

Take This Job and Love It!

—How to Become a “Fire-Proof” Asset to Your Company

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“**5,000 Jobs** to be Cut,” so says a recent newspaper article about a well-known technology company. But that company was not alone. Other companies, especially the “Dot Com's” are also cutting jobs, primarily due to a declining market and economy. Although business has been difficult for the Technology sector recently, it has also affected related companies due to the ripple effect that one industry has upon another.

But job cuts and downsizing are not exclusive to the Technology sector, nor are they anything new. No longer does a person enjoy guaranteed employment until retirement with a single company. Consequently, many people are rightly concerned about the ongoing stability of their jobs.

The important question is, “With all of the job cuts and downsizing going on these days, is there a way to position yourself as a “Fire-Proof” asset to your company?”

On the other hand, losing your job due to downsizing may not be an issue, and you may really enjoy your work. But for so many people, going to work every day is a begrudging experience. If this is true in your case, rather than thinking, “Take this Job and Shove it,” is there a way you can “Take this Job and Love it”? Is there a way to find more satisfaction and fulfillment in your current employment?

Having founded a successful office equipment dealership over ten years ago, I know first hand the uncertainties of business. Furthermore, I know what it means to employ a person who is virtually indispensable, and also what it means to let someone go who is really not interested in doing his or her best. In addition to being a business owner several times, I have also been an employee several times. This has allowed me to live on both sides of the business experience.

As a result, there are three areas that I believe are essential to success in any job:

1. Understanding how business works in the real world;
2. Providing Exceptional Customer Service, both internally and externally; and
3. The attitude you choose regarding the first two.

Another equally important area is how business owners and managers deal with their employees. After all, an employee might be doing a very good job, but if the owner or manager is unbearable to work for, it can be very difficult—if not impossible—to enjoy the work or perform well.

This article will address each of these areas in two parts:

Part 1: How Business Works in the Real World;

Part 2: Displaying Exceptional Customer Service;

Before we continue, let me qualify a couple of things. First, no job or employment is guaranteed in business, because unexpected circumstances arise from time to time. The term “Fire-Proof” primarily refers to not losing your job due to traits such as a lack of initiative, weak performance, being difficult to get along with, or laziness, to name a few.

Secondly, you may not really like or enjoy your current job or work. If this is true, then it will be virtually impossible for you to really excel and find enjoyment in what you are doing. If you find yourself in this position, then do your company, those around you and, most importantly, *yourself* a favor and QUIT! Discover what *does* bring you fulfillment and *do that*. (For more on discovering your true purpose in life, read *The Game Rules for Life*, By Doug Kelley. Visit www.EmpowerTheSpirit.com/Articles/plan.htm and read “Do You Have a Plan for Living?” which is a relevant section of the book to our discussion here).

“... is there a way to position yourself as a “Fire-Proof” asset to your company?”

Also, as you consider this series of articles, please notice three undercurrents or themes:

1. The importance of attitude in positioning yourself as a "Fire-Proof" business asset;
2. Showing high regard for the human element or condition; and
3. Empowerment—both personal and job related.

It is my firm conviction that both business *and* life run much smoother if each one of us loses unnecessary control issues and shows honor, dignity, and respect to one another.

Part 1: How Business Works in the Real World

I admit it, I'm guilty. In my early years as a new employee, I really had no understanding of how a business operates and only a vague idea of what its all about. My lack of understanding went on for years — quite unintentionally—until I founded my own business and got a heavy dose of reality.

By simple definition, any business is in business to make a profit by providing a product or service that people want or need. Though this is the long and the short of it, making it happen is not nearly so simple. This is because every business owner or manager must juggle many different aspects of the business, but primarily three:

1. Employees;
2. Customers; and
3. Products and/or Services.

Every business in existence has these three essential components or legs. Which of the three do you think is most important? To answer, picture in your mind a three-legged stool. What would happen if one leg were to break? The answer is obvious. Without the support of *all three* legs, the stool fails to support its own weight, let alone the weight of something sitting on it. Likewise, a business without employees, customers and a product or service, cannot support itself and fails. (Just to clarify: even a one-person operation still has one employee—the owner). Further-

more, if one leg is weak or wobbly, the business will not be stable.

