone and anyone who is guilty of bad behavior and discuss why they are doing it. Clearly convey your expectations for appropriate behavior and get their commitment to cease this activity.

Create and/ or publish a set of guidelines that establishes appropriate behavior for your workplace. If you have an HR department or use an outside service, have them conduct a workshop to orient everyone to the behavior that's expected. This workshop or any other form of notice should explain the consequences of non-compliance.

Visit with employees you know have been offended or made uncomfortable by another employees' behavior to reassure them that you are addressing the problem.

Action you should take

If you have been negligent about addressing bad behavior, it's very important that you demonstrate a new or renewed awareness of what is happening and who is causing problems in your workplace.

Things you need to do:

- Talk with HR or some of your best employees to find out the extent of the problem.
- Ask yourself why you have not seen this activity?
- Take time to be more visible in your workplace.
- Acknowledge employees who set great behavior examples.
- Have a management process developed to swiftly address any behavior issues that surface.
- Recognize that bad behavior is unacceptable regardless of who does it. If you have been lax about calling people out, your best performers might be some of your biggest culprits.

Key observations

Your people need to trust that you set the standard for working at your company. When bad behavior is allowed to fester, your people will eventually question your values and lose respect for what you say you stand for. Once a company is inflicted with distrust born out of leader negligence, it's very hard to win it back. Make a priority of being aware of your employee's actions, interactions and workplace behaviors.

Additional resources: (found on my website)

[How to Deal with Bad Behavior in the Workplace](#)

[Managing Difficult Employees and Disruptive Behaviors](#)

[How to Handle Sarcasm in the Workplace](#)

Make a Commitment

This is one you don't want to let slide. Decide how to begin using the guide above and start taking note of the behavior exhibited in your organization.

"When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion."

Dale Carnegie

Blind Spot #7: Thinking You Don't Need to Hold People Accountable

This is by far, the biggest operational blind spot suffered by most businesses. If you constantly complain about your own people not doing their jobs without you getting involved, you have an accountability problem!

Accountability is a behavior; one that is learned at a young age. It is reinforced by others who make their expectations clear and follow up to see that their expectations get done. If you want a more accountable work force or management team, you must exhibit this behavior and insist on it from the people who work for you.

Case in Point

A local provider of janitorial services called me asking for help getting her people to follow through on their assignments. She had a team of 14 people being overseen by a field supervisor and an office manager. At first glance, all her people seemed capable and dedicated to their jobs.

As I worked with various employees and began observing the normal flow of activity, I noticed that the owner was rarely in the office or visiting various job sites. When asked how she monitored her operation, she replied, "oh, they know what to do, I just have trouble getting them to do it."

What this owner failed to realize was without a clear understanding from her team of her expectations and her being involved in the delegation/ holding one accountable process, nothing was likely to change.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

Once you lose a level of accountability, your job of running the company becomes infinitely harder. You inevitably start doing things to offset what others don't do. Your time gets spent on low level activities or on doing the very things you hired people to do.

Not enforcing your expectations for being accountable will eventually cause a loss of respect by your team. They will interpret your behavior as lacking commitment and their care for doing their best on the job will decline. Productivity is a tough thing to accurately measure and when people stop being accountable for getting the work done, productivity slides. Worse yet, missing deadlines or not following up with important customers could cost you immediately.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

Recognize that you will have to retrain your team to expect to be held accountable for what they are paid to do. Until you decide that your involvement is mandatory, this blind spot will continue.

You will need to adopt a system for holding people accountable. It is not complicated but it does require a high level of conviction from you so that your team will see that you are serious about it.

Take a good look at your own system for management projects, goals and ongoing processes. Holding others accountable means your system for staying ahead of them needs to be fool proof.

Carve out time each week to meet with various people to get updates and learn how they are addressing and accomplishing your objectives. These meetings will not only be eye-openers for what you will learn but they can be valuable teaching moments to insure your people are developing the way you want.

Action you should take

Here is my 6-step process for building more accountability within your organization. Practicing these steps consistently will train your people to on what you expect when it comes to their individual work responsibility.

Here is what you need to do:

1. Be clear about what you expect. Get their feedback to insure they understand you.
2. Invite their input to gain their commitment and ownership.
3. Gain agreement about how the project will be monitored.
4. Give timely appropriate feedback throughout the process.
5. If progress stalls, use consequences to realign engagement.
6. Review results and discuss lessons learned to gain insights.

