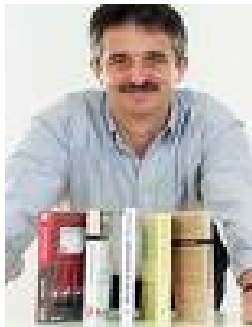


Kick-Start Your Business

100 Days To A Leaner, Fitter Organization

About the Author



Author: Robert Craven
Publisher: Virgin Books, 2001
ISBN 9780753509739
271 pages

Robert Craven is one of the UK's best-known and sought after speakers on entrepreneurship; anyone who has experienced one of his impactive presentations will know exactly why.

'The entrepreneurship guru' (The Financial Times).

'Probably the UK's most sought-after speaker on the subject of entrepreneurship and business growth.'

■ The Big Idea

Running a business can sometimes feel like running up the 'down' escalator. Unless you can get your business to work for you.

Kick-Start Your Business uses a practical, hands-on approach to putting your affairs in order, including:

- Essential tools for getting a business to work better
- Hundreds of ideas and examples to turn a business into a powerhouse
- Useful resources and contacts
- Proven worksheets to 'kick-start your business'

The figures speak for themselves – about half of small businesses fail in the first four years – so in whatever industry you work you need all the help you can get to succeed. And above all, you should be having fun. Use these books as your tools, follow the advice and then make your own decisions – after all, you're the boss!

Why You Need This Book

You'll find out how to identify your company's strengths and weaknesses and assess its potential in order to get what you want from your business and transform it into a powerhouse.

THE THREE OBSESSIONS OF SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONS

Business failure is attributable to one key factor in 99.9 per cent of cases: the owner-manager or the management team. In other words, YOU! You hold the key to your business success and you hold the key to your business failure. This highly successful have an obsessive focus on three key things – do you? And finally, why do most businesses ignore the obvious?

The three things that the highly successful are obsessed with are:

Obsession One: Business Strategy

Strategy is about planning where you want to go while being aware of the business environment – making your own plans while taking into consideration the outside factors.

Obsession Two: Marketing

Marketing is another misunderstood word in the business world. As with 'strategy', we use the word 'marketing' all over the place and give it different meanings depending upon our mood and our inclination. No wonder no one respects these words or the people who use them a lot.

Obsession Three: Teams and People

Successful teamwork requires the ability to motivate, lead and communicate effectively. Sadly, most businesses have some kind of 'people' problems.

ON APPROACHING STRATEGY

Strategy is all about knowing what you do and what you don't do! Strategy is about deciding which race you want to run. Strategy is about being different from the rest of your competition. After all, if you are the same as the rest, then why should customers want to come to your business?

In a nutshell there are three reasons why strategy does not work:

1. Types of strategic thinking. Managers often fail to differentiate between business-unit strategy and what is referred to as 'corporate-centre' strategy. The reason for this is that business schools and consultants normally talk about big-business/corporate-centre strategy when they are talking about strategy.

2. No clarity of purpose. Put simply, business strategy is planning while being aware of the business environment. So, who should be involved? Consultants? The senior team? The whole team? Well, this depends on the level (and size) of the organization that you are talking about.

3. The use of tools and theories. At the business-unit level, the tools of analysis are relatively straightforward. The only real barriers to a successful strategy are intimidation by the so-called 'professionals' and their jargon.

THE SOLUTION

To be effective, strategic thinking tools must satisfy the following conditions:

1. Reflect the business needs of today and tomorrow
2. Start with the customers – be rooted and immersed in market understanding
3. Be practical (not theoretical)
4. Be specific (not superficial)
5. Encourage a longer-term view
6. Be measurable

MARKETING

A report, *Marketing Success in Fast Growth SMEs* (by David Storey of Warwick Business School), is based on a series of fascinating case studies of 'live' businesses. Out of the research are drawn nine fundamental lessons;

1. Use professional advice: an outside professional can act as the catalyst to focus the business on to the importance of marketing.
2. Use basic techniques: simple, basic techniques are what are required. Segmenting the market or using existing information more effectively may be all you need.
3. Focus on the customer: if you do this you will be better able to give the customer what they really want!
4. Plan: the discipline of putting the customer first brings with it systematic planning, prioritizing and measuring effectiveness, all of which help business performance.
5. A shift of focus changes other factors: focusing on customer needs changes the whole outlook of the business as it reviews all its functions in the new light.
6. New rules create new markets: new legislation, rules and regulations have created new opportunities for those actively seeking them.
7. Get a competitive advantage: by focusing on customer needs and marketing issues, businesses are able to establish a competitive advantage, as they are able to focus their operations on what is really acquired of them by the customer!
8. Changes outlook: Marketing can become the central business function, which increases the firm's competitiveness. All activity should be focused on the impact on the customer.
9. Staffing changes: staff needs to change to adopt the new philosophy. Becoming successfully customer-focused requires the involvement and commitment of all your people.

You ignore marketing at your peril. You cannot assume that you are doing 'good' marketing just because you are still in business. You could be missing profitable opportunities right now, simply because you are spending too much time on everything but your customer.

REAL ENTREPRENEURS ARE BORN SURFERS

Entrepreneurs, like surfers, are driven by specific psychological attributes – some might describe these as flaws. Many have an all-consuming need to prove something to themselves and to others.

