

Facing the Facts

By Michael DeVellis

Published In Part – January 2005 – Professional Beauty UK

We all have a vision. I'm speaking of the kind that come from years of dreaming about what our future will be like, what our ultimate goals are and what our careers and business will turn into. The problem with these visions is that they sometimes don't turn out quite the way we'd expected. If we are unprepared, this can turn into disappointment, frustration and even failure to make our business work for the long term. If, on the other hand, we are prepared to change that vision by being honest with ourselves about what is and what isn't working, our flexibility can lead us to a long career and a successful business.

Honestly facing the facts in your business can be the most difficult thing in the world to do. It can also be the key to ensuring that you will succeed. We can be our own worst enemy when it comes to coming clean about changes that need to be made. But, if we continue to tell ourselves over and over again that if we just keep going down this same failing path, things will turn around, we will start to believe ourselves. If we start to believe ourselves, we are sealing our fate.

Sometimes changes that we need to make are as simple as our business looking tired and dated and need a desperate face-lift. Maybe the change we need is staff-related. Maybe we have hesitated to introduce a popular new treatment because of the expense and effort involved.

Customer needs change. Technology changes. Our own personal path changes too. What may have been important to us ten years ago may be of no relation to who we are and what our path is today.

Some changes are forced upon us by an advancing industry. Take Kodak for example. A number of years back, the company found itself in a position where digital cameras became the technology of choice for both casual and professional photographers. What do you imagine happened to a company who made a good part of their revenue selling film when the need for film all but disappeared in a matter of years. If Kodak hadn't adjusted their products and services to meet the lessening need for film and heightening need for digital cameras, accessories and printing paper there might not be a Kodak today.

This doesn't mean that your business has to be in danger of failing in order to shift direction. Successful business have flexible business plans that allow for change, not change for change sake, but for growth. If given the opportunity to choose growth over stagnation or decline, I think we'd agree that growth would be the obvious choice.

Once we have determined that we need change in order to grow, or in the worst-case scenario even maintain, our business, how do we go about implementing that change? Three steps – Analyze, Accept and Adjust.

First thing is to break it down. What is working in your business, what is not. Sounds easy, right? Some things will be very obvious. A product line that doesn't sell very well. A member of your team whose customer service skills are not up to par with the rest of your team. A business environment that doesn't feel clean and beautiful. Those are the easy ones. But what if the answer isn't so easy. What if you can't tell why your business feels like it isn't going anywhere fast? That's where the analyze piece comes into play. Make a list of things that your business does well. Make sure everything that you do or sell and every service that you offer is on that list. Write down every product that you retail and those that you use for services. Add any promotional or advertising expenses and every member of your team and any business partners, cleaning services, florists – anyone who plays a part in your business. Then go through that list one item at a time. Ask yourself this question for each item. How does this item affect my business? Does this item help to grow my business? Does it help to maintain it? Does it do

nothing for my business at all or hurt it? If it's the last one, consider getting rid of that item. If it's the others than keep it.

Accepting the outcome of your analysis can be a difficult task, but not as difficult as struggling without making the necessary changes. As we noted earlier, you can continue to tell yourself that things are working just fine the way they are, but that won't lead to greater success. Accepting that things need to change is a psychological barrier that can be difficult to get past. By accepting that things need change, we might feel that we are acknowledging that we didn't do it right the first time or that we have failed in some way. That's not always the case. Maybe things have changed around us and we just weren't paying attention since we were concentrating on the day-to-day operation of our business. Maybe the demographic of our neighborhood changed gradually and we haven't had to make any changes until now. Accepting that change is a required part of running a business, without an emotional attachment to the changes is crucial.

Once you've accepted the idea of change, you'll be accepting that you've got some adjusting to do. You may be setting yourself up for spending some money on staff training or introducing new technology to your business. This might mean that you have to stop spending on another area of your business for a while. You might have the new expense in time and money of researching new products to update your selection, this may mean eliminating an old product line. Or maybe it's as simple as getting a can of paint and painting the walls. It doesn't have to be a big thing, even the small things will make a difference.

Adjusting our direction to make our business more successful can be as simple as continuing to do, or expanding upon, the things that do work, and eliminate the things that don't. If we can analyze, accept and adjust our behavior to deal with different types of clients or even the weather, why not do the same to meet the changes that happen around us in the industry, with our clients and to our business. That's facing the facts.