As a new business owner over ten years ago, I quickly discovered the reality of being in business for myself—it is very difficult. Consider what a business owner or manager has to deal with everyday:

1. Employees—including training, performance, and various problems, etc.;
2. Cash flow—payroll, inventory, owner income, and other overhead;
3. Sales and marketing—remaining competitive;
4. Customer satisfaction and problems;
5. A myriad of other areas, such as accounts receivable, accounts payable, bookkeeping, taxes (and man are there a lot of taxes!), inventory, property maintenance—and the list goes on and on.

(Each of these areas must be managed properly to ensure business success. It is no wonder that most businesses fail in the first few years of starting!)

On top of all this, now factor in a business owner's personal life, family, outside interests, and/or personal problems to his or her assortment of business challenges. It becomes easy to see why owning or managing a business can be so difficult, draining and demanding. Owning or managing a business can even take a heavy toll on one's mental and emotional health. It is not uncommon for a business owner to deal with depression due to the stress involved in growing his or her business.

The Ownership Attitude

In my experience, most employees who have never owned or managed a business are simply unaware of all that a business owner or manager has to contend with—I know I was unaware in the beginning. It is quite common for employees to quickly conclude that a business owner is making a lot of money and has it good. While this is no doubt true in many cases, it is more rare than one might think. But with a little education and effort, any employee can learn and better appreciate the challenges business owners' face without becoming a business owner him

"Every business in existence has these three essential components."

or herself. When an employee does this, he or she takes on a new attitude—an Ownership Attitude.

An Ownership Attitude is defined as:

Taking responsibility for and performing your job as if you owned the company.

You demonstrate an Ownership Attitude when you take full responsibility for your job or career, and show initiative in performing your responsibilities. You mentally consider that *you* are part owner of the company, and so do all you can to make the business grow. After all, if the business grows, so do your chances of advancing. If you as an employee are to offer your maximum value and position yourself as a "Fire-Proof" business asset, you *must* put on the Ownership Attitude.

Business 101

The area in which I received the heaviest dose of reality when I started my own business was in cash flow. Just like your personal checking account, money flows into and out of a business as a result of sales and expenses respectively. Cash flow can be good or bad; a double-edged sword; a real beauty or a terrible beast. Furthermore, negative cash flow is a force to be reckoned with and is *completely* unforgiving. Just ask the business owner who has had to meet payroll, but didn't have enough cash to cover it. This is where lessons in the art of juggling are learned and mastered. To say the least, a situation like this is an intense educational experience—and a stressful one at that! Very quickly, a business owner learns to avoid similar experiences in the future (just ask me how I know!).

A "Fire-Proof" employee with an Ownership Attitude must fully comprehend the basics of cash flow. When products or services are sold, cash is generated and flows into the business. From this inflow of cash, expenses such as payroll and overhead are paid and

flow out of the business. What is leftover is the net profit. **Figure 1** illustrates a cash-healthy business. Cash from sales flows into Bucket A where expenses are paid. Any surplus cash then flows into Bucket B which represents net profit. From the net profit comes cash for things like owner salary, business growth, and employee raises, among other things.