Many suffer deep down from low self-esteem; some are profoundly insecure, always trying to prove that they can do better than the opinion that they hold of themselves.

The standard definitions of entrepreneurs could be a description of a surfer – they are 'bounce-back' people with a powerful desire to achieve. They do not get distracted by either success or failure: they just plough on, never satisfied and constantly in fear of 'being found out'. Often after one success, they need to do it again to prove it was not a fluke.

Failure is seen as confirming inner fears, but they do not give up. Instead they pick themselves up and attempt to show that they can get it right a second time. Many don't care about anything other than the business in hand – it can be like a drug.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SUCCESS

Successful people seem to do things in a different way from the unsuccessful. Success breeds success, and certainly attitude is a key part of the secrets of success.

Success is goals

Goals imply ambition and drive. Goals are the motivators that make you work that much harder. Goals give you the reason that you go to work so be clear about what you want – the lifestyle or the car or the house or the social life. Be clear about what you want to achieve and the focus will help you to succeed. You will achieve little without goals.

Self-limiting beliefs

Our ability to dream is limited by our willingness to allow our imagination its freedom. Fear of failure is drummed into many of us from an early age so that we become nervous to mention our deepest ambitions. Fear of success is another limiter on what you are willing to do.

Accept responsibility

The successful accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. They accept their failures as being a result of their own behavior and they also accept their successes as being attributable to their own behavior. They don't blame others.

Develop a positive attitude

If you surround yourself with negative people, you will take on their negativity. In fact, you will absorb the attitudes of those around you. Surround yourself with beer drinkers, and talk about beer and alcohol will soon become the norm. Surround yourself with musicians and talk of music will soon become the norm. So surround yourself with people and books that stimulate and encourage you to stretch yourself.

Believe in yourself

Self-belief and self-confidence are probably the most important gifts we can give to our children. With self-confidence, we are willing to experiment and try out new ideas. We don't measure ourselves by other people's standards.

Decide to be successful

Success won't just happen to you. You have to work at it. Decide what your definition of success is. Plan out how you are going to achieve it.

Manage your time

Use your time effectively. Cut out the time-wasting activities, decide what is important and concentrate on the activities that give you most benefit.

Set goals and achieve them

Clarity and vision about what you are going to achieve reinforce your determination to succeed. The more you visualize your success, the more you rehearse your victory, so the more you prepare yourself for the task ahead.

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR INNOVATION

1. Make it fun.
2. Listen to your customers and what they want – focus on giving them something extraordinary rather than ordinary.
3. Don't just talk about it: create prototypes so that others can see and touch what you are talking about – strike while the iron is hot.
4. Be clear about whom you are targeting and make sure your innovation will deliver the 'promise', and is easy to understand.
5. Beware of the enemy within – the pessimist will always try to defeat your enthusiasm and focus on your fear of failure.

AND SOME CRUNCH ONE-LINERS TO GIVE YOU SOME FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Brand it

You cannot not communicate your brand. Everything about your business communicates something. So what is it that you want to be communicating?

Brand you

Treat yourself as a business treats its brand. You need to plan and create a strategy for communicating what it is that you represent, what it is you represent, what it is that you do, and where you want to be seen and what you want to be known for.

Start it – stop procrastinating and do it now

Stop procrastinating. Sometimes it is better to make a decision, one way or the other, and look at the results, rather than make no decisions at all. Paralysis by analysis is the disease of the undecided and the uncommitted.

Keep it

Don't make changes for the sake of making changes. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. We spend too much time re-creating, re-engineering things that are perfectly OK.

Get your customers' permission to sell to them

Traditional mass-selling techniques are simply not effective and have low success rates. Look for customers to give you permission to stay in contact with them. Customers who have given you permission to have a relationship with them are ten times more likely to spend money with you.

People love to buy from people, but they hate to be sold at

In today's one-to-one marketing world, customers hate to be sold at by badly trained salesmen. But they love to buy products from you. Seduce them to your business but do not treat them like morons.

Spend a day with weird people

You get out what you put in. If you spend all your time with boring people in boring meetings then you are bound to dampen your creative edge. Somehow your thinking has got to be different from that of your competitors. One of the best ways to sharpen your thinking is to spend some time with people who come at almost everything from a wacky angle. Celebrate the differences and see if you can't find a better way of doing things.

Strategy is all about trade-offs

Strategy is all about planning while being aware of the business environment. Strategy is about being clear about what you do and what you don't do.

Stop unprofitable activity

Do you know how profitable you are, by customer, by product, by channel? And if it ain't profitable then why are you doing it? What excuses are you using to continue to do unprofitable work?

Focus on the important

Know the difference between what is urgent and what is important. You must know what things are really important to you or to your business. And, if you know what is really important, then you know what is less important and what is really unimportant.

Watch your attitude

Your attitude leaks like radioactivity. Everything you do communicates how you feel about what you are doing. So what messages are you communicating, consciously or unconsciously?

Spend more time thinking and less time doing

As you rise up through an organization you will progressively spend more and more of your time thinking and less and less of your time doing. The role of the leader of an organization is to spend time looking down on what is going on and taking the broad view.

Less is more – simplify everything

The simpler the concept, the more power it has. Use your time and your resources with care.

© 2009 BusinessSummaries.com