

EXPERTS' FORUM | Open Forum

Making in vs. on work for your business

At a recent seminar, business owners and key executives explored a number of truths about the way we lead our organizations. One familiar concept revolved around working *on* your business versus *in* your business.

An entire discussion ensued about percentage of time devoted to each and the appropriate balance. More interesting, however, it prompted a whole new conversation on successfully engaging resources to help balance these equally important needs.

Working in your business means you're actively participating in the creation and sale of products and services that you provide. You likely have customer interaction and may even perform some or all of the work yourself.

Meanwhile, working on your business entails everything from day-to-day operations and financial models to marketing and even long-range planning. Many business leaders shy away from on-the-business tasks because these aren't their strong skills – these aren't the reasons they got into their businesses in the first place.

At the business event, one common strategy we discussed was outsourcing on-the-business activities such as marketing and communications, accounting, IT and others.

Aside from budget, the most important consideration of outsourcing is whether you'll actually participate and collaborate with your professional services provider – whether you'll have a partner or vendor relationship. It's impossible to pass the work on to another group and expect that it will succeed without a partnership mentality.

Why? Because, there's often something (or rather someone) missing – the person who hired us. When that happens, expectations are misaligned, work is done in fits and starts, and we struggle to generate results that matter – the very reason we were hired in

the first place.

We really need YOU. It doesn't mean a micromanager or a buzzing fly as we conduct our work. It does mean an engaged person who shares the vision, collaborates in solutions, contributes during brainstorming and then goes to bat to make the program a success, who shares in the opportunities and the challenges, and rather than judging or passing blame, commits to doing it even better – together – the next time.

Right now, some companies are outsourcing more and more things to better manage internal costs. So before you set out to hire on-the-business type services, ask the following questions to enhance the outcome for your business.

- Capabilities – Does the firm offer the services you need?
- Competencies – Does the firm have case studies that demonstrate success with similar strategies?
- Chemistry – Do you like the folks at the firm whom you will work with? Will you be happy to hear from them and are you comfortable being yourself with them – sharing the good, the bad and the ugly?
- Potential – Do you believe that this group has the potential to succeed? Is there just something about them that inspires you?
- Commitment – Will you be integral to providing vision, collaboration, participation and feedback?

With these answers in mind, business leaders who tap outside sources can enjoy benefits such as critical time *on* the business as well as relationships that generate results that matter. And, if it lets you get back to doing the in-the-business things that you do best, then it really makes the in-versus-on balance a whole lot better.



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