

Better Focus, Better Results

“Wherever you go, go with all your might.”

Since beginning my entrepreneurship journey some years back, I’ve met without exaggeration hundreds (if not more) of similarly-minded professionals who have made the bold decision to hang out their own shingle – some who have established thriving businesses and others... not so much. If you’ve already made the leap of faith, I don’t have to tell you how challenging it can be to build a business from the ground up (in the words of a colleague who has built and currently manages two amazingly successful companies, “Small business isn’t for wimps.”) As a consultant, advisor, confidant, and general business enthusiast, I’ve seen some great companies, some not-so-great companies, and some companies that could have been great with just a little focus. This article discusses some of the most common focus fallacies I’ve encountered.

The Fisherman’s Net - *Wider Nets Always Catch More Fish.*

When starting out in business, it can be tempting to jump at every opportunity with equal vigor. Eager to earn business, it’s not uncommon to find oneself acting as the jack-of-all-trades. After all, by offering more services, it’s likely that you’ll be landing work in no time, right? Counter to what one might think, the answer is a resounding ‘not necessarily’. While this may seem like a winning strategy on the surface, it doesn’t take long to realize that it is very difficult to be all things to all people - especially for a small team or solopreneur.

To illustrate this point, I commonly draw the comparison to a fisherman’s net. At first glance, it’s easy to assume that, by expanding the net, you’ll catch more fish. What many overlook, however, is the limitations of resources (i.e. time, money, etc.) These resources are not that different than the actual netting material itself and one quickly learns that “expanding the net” might be more accurately defined as “stretching the net.” By *focusing* on everything, the holes in the “net” become so large that many smaller (and well qualified) opportunities will simply pass right through. While this may be an effective strategy for some businesses (whale hunters), small business owners may best served by crawling before flying.

Morale: An entrepreneur who focuses everywhere, focuses nowhere.

Identify what you do well and hone your focus to develop that business.

The Sequoia Model - *The Omnipresent Entrepreneur*

We’ve all heard the business quip, “fake it till you make it.” While there may be some necessary truth to this long-held sentiment, too often I’ve shared coffee with *Omnipresent Entrepreneurs* who tend to focus more on establishing their reputation as a renowned industry expert, rather than practicing any actual trade. Through thought-leadership (*we never tire of buzzwords in the business world*), authorship, speaking engagements, regular blogs, and networking, they expect their reputation to flourish and a wealth of business to follow. Unfortunately, I’ve met many well-intentioned professionals who grow frustrated as they seemingly sprint in place, month after month from one year to the next, never quite gaining the traction they so earnestly strive for. Determined as they are, they sprint faster and faster until they’ve given it their all.

On the surface, this strategy of *being everywhere* sounds like a solid plan - after all, every successful business must develop a name, right? While the answer is almost certainly 'yes', as we know all too well the devil is often in the details. In our case, the *details* in question involve the 'how' – becoming a thought-leader often involves writing blogs, gaining notoriety as a public speaker, getting published, networking, and promoting your achievements - all while trying to grow a business. Notice anything missing? How about the work? While it sounds amazing, the Omnipresent Entrepreneur isn't a sustainable model (for most) and seldom gains the intended results.

To illustrate this point, I commonly draw the analogy of chopping down a Sequoia Tree. If you're not familiar, the Sequoia (*formally Sequoiadendron Giganteum*) is a species of tree which is among the largest in the world and I've always felt it to be an appropriate comparison to starting a small business. Your mission, as an entrepreneur is to fell a tree – a gargantuan undertaking by every measure. Most would agree that the only logical approach to such an undertaking would be focus efforts in one spot, day after day until the goal is met (the tree has fallen.) However, if the axman were instead to approach the tree from different sides and varying heights each day or week (i.e. different strategies), it's not difficult to understand the Achilles Heel of the Omnipresent Entrepreneur. After months and years of effort, what stands before the exhausted axman (yes, stands) is a mighty tree with many small chunks removed from different sections of the tree's base.



Morale: An entrepreneur who does everything, achieves nothing.

Choose a strategy that fits within your time and resource limitations and execute it flawlessly.

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