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New Year's Resolution - Focus on What You Enjoy

As it is New Year's Eve, it seemed appropriate to discuss New Year's resolutions. I've never been fond of New Year's resolutions because I always thought that if I should do something, why wait until the magic day (the New Year)? However, in thinking about this topic in relation to business and personal success, I had a thought to share - why not focus on what you enjoy doing?

As usual, this sounds quite simple and certainly not profound; however, how often do you prioritize what you enjoy? And, if you have prioritized what you enjoy, did you notice a difference? I've found that when people focus on what they enjoy, they are not only happier, they typically excel, make more money than they thought possible and enjoy better relationships. So, if this typically comes true, why not give it a shot?

I thought about this earlier today when I was talking with a former colleague, who is also a current business partner and friend. We were discussing the differences since we left our former employer to what we've done since then. It is amazing what an impact what might be considered small items can have in your life when you focus on what you enjoy. And, for me, I've been fortunate that I've always been in a career that I've enjoyed, as I know my parents helped significantly when I was young in making me believe that I could do anything I wanted (and providing me with a variety of experiences from a variety of sports including competitive ice skating to chess class to Indian Princesses so I had some background to support this concept) - there were no limitations (who knew of issues others thought as roadblocks such as being considered a young woman in an operations field?). With that said, I've found that I'm enjoying my current situation even more since I have additional time and energy to focus on what I enjoy.

I've read quite a bit of research about this topic and seen many examples, and generally, the idea is to focus on what you enjoy, stick to it, work hard at it, continually improve your skillsets (training, education, mentors), and success will follow. It sounds like a simple formula, but it works. The first step is to take a step back from the frantic days to determine what you enjoy. Then, put aside some time to figure out how to focus more on this activity. Of course, with most recipes for success, sticking it out is many times much harder than it sounds. In my experience, this is the step where most people abandon the process. Instead, be determined! Invest in yourself, ranging from training to time spent with mentors, reading, etc. And, continually look for opportunities for improvement - this is the same concept as implementing an aspect of many of the successful operations programs such as the Toyota Production System, lean manufacturing, etc. In this case, it is applied to your personal success.

There is no downside I can think of in giving this a shot - spending 15 minutes thinking about this topic can be more than spent previously, and if it can result in significant improvements in your life, why not give yourself 15 minutes or whatever timeframe is appropriate for you?

Lisa's Tips: Reducing waste

1. Stop doing those activities that no one uses anymore - for example, it is common to continue spending hours developing reports that everyone deletes upon receipt. Take a step back and figure out which activities add value today.
2. Determine your profit drivers before you fanatically pursue a waste reduction program - this sounds obvious but in my experience, it is most often overlooked. Once you understand your profit driver, you'll know what to focus attention on that will make a significant difference to your business.
3. Take a step back and "see" what you are doing - this can take many names including putting together spaghetti diagrams etc, but simply, it is just to focus on what you are doing to see opportunities for improvement. For example, you might find that you are running around in what appears to be circles to gather everything you need to complete a project or to produce a product.
4. If focusing on materials waste, there are several routes to pursue, from the typical one, manufacturing line scrap, to material usage to the waste built into product design and packaging design to opportunities in material options and working with suppliers.
5. If focusing on labor waste in a manufacturing environment, scrutinize your schedule loading and opportunities for flexible crewing to your crew size for specific items and run rates (however, be careful not to be overzealous on one particular topic to the exclusion of all else. For example, many times, run rates and material usage can have opposite effects).
6. If focusing on labor waste in non-manufacturing specific roles, remember your profit drivers! For example, it makes no sense to save labor costs by getting rid of your engineering expert if that person can help you save 10 times their salary in waste reduction. Sounds silly? Believe me, it is common! Another example I've seen that flies in the face of sanity is to reduce your technical expertise when your company's strategic advantage in the marketplace is technology. Although it seems to me that a lot of the frenzy over reducing labor dollars is largely a narrow view, there are times when it makes sense to cut back. The key is to make sure you aren't caught up in a frenzy of viewing people in terms of the narrow view as labor dollars alone. Instead, look at the big picture and keep your strength in the areas related to your profit drivers, so think before jumping off the cliff!

Recommended Reading

"[*The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century?*](#)" by Thomas L. Friedman. I consider this a "must-read", as it describes globalization and the evolution of the world in the last century, which has resulted in lasting changes for businesses, the world economy, and politics. The topics range from outsourcing, insourcing, offshoring, supply-chaining, etc. In addition to providing a historical perspective, it also discusses the impacts of these topics from multiple perspectives - environmentally, socially and politically.

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