

Expert Tips & Tactics

Dealing with Difficulty

Reality and honesty dictates that we should not expect our businesses to run smoothly all the time. It is essential, therefore, that we have some strategies to help us keep our vision, maintain hope and sustain our efforts when we face the inevitable difficulties. When running a business is tough going, our personal resources can be stretched to their limits and our leadership skills are put to the test. These are the times when the character of a leader is forged.

It is a lot like being a parent. We want the best for our children, we know how we want the child to grow up, but children have wills of their own and things don't always go according to plan.

So how do we deal with the difficulties and stresses of being an entrepreneurial parent?

Let's explore ten strategies that can help you overcome the darker passages in the life of your business. Some of them are self-evident, some are perhaps simplistic, but each of them I believe to be an integral part of maintaining an even keel during stressful times.

So here they are, in no particular order:

1. Be a realist
2. Study mentors
3. Seek counsel
4. Diverge
5. Eat close to nature
6. Exercise
7. Indulge a whim
8. Be patient
9. Reflect on past success
10. Be proactive

Be a realist: I'm all about positive thinking, but pretending to be something you're not might be self-delusion. Like my young son; my business does not always do what I want it to. Sometimes I am anxious about it, sometimes I worry about it. Most of the time there is the strong, quiet undertow of assurance. When my business is not doing what I had hoped or planned for it to do, it is not a time to pretend all is going well. It is a time for being practical and realistic.

When your world isn't going the way you planned, recognize what's going on and make strategies to deal with the situation. Whining and complaining do not get us anywhere, but naïve denial is just as futile. It is important to recognize the realities of where you are and remain bouyant and positive about the eventual outcome.

If you are caught by negative emotions for a time, don't pretend that you are not, but equally don't pollute the lives of those around you. Acknowledge what you are feeling and then focus upon the emotions that will bring you out of your current emotional state. Understand exactly why you feel the negative emotions and begin to see the cause of the emotions as something that you can control....and therefore, change.

Eat close to nature: We all know that we get much better nutritional value from eating a variety of natural, whole, unprocessed foods. The foods we eat do a lot to help fortify our bodies and strengthen our minds. When we are feeling stressed our immune systems are more susceptible and if we consume high value nutrients, we help to bolster the natural immune systems. Unfortunately, we humans in the western societies seem to do the exact opposite when we are stressed and we have a track record for binge-eating junk, taking stimulants, or turning to addictive resources to help us along. It's much easier, however, to reduce your stress if you feel physically healthy and if you are eating and drinking things that keep you mentally alert and positive. So do yourself a favor, listen to your body, feed it well and eat close to nature.

Exercise: Two words: Do it! I know what your thinking..... "Hey, go to the gym three times a week" Do you? Do you *really* sweat, or are you used to the routine? Does your mind get a work

out along with your body, or has your mind also adapted to the same old work-out routine long ago? You see, it's not just a body thing, it's a mind-body thing.

We all know that that exercising helps us to metabolize our foods efficiently, promotes good muscle tone and blood circulation, maintains cardiovascular performance, massages our internal organs and promotes the production of positive endorphins. We all know that we feel better after a good workout because we are awash with hormones that generate feelings of well being.

Combining good eating habits and a daily exercise routine is more than half the battle when we are stressed. I find that some of my most creative ideas for the business or for my writing come after I have a really good workout. The effect is even more pronounced when I am struggling with what seems to be an intractable problem. Putting the problem aside while I work out, makes it seem less daunting afterwards.

Seek Counsel: Solitary brooding tends to be like wading through mud: It can easily turn in on itself and lead us deep into negative thinking if we are not careful. Finding a trusted friend and talking things through can help to lift your spirits because you are sharing your concerns with someone who truly cares. Moreover, other people whom we trust can often provide insights that we might have missed. They almost always provide a new perspective on things if we are just willing to open our hearts and minds to truly listen.

In my business I have a board of advisors with whom I work on an ad-hoc basis. Sometimes the business needs a formal meeting of the advisory board; more frequently, I will seek out one or more of my advisory board who has special gifts in a particular area and seek their counsel. Equally as I grow, and my business grows, my Board of Advisors has changed.

Getting outside of your own mind can be very liberating, especially if you are willing to really listen to what your advisors have to say. All of which, of course, does not mean that you have to take their advice every time, but it does give you the possibility of gaining a fresh perspective...and that is always useful in creating a positive outcome.

Diverge: Take a new approach. If beating your head against a wall is giving you a headache, I would suggest that you might want to stop and try something different. If one approach to your situation does not work, then look for an untried approach.

