

The Measure of Success

What happens to a business or life when you change the measure of success?

When I was establishing my business, I struck upon targets that defined success for me. This was not a simple task and required a fair amount of soul-searching. I set goals for 6 months, 12 months and 36 months. The timeline was a bit loose, but I knew that I would be able to achieve the 6 month target; I figured that I would be able to achieve the 12 month target; and I had no idea how I would achieve the 36 month target, but it would come. I was not wedded to the timeline; in fact, I was not at all sure that the targets were achievable in those timeframes. Nonetheless, I wrote down the targets; I shared them with people central to the business. I was on my way.

The targets were defined in terms of business revenue – money. Yet, whether I talked with people about what I was doing, I frequently commented that the money was not that important. More than one close friend challenged me, “is money why you’re doing this?” The answer was no, but the money represented a level of achievement; and so, I continued on my merry way; noticing that as the money did not flow, I was feeling disappointment and dissatisfaction, rather than relishing the success I was achieving.

One of the advantages of having a coach is that they do not let inconsistencies pass, at least not for long. My coach challenged me to consider whether there were other possible measures of success that better aligned with why I am in this business. As all good coaching questions are, this was thought provoking. If I attest to having defined why I am here – my purpose in life – and it does not have any emphasis on money, why is that the measure of success for my business?

Looking at what I gain from this business besides revenue, it is the satisfaction and joy of helping people; of being a part of people improving their lives. It was easy then to restate the goals around the number of people I can help through my coaching.

Which leads us back to the question, “what happens to a business or life when you change the measure of success?” In this case, the focus shifted from an uncontrollable outcome (the revenue) to controllable events. The focus shifts from the outcome to the process (and the former statistician in me says “duh!”). Let us get more concrete. A trial session may not result in immediate or any revenue, but it does help someone if I have done my job well. The trial session that does not convert to a paying client is a small part of my success; rather than a \$0 income failure. And that session may lead to a coaching agreement in the future. The blogs and newsletter do not generate any revenue, but they do, I hope, help someone.

Ah, but the businessperson says, that is fine, but you need to make money; it is an important measure. Well, like the manufacturing or quality engineer, perhaps what I need to do is to trust in the process. The process says that I need to establish a fair price for my work. The process says that I need to

develop credibility and a base level of clients that can lead to subsequent referrals. The process says I need to have a structure for getting, conducting and following up from trial sessions. The process says I need to have structures around the coaching practice. If I succeed in the processes, can I trust the outcome (eventually money) will follow?

Only time will tell. In the meantime, it is much more fulfilling to look at every step as a success; to evaluate the business building in terms of helping people improve lives, rather than how much money I made today.

Do you have any examples where changes in your measures of success had an impact in the conduct of your business or life?

Sherry Read is a principal in Read Solutions Group, a firm dedicated to helping successful professionals move forward in their careers and lives. If having a coach to assist setting the direction that is right for you sounds interesting, you can find out more at <http://www.ReadSolutionsGroup.com>. See the site for the free download of "Top 10 Tips for a Successful Job Change".