

## Growing The Right Way

Effective Ideas for Small Business Owners

By David Handler

### Curing the Summertime Blues



It's hard to believe the year is half over. All the planning you did for your business at the beginning of 2005 is either turning out great, coming along slowly but surely, or hasn't really gotten off the ground because other issues keep getting in the way.

With so many things to distract you from your business this time of year – like outdoor activities, yard work, vacations and the kids being home from school – the next 90 days often fly by and you find yourself further down the road and further away from accomplishing your goals. The key to avoiding the Summertime Blues and running in place until September is to conduct a mid-year check-up.

Gather your team and spend some time discussing what you've accomplished so far this year. Focus on the positive things occurring in your business. Celebrate your successes, however small they are, so everyone recognizes there are indeed good things happening. Here are some questions to help you get started:

1. What is the best thing you've done as a company in 2005?
2. Why are you better today than six months ago?
3. Which part of your business improved the most this year?
4. What are some of the good comments you've heard from your customers?
5. How have you personally helped your team achieve their goals?

We get so busy trying to survive the daily onslaught of crises that it's easy to forget to look at the big picture – to step away from the grind and remember even minor progress is still progress. It's important to stay focused on continuous improvement, striving every day to become a little better. The Japanese call this management philosophy "Kaizen"; making incremental progress one day at a time.

Pause for a few minutes and review the goals you made at the beginning of the year. Take a candid look at what you set out to do and whether you're actually doing it. Gather your team and talk about the reasons you're not achieving the forward momentum you expected. Instead of dwelling on what isn't happening,

choose three attainable goals from your list and create action plans for accomplishing them in the second half of the year. Assign specific responsibilities and timelines for completing each item. To help everyone understand the importance of their role in making the remainder of 2005 remarkable, follow these five steps:

**ASK** your team to repeat their responsibilities, and ask if they have questions about their parts.

**CREATE** a buddy system in which two employees work together to ensure accountability.

**POST** the action plans in a visible place where everyone sees them each day.

**ENCOURAGE** team members to look for opportunities to help each other reach their goals.

**CHEER** for small victories by blowing a whistle and recognizing deserving employees.

Rather than overwhelming everyone with yet another plan for changing the way you operate your business, limit yourself to these five goals, focusing on what each person needs to do to complete his/her pieces. Bring your team together each week for a brief 12-minute discussion in which every member provides an update on their progress. Encourage them to share roadblocks that are preventing them from moving forward, and work on solutions for overcoming delays.

It is important to take time to plan the direction of your business. However, the only way to achieve your goals is to actively work your plan. Do this every day, and you'll find that there actually is a cure for the Summertime Blues. *CSTX*

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