



The Tyranny of the Should

"The Tyranny of the Should" is a marvelous phrase that applies to all of us, and particularly to owners of small businesses.

We all say to ourselves, "I should...", "I ought...", and "I must..."

For instance, we say, "At this point in my life, my income *should* be (insert your own amount here)". In our inner dialogue we go on to say, "I *ought* to be doing (insert your own dream)". And all too often we conclude with, "I simply *must* (insert your own prescription: work harder, sell more, spend even more time in the business)".

Engaging in inner dialogues of this type—and who of us has not done so?—can be very destructive to our confidence, our view of the future, and ultimately, our ability to control and shape that future.

All of these statements are really saying that we have judged ourselves, and have found ourselves to be deficient in some important way.

Close on the heels of this guilty verdict we have rendered upon ourselves comes a good bit of personal blame.

The inescapable conclusion is, "It's all *my* fault. I *should* have done..."

We then come to the inescapable conclusion: "And because I didn't do what I should have, I have personally failed my family, my company, and my personal dream."

And then we become trapped by that guilt, the guilt we have placed on ourselves.

The Tyranny of the Should.

If we don't learn to forgive ourselves, we may live a substantial portion of the rest of our lives with this guilt.

I'm not advocating that we avoid taking personal responsibility for our failures and shortcomings. But by the same token, none of us are perfect, and none of us win all the time.

WHAT TO DO?

For one thing, start thinking some positive thoughts. While that may sound silly to some and wimpish to others, consider these two thoughts from two of America's most successful small business successes.

Zig Ziglar says, "You are the most important person you will talk to all day, so you'd better be careful what you say to yourself!"

Jim Rohm says, "In the end, I am not judged by the number of times I fail, but by the number of times I succeed, and the number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I can fail and keep trying."

I taped that saying to my desk many years ago. It is there today. And when I fall under the spell of the tyranny of the should, I use that saying to pull myself back out.

THE TYRANNY OF THE SHOULD AT WORK IN SMALL BUSINESS

We allow this process to work on us, and in us, in many ways.

Nine years ago, I went through a two-week training program when I started our small business in 1996.

My group had five men in their '40's and '50's, and all of us were starting over in what for us was a new field. All of us had once been successful in the corporate world, and several of us had national reputations.

Looking back, I think that all of us were suffering from the Tyranny. All of us wanted to use our new business identity to do the things that had once made us prominent.

Guess what happened? Instead of doing the things that bring small business success, we allowed the Tyranny to dictate our thoughts and actions.

Six months later, four of us had closed their businesses, and one was under psychiatric care for depression. True story.

Take a mental inventory of your inner thoughts. See if you're beating yourself up more than is really necessary. And be careful what you say to yourself.

A REAL LIFE SITUATION

There is a family here in Fort Mill who approached me recently looking for a solution to a financial problem.

They're not looking for a handout or anything like that. They work hard, and evidently generate a decent family income. But they're still in debt, and not saving for the future.

Sound familiar? Would you expect that over the next 5 or 10 years, their situation would radically improve so they have adequate cash reserves in the bank, have provided for their future, and still have maintained their present standard of living?

Or would you guess that in 5 or 10 years their situation will not have changed substantially. And if disaster should strike, so that one of the breadwinners is unable to work, the family's finances could have deteriorated.