Again, if you have been practicing this set of strategies as a whole, then you will be getting ideas from the mental vitality you feel from your diet and exercising, you will also be getting ideas from your friends and mentors, as well as ideas from looking at your past successes.

Look at so-called opposites. I have been pleasantly surprised on more than one occasion when the answer I needed was found in doing the exact opposite of what I thought I needed to do. This is a lesson that Judo teaches over and over, control is often created by giving way and yielding, not by resistance. It is more natural for us to resist than to yield, but sometimes yielding can give exactly the result we were looking for.

Study Your Mentors: I learned early on in my business life that there are few overnight sensations. And, as my father once said to me...stars may burn brightly, but they frequently do not burn so long.

Success takes effort and is the reward given to the tenacious, the determined and the willing. In the lives of many of the people whom I have chosen as mentors, are all manner of financial, personal and emotional failures. But this is exactly why I have chosen some of these people as my mentors: They have failed over and over, started anew each time and eventually reached success.

I should tell you that some of my mentors are famous people long since dead, but that doesn't matter; their writings and their lives are inspirational to me. Some of my mentors are people with whom I have regular contact, so I have the added benefit of being able to talk or write to them. Like my trusted friends, my mentors have insights for me and provide clarity and perspective. They remind me that I am not alone on my journey, that others have gone before me and have made the same mistakes, learned similar lessons and are now willing to help me along in my journey.

Be patient: If the lives of mentors teach us anything, it is patience and tenacity. Our business ventures will have times of disappointment, anxiety, and stress as well as times of great joy and success. The art of being an entrepreneur involves learning how to surf the surface of the business ocean. We are not seduced by success, nor are we cast into the pit of despair by perceived failure. During difficult times cultivate patience with yourself and the situation...as with all things, “this too shall pass”. Patience allows us to weather storms and recognize that success takes time. Patience puts things in a “time perspective.”

Reflect upon past success: We have all been successful at something at some point in our lives. When you are feeling as though your business is in troubled waters, look back on those times. Look at the photographs, read the letters of thanks that you have received over the years. Reflecting on past success reminds us of the skills and techniques that we used to achieve success. Some of those skills may be of use again in the current situation. Remember why it is that you have passion for what you do.

Be Proactive: Don’t wait for things to change; take action and look at your plans and options. Re-organize and re-prioritize. You have to be careful here, because you don’t want to take indiscriminate action, you want to make sure that the action that you take is going to lead you in the direction of your ultimate goals. Make sure that you run *toward* something, not *away* from something. This is where patience, the wisdom of experience and your insights will guide you towards the right choices and actions. Talk about your “strategies for recovery” with your advisors and mentors.

If you have been following the other steps, then you will be getting a lot of information and new perspectives on your situation that will help you decide what sort of activity might be best under the circumstances.

Indulge a whim: Oh go on then...do something frivolous. Take some time out for yourself and get some fresh air both figuratively and actually. Read a book, watch a movie or sew a quilt, go rock climbing, white water rafting...something.

Doing something for relaxation and recreation is a powerful motivator. Look at the word for a moment: *re-creation*. What a wonderful word. During times of rest we can literally re-create ourselves. We can re-energize, re-focus and re-commit to finding a solution to our business woes. Doing something out of the normal routine can help to put us back on track.

One of society's problems is that we don't see movies and television as a luxury any more...we take them for granted. Having not watched television for more than twelve years now, I can tell you that it is very liberating and frees up all sorts of time to do other things. Equally, I watch fewer movies than I used to, which means that when I do watch a movie it really is a form of therapy and relaxation. Watching a good movie allows me to unwind, to be entertained and to put my cares aside.

Another thing that has lost a lot of its therapeutic value, is....eating. We combine business with a meal so often that we sometimes forget the wonderful fellowship that can be had when a group of close friends break bread together. Dining with close friends can be a wonderful form of relaxation and renewal.

Who knows, serendipity and synchronicity are such that we might just find our answers in completely unexpected places...if our eyes, ears and hearts are open.

So there you have it...Chris Dewey's recipe for dealing with business stress. I do not claim to have invented any of these, they are all learned skills and strategies. None of these things really stands on its own, I recommend them as a series of interconnected strategies that create synergy. Taken together, they create greater effects than any one of them taken alone. And, if you haven't figured anything else about me from these columns by now, you should have figured out that I am all about creating synergy wherever possible.

Chris Dewey is a university professor and martial arts business owner. He holds black belt ranks in judo, jujitsu, taekwondo and hapkido, and has been training since 1968. Chris can be reached at chris.p.dewey@gmail.com.