Key observations

Once your people understand that they will not be able to neglect their duties or sidestep your expectations, they will work harder to take ownership for the duties you assign them. Best of all, you will spend less time in the business using this process. Your employees will also enjoy their work more and respect you more for being the kind of leader/ manager that makes them better at what they do.

Blind Spot #8: Thinking Innovation is not Important

The late Peter Drucker, 20th century management guru, once said that a business has only two primary objectives; to innovate and to market.

Resistance or neglect for innovation your business can cause your processes to become inefficient, slippage in your marketplace and loss of more forward-thinking clients and employees. Why? Because everything is constantly changing-your customers' demands, your employees' desires, the things that influence efficiency and what your competition does to get the jump on you.

The business owners that suffer the most from this blind spot are the ones who own family businesses and don't see the need for staying current or making changes that keep the business relevant in the marketplace.

Case in Point

Several years ago, I helped an industrial engineer who had built a company that produced surface coating materials used in his industry. While his product and application were superior to most other companies, his method of producing, packaging and shipping his product was manual at best. We discussed the need for him to innovate his manufacturing process many times, but he believed that the best way to control quality was to touch every facet of his operation.

Things came to a head when he was introduced to a huge state agency looking for his level of expertise. They offered him a lucrative multi-year contract then suddenly pulled the offer and sent him home. When I asked him what happened he said, "they found out I was a one-man shop and didn't want to take a chance on me not being able to handle the demand."

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

As stated above, there are simply too many factors in place that affect how well your business does. If you don't recognize that change is inevitable and seek to continually improve your products, services, processes, talent, marketing, etc., you will be run over by others who want to dominate your space!

Innovation is what keeps things fresh and exciting. Being innovative requires a healthy level of evaluation about what is currently not working and what could work better. Your business's future is totally dependent on how well you acclimate to changes in your marketplace, with your customers and among your employees. People want to be part of a winning team, not a place where nothing ever changes and the whole place seems out of touch with what's going on today.

One of the biggest American business tragedies was Eastman Kodak. They were successful worldwide until photos went digital. They saw this but chose to ignore it. Now they are relegated to the history books.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

Stop hiding! People who refuse to see the need for improvement or change are afraid that they will lose what made them successful in the first place. Becoming successful is one thing; staying successful requires constant innovation.

Start by asking questions of your staff. If you display interest, they will tell you. Follow this by evaluating what your customers buy from you. Look at your competition. Read online reviews. Talk to your suppliers. The more input you receive about whose doing what, the better you will be at determining where your business needs to go.

Guard against overwhelm. This process can make things seems too big to address. Keep a notebook of what you learn and where you should start. Recognize that innovation is not a onetime event. It is an ongoing journey. Changes don't need to be massive (unless your business is in peril), but they do need to be well thought out, purposeful and consistent.

Finally, read books or stories about others who have been successful innovating their organizations. Success breeds success!

Action you should take

Being innovative is mostly mindset. If you value looking for ways to improve, the process will be much more gratifying and effective. If this is not what you are used to, start with these actions.

Initial steps to take:

- Understand what innovation in business is and what it's not.
- Read these 2 books- Blue Ocean Strategy & Change by Design.
- Start asking your employees what they think needs to improve.
- Survey your customers to find out what they like and don't like.
- Study your top 3 competitors to see what they are doing that's unique.
- Create a vision that defines how you will change your own industry.

Key observations

Some people look at innovators as dreamers looking to fix things that aren't broken. Do not let what is not broken become obsolete! Your marketplace is constantly changing, and your business needs to stay ahead of it. If you embrace the need to improve and change, your employees will be happier, your customers will stay with you and your competitors will have to play harder to keep up with you.

Additional resources: (found on my website)

[The Importance of Innovation in Business](#)

[4 Main Ways to Innovate in a Digital Economy](#)

[21 Great Ways to Innovate](#)

Make a Commitment

It is never too late to start innovating your business. Look for areas where you can be more efficient, driving down costs or provide better service to customers. Also look at what you offer to determine if your selection is right for today's customer.

"It's easy to come up with new ideas; the hard part is letting go of what worked for you two years ago but will soon be out of date."

— Roger von Oech

Blind Spot #9: Assuming Your People Can't Accomplish More

This blind spot is a real growth killer. If you have ever made decisions to expand your business, launch a new product/ service, or go after more aggressive goals only to retreat because you don't think your people are up to the challenge, you own this particular blind spot!

Case in Point

Richard owns a signage company. It's a family business filled with immediate family and friends. After 12 years in business, Richard felt that they were poised for significant growth but was cash strapped and lacked the capability to expand. He felt more people were needed but his revenue would not support such a decision.