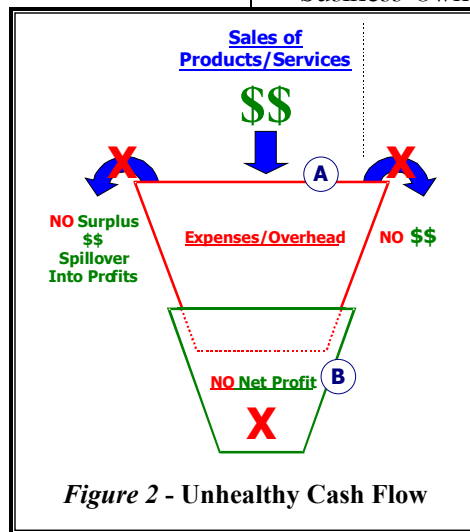
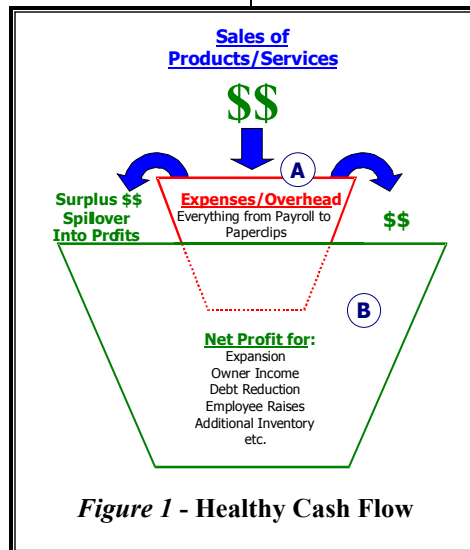
But what about the opposite, that is, a business that has an unhealthy cash flow? **Figure 2** illustrates a business that does not have enough cash to record a net profit. This means that there is no cash for anything else, including raises. It also means that the owner doesn't get paid (ouch!). I can't tell you how often my own employees earned more income than I did in the early years of my business—and I had all the headaches! But this is the trade-off a business owner makes—the security of a regular paycheck for the prospect of a successful business and a better life.

The situation can, however, get worse. The cash flowing out for overhead expenses can exceed the cash flowing in from sales. In this case, there are only two real outcomes: Either the business owner scrambles to "beg, borrow, or steal" the cash to cover expenses, or the business fails. Moreover, if the business owner doesn't learn the lessons of cash flow and make the necessary changes, the business *will* eventually fail.

Applying the Lessons of Cash Flow

Armed with the foregoing lessons of cash flow, the "Fire-Proof" employee with an Ownership Attitude will begin to see the business he or she works for in a new light.

Hopefully this describes you. If it does, you will begin to see the value of scrutinizing every expense to determine if it is really necessary. You will begin to take better care of things, and look for ways to get more life out of the equipment and the tools of your trade. You will begin to see customers in a whole new light—they are responsible for your paycheck! You



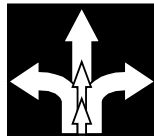
will begin to take full responsibility for the business *as if* you owned it. The very essence of an Ownership Attitude is to combine a higher knowledge of real-world business along with self-empowerment to be and do the very best you can.

But what if you work for a bigger company with perhaps hundreds of employees or more? Let me qualify the Ownership Attitude in this regard. Displaying the Ownership Attitude and acting *as if* you owned the business must be kept in perspective. Obviously, the Ownership Attitude, in and of itself, does not automatically give you more executive authority, privilege, or control. And since many companies have several different departments, you as an employee with an Ownership Attitude cannot control the departments you don't work in.

Having the Ownership Attitude means to take full responsibility for *your* position within the company, and to the *full limits* of your position. In other

words, control what you are authorized to control, and mentally operate *as if* you owned and were fully responsible for your department, and by extension, the entire company. And the interesting thing about it is if you display the Ownership Attitude long enough, you will *gain* more authority, privileges, and control. This is because you have demonstrated a higher understanding and awareness of the real world of business. Quality employers are always searching for quality people who show the Ownership Attitude, and **this Ownership mentality is what will make you a "Fire-Proof" business asset!**

Armed with the Ownership Attitude, you will begin to look at the people you work with, as well as customers, quite differently. Part 2 of this series is entitled, ***Displaying Exceptional Customer Service***, and refers to both internal and external customer service.



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