

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

HOW TO FIND BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AT 30,000 FEET

It was a gorgeous, sunny morning as I flew out of Midway on a recent business trip. As the plane took off and flew over the southwest suburbs of Chicago, the low altitude and bright morning sunshine allowed me to see the landscape below in colorful detail. I recognized where we were from several landmarks, and I was fascinated to see the growth and development of the area from the air that I had never noticed from the ground.

I noticed the baseball diamonds and parks laid out in innovative, space-saving ways. I saw subdivisions under construction, the brown earth a stark contrast to the lush greens and smooth finished concrete of the developed areas surrounding it. I saw some other tracts of land nearby, and thought of how ripe that area was for development at some time in the near future.

I saw a golf course I had played on recently, and could see for the first time how it had been carved out of a wooded area, and the array of homesites that had been carefully planned around the course. I could clearly see the number of swimming pools in a particular subdivision, and how far apart the houses were built in that area vs. the homes in another nearby development.

It was a view I don't get to enjoy very often, and I was struck by how different this view of the land was from what I normally see on the ground.

And then it hit me. Business owners should do the same thing!

When was the last time you looked at your business from 30,000 feet? When you step back and look at things from a different angle or perspective, you're likely to discover several ways to improve on what you're doing, and see possibilities you would never have considered.

So what are some ways you can look at your business differently? Here are a few suggestions:

- Get your top people together and get away from the office for a day to brainstorm about the “big picture”, and the possibilities of improving on your business. No idea is too wild, expensive, or crazy, but the meeting should have some focus on key issues and challenges.
- Find new voices and surround yourself with them to avoid becoming stale and outdated.
- Hire someone (or ask a business owner or manager from a similar business from another area) to come into your operation and look around, specifically to offer suggestions on how you might improve. Better yet, make an offer to a business owner or manager to come to his or her business and do the same thing as an even trade-off. There are significant benefits for both of you.
- Join (or start) a mastermind group of like-minded business individuals that you can open up to and dialogue with who can bring their own brand of energy, passion and new thinking to your life.
- Gather your entire staff for a no-holds-barred, straight-on thinking session on what we as a team can do to improve the business. Buy the pizza, open the discussion, and take lots of notes. Many times the best ideas come from the most junior members of the team.

Don't be afraid to test the new, innovative ideas and experiments that come from these conversations. Some of the ideas may fail, but you'll grow yourself and your organization from the positive lessons that you'll learn from them.

In an ever-competitive marketplace, the companies that are poised to grow and thrive are the ones that are constantly innovating and stretching themselves. When you're in the trenches all the time, you rarely get an opportunity to see the beauty – and the hidden opportunities – of a fresh perspective at 30,000 feet.

Set aside some time to step back and think about “what-if’s”. It's not wasted time at all; indeed, it's vital to the future growth and development of you, your people, and your business.

And it's likely where the next big idea is waiting to be hatched.

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