When I asked him if he thought his current team was working at 100% capacity and effectiveness, he stated that they were all hard workers but did not have all the skills or abilities to do more. I followed with, "do you think you have the right people doing the right jobs" to which he replied, rather matter-of-factly, they are family.

It was only during a strategy meeting with his managers and several key people that Richard became aware of his people's thoughts on this. It turned out that several employees already had the training needed for some of his more complicated tasks but were never asked about it. Their operating manager's best guess was that the business was running at about 60% of capacity and could handle much more if only the head of sales (Richard) would spend more time selling.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

I have worked in or overseen major organizations in my career. I have also coached countless owners and executives in this area and in the majority of cases it's the perception of the leader, not the people who limits capability.

Human nature dictates that all but a small percentage of your people will independently go beyond what you expect. Thusly, most of your work force will get tired of tiring to convince you they can handle and accomplish greater results and will ultimately work only to meet what you expect.

It has been my experience that most commercial organizations leave between 25-30% of their available 'human capacity' on the table. Think of how much more you could accomplish and grow if you unleashed your people's full potential. The savings you realize by not hiring extra people, buying more equipment or engaging countless productivity experts could be staggering.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

Human nature is a fascinating phenomenon. Regardless of someone's innate talent, most will settle into a pattern that satisfies external expectations. It is a survival mechanism that safeguards physical and mental well-being.

Human behavior patterns can also be changed and improved upon by exerting the right trust building and motivation techniques. Before you can expect more from your staff, you should acknowledge that it is you, not them standing in the way of greater performance.

Start by identifying a goal, project or initiative that you have sidelined because you did not believe your people were capable. Make sure your directive is well thought out and clear in its purpose. Then, select the individuals who most closely reflect the talents needed or area of responsibility to make it happen.

Once you are ready to unveil your objective, call a meeting of the people involved and explain what you want done and why it's important to the organization. Let them know that you selected them because you believe they possess the skills and abilities to deliver a successful outcome. Then, ask them to get involved by asking questions. Find out what they think. Let them tell you how they would accomplish the project, what obstacles they see and what help or resources they believe they need to be successful.

At this point, you have successfully and positively demonstrated your faith in their abilities. Once you establish measurable goals and appropriate times for progress updates, let them run with it.

Action you should take

Recognizing that your team is capable of much more requires a shift in your thinking, your perceptions and your approach to leading. When you make a turn around like this, people will listen, but they will wait to see what comes next. After years of being discounted or limited by the boss's opinions, most people will need to see sustainable change from the boss before believing in the new approach.

Here are a few steps to take that will move you in the right direction:

1. Be more open with feedback. Ask for it and be willing to listen to it.
2. Give people opportunities to succeed by asking them to do more.
3. Create an environment for learning. Make development help readily available to those who show initiative.
4. When someone experiences a setback, help them understand why and encourage them to try again. Reminding people of past failures as a way of letting them know they are not capable only reinforces the pattern of limitations.
5. Be willing to admit your own mistakes and what you learned. Your people need to know that failure (and taking ownership) is not a career killer.
6. Adapt a 'what's possible mindset.' Your people will rise to your new expectations if they see that you believe it's possible and are willing to support their going the extra mile.

Key observations

If you want your people to reach their full potential, you must first realize that your mindset about what they are capable of is their biggest obstacle. Free them, and yourself, from this huge growth limiting factor by focusing on what is possible and engaging them in discussions and actions that convey confidence and trust that they can do it.

Additional resources: (found on my website)

[5 Keys for Developing Talent in Your Organization](#)

[Increasing Employee Capability](#)

[How Do I Improve Employee Performance Through Leadership](#)

Blind Spot #10: Assuming You Can Grow Without Marketing and Sales

There are only two functions in business that create revenue. They are sales and marketing. Without a dedicated, well designed strategy to optimize both, your business will be subject to the whims of the marketplace (competitive forces and customer shifts).

Unless you have a well-known monopoly, your chances of maximizing your business's full potential will be limited without a sales and marketing game plan.

Case in Point

I was contacted by a home improvements company following a networking event. After hearing my talk on the importance of having a well-designed, consistent marketing and sales plan, the owner wanted to know how I could help them.

As with most businesses in the construction/home improvements industry, work can be erratic. When work is heavy, these companies spend no time marketing. When business dries up, they scramble to find more work.

