

Growing The Right Way

Effective Ideas for Small Business Owners

By David Handler



It's All In The Systems

Have you ever noticed french fries taste the same at every McDonald's? The same can be said for Subway and its Italian BMT. How do these fast food icons replicate themselves at nearly 40,000 locations when some eateries struggle to get it right in a single restaurant? The answer is simple: it's all in the systems.

Picture yourself waiting in line inside McDonald's. Look across the counter and you notice the shiny french fry machine. Standing in front of it is a high school student. What is she doing?

Chances are she's executing a procedure someone trained her on the first day. A system that goes something like this: "Take the bag out of the freezer. Empty french fries into the wire basket until full. Lower the basket into the hot oil. Push the green button. Return the bag to the freezer. When the buzzer rings, push the red button. Take the basket out of the oil and empty fries onto the holding area. Sprinkle the salt shaker four times over the fries. Take a white bag and fill it with fries using the silver utensil. Place the bag under the heat lamps. Repeat with different size bags until the basket is empty and all fries are ready to serve."

I spent six years in the franchising industry as head of marketing for an international franchisor. Today, as a professional business coach, I help franchisors, franchisees and business leaders develop and implement systems to make their companies work like McDonald's and Subway.

Franchising is a major part of the U.S. economy, accounting for 14 percent of private-sector employment and more than \$1.5 trillion of annual economic output (International Franchise Association). The fastest-growing franchising companies – names like Curves and Quizno's – understand the impact of having detailed systems for every aspect of their operations.

A common approach taught to new franchisees – originating in Michael Gerber's book "The E-Myth" – is to work ON your business and not IN your business. This means taking time to step back and plan where you want your business to go, then setting about working your plan.

Think about your employees. Do all understand their specific role in making your business successful? Or do you occasionally have thoughts of, "Why can't they just get it?" If you find things falling through the cracks, then treating your business like a franchise would mean creating a job description for each position.

These one-page summaries identify every responsibility, with specific details such as which positions take out the trash, answer the phone and batch credit card charges each day. Taking the time to create these will transform every position into a meaningful role, ensuring you have all of the bases covered. It will allow you to hire for specific positions, enabling you to focus on finding the right people, which will help you achieve greater productivity.

I previously co-founded a sports travel company. One of our biggest clients was Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex, where we often took more than 1,000 people to events. I also received executive training at the Disney Institute. From these frequent interactions with Walt Disney World Resort, I learned important lessons that I continue to share with clients. The most valuable of these are the "4 P's of Disney":

PLANNING – It's almost a cliché, but it is truly important to know where you want to go...or you may wind up somewhere else. Take time to organize your thoughts, consider options and make educated decisions before setting out in a direction.

PROCESSES – Make sure you have systems for every aspect of your business, from unlocking the front door in the morning, to handling upset customers, to turning off the lights at night. The more organized your procedures, the better likelihood your employees will be able to execute them.

PARTNERING – If you have ever been to Walt Disney World, think about all the kiosks and shops that sell merchandise. Now think about designing, manufacturing, ordering, taking delivery and disseminating products throughout the four theme parks each day. It requires orchestrated coordination between multiple departments. Whatever the size of your company, be sure your employees understand the importance of partnering together.

PERFORMANCE – Disney believes if you can do it, you can measure it. Take time to measure your performance. Then adjust your plan, re-measure and adjust again...always moving forward in a continuous improvement cycle.

Treating your business like a franchise by developing systems that work may not make you the next Blockbuster, but it may enable you to better serve your customers and increase sales. *CSTX*

Tomball resident David Handler, The Coach, is the founder of Success Handler, LLC (www.successhandler.com), and specializes in helping franchisees, franchisors and business leaders achieve their dreams. He understands the challenges of running a business, because he's been there – as a business owner, trainer, corporate leader, and in a franchisee and franchisor environment. For a complimentary copy of David's list – "11 Ways to Treat Your Business Like A Franchise" – send an e-mail to coach@successhandler.com.