

IDEAS

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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

CHANGE, OR ELSE!

The longer you've been in business, the more likely you're set in your ways. And if you've been successful in that time, you can multiply the effect. Call it inertia or apathy or arrogance or laziness or just plain not knowing better, but there seems to be some sort of blindness that comes the result of your time in business. Let me explain using my own lessons learned as an example and see if you can relate.

My former company, Medley Music, was started by my parents back in the 1950s. With stars in their eyes, they did whatever it took to succeed. Working long, crazy hours, at times they survived on their wits alone. Clearly, ours was a case of "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." And since success was not immediate, they experimented and constantly tried new things in an attempt to gain a firm footing.

And then a funny thing happened: the place actually started to make money. Was it because of a brilliantly designed business plan? Had their persistence finally paid off? Or was it a lucky Sunday night 50



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years ago when the Beatles first appeared on "The Ed Sullivan Show?" That single performance brought scores of new customers to our front door with their wallets open.

Next up was a string of innovative keyboards starting with

MiniMoogs, ARP Odysseys — all leading up to the Yamaha DX7. I don't think anyone had seen such a successful product, and no one has since. It was practically a license to print money.

DON'T REST ON YOUR LAURELS

It all sounds like quite a nice success story so far, doesn't it? But here's the bad news. These great successes I enjoyed did nothing but train me to be on the lookout for the next hot product. But when hot products stopped driving the market, I was in trouble.

Having success is like an addictive drug — the more you have, the more blinded you become. I learned through failure that success doesn't always breeds success. In reality, what worked for you yesterday is probably barely working for you today and has a strong probability of being ineffective in the future.

Do you ever find yourself saying, "If it ain't broke, I'm not going to fix it?" The problem with that mentality is that the market is changing around you. If you stubbornly stick to what worked before, you'll be ill-equipped to deal with the

challenges of a rapidly changing marketplace. For instance, thinking that I had a formula that people loved, I found myself catering to a progressively older clientele. What's the problem with that? Death! Your customer base starts to dwindle with the passage of time. Meanwhile, younger customers flock to your competitors who better understand what they want to buy, how they want to buy it, and what type of sales approach works on them. If you're not constantly searching for ways of reaching new customers, you are plotting a course towards irrelevance.

But what if you are the dealer that is at the cutting edge? I warn you: Be cautious of resting on your laurels. Your customers will mature and their expectations will shift. And while that's happening, new generations will be right behind them with a whole new set of needs. Don't let success lull you to sleep. Let it serve as a sign of the hard work that lies ahead in order to maintain success. **MI**

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