The owner explained that they had engaged in many expensive marketing programs and sold their services when they needed business but had nothing that ran all the time. Subsequently, their market visibility and brand reputation were spotty, and their close rate was low and inconsistent. Overall, the owner felt he

had lost money on his marketing and sales efforts over the years. When I came into the picture, they had stopped altogether.

Why this blind spot needs to be addressed?

Both of these functions must be actively managed and consistently applied to get an acceptable ROI. Starting and stopping or trying one tactic to see if it works only ensures disappointment while confusing your people and your customers.

Recognizing the need for sales and marketing signals a healthy view of the need to work outside your business. Your community visibility and your relationship with clients and customers depend on how you reach them. Only through a well-designed approach to educating, servicing and supporting your customer's will they remain loyal and actively help you by referring others to you.

Failing to see the competitive advantage of sales and marketing only makes your competitor's job easier and allows others to enter your space without fear of being challenged.

What you can do to reverse this blind spot

There are two main reasons for harboring this blind spot. 1). You don't understand how to make each work and rather than waste money, you simply opt out. 2). You have had poor experiences with marketing and problems with salespeople, so you cut your losses and rely on word of mouth and location to get your business.

Location and word of mouth are both solid approaches but may not be enough to establish the reputation you desire or an understanding of why you operate the business you do. In order to grow and sustain a healthy profit, your marketing must be compelling and your sales efforts engaging.

You can start by understanding who your primary customers are. This means understanding what's important to them and why they buy from you. You also need to know what makes you different. Telling people you have been in business for 40 years means little if everyone thinks you are out of touch with others offering similar products and services.

Next, take full advantage of the internet. Today, people do the majority of their search related information gathering before they ever reach out and contact you or visit your place of business. If your online presence is weak or nonexistent, you have given your competitors an edge and doing your future customers a disservice.

Finally, realize that marketing without a well-planned sale component limits your ability to generate actual meaningful contact with prospects. If you are unfamiliar with or fearful of establishing your own sales team, find a professional to help you design a system that will support your revenue and growth goals.

Action you should take

An appropriate marketing and sales strategy can take many forms depending on the type of business you have and industry you operate in. Do some research on your biggest competitors to find out what approach they are taking. Also talk to other people in your industry who can shed light on the way to approach developing a sales and marketing strategy.

The more you know about whose doing what and what seems to work, the better positioned you will be when it comes time to bring experts into your business for help.

As the owner or key decision maker, here are some actions you can take to prepare for launching or overhauling your sales and marketing approach:

1. Recognize that driving revenue is one of your most important responsibilities.
2. Be willing to devote the right amount of time to developing, planning and executing these two functions. There is no higher priority as a business owner!
3. Network your contacts to find trustworthy experts that can educate and guide you towards building strategies that work for your business.
4. Understand that successful sales and marketing is an ongoing journey. You will experience successes and failures along the way.
5. Be ready to invest in these two processes. Unlike other things you can invest in, sales and marketing will generate immense paybacks if done correctly and consistently.

Key observations

The primary purpose of a business is to make money. The primary focus of the owner is to keep the business profitable so you can continue to service your clients and provide meaningful employment to your people. Actively pursuing sales and marketing strategies that attract customers and drive revenue is the only way to accomplish this.

Additional resources: (found on my website)

[What You Need to Know That Will Make You a Better Marketer](#)

[Does Your Marketing Appeal to the Customers You Want?](#)

[How to Develop a Sales Strategy](#)

Make a Commitment

It is time to make a renewed commitment to driving growth with a clear, well thought out sales and marketing strategy. If you have dabbled in these two areas before but continue to retreat to safe, less expensive (and less effective) approaches, get back in the game. In our current economic climate, the only way to ensure long term survival and prosperity is to get aggressive with your outreach.

Conclusions

Now that you have a working knowledge of what blind spots are and the most dangerous ones that can infect the flow and profitability of your business, take the initiative to reverse their effects.

The place to start in each case outlined above is with you! You are the one who controls the flow and direction of your company. It is your awareness, decision making and action that has the greatest benefit or lack thereof when it comes to resolving blind spots.

If necessary, ask your management team or key people to read this ebook and identify areas they may be blind to. Of course, the best outcome you can hope for is to have a candid, open discussion with your people and ask them if they see what you are now seeing. The sheer openness of a conversation like this will build trust, commitment and loyalty throughout your organization.

Now, the only thing left to do is DO IT!

Good luck.

This book was written by Steve Smith, President and Founder of GrowthSource Coaching. To learn more about Steve's coaching services, please visit us at <https://www.growthsourcecoaching.com>

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