

Are You Too Close to Your Business to Be Objective?

By Erin Joy

Sometimes we need a good friend to tell us things about ourselves that we can't see, and that are getting in our way. Like the time my friend Stacy told me I talk too loud. She was right, but I never would have called myself on it. Yet, my enthusiastic volume could have been off-putting to others—a situation that, as a business consultant, I would never intentionally create. Often, we are too close to a situation to assess it objectively. It happens both in our personal lives and in our professional lives.

In my many years of consulting small business owners, I've found that many are simply too close to their organization to comprehensively and objectively evaluate its challenges. As such, we often begin our engagement with a facilitated assessment. I ask questions (including the ones below) and business owners sit down with their yellow legal pads and really think about their answers. The point of the pausing, and the reflection, is to make space to see and hear things you can't see and hear when you're working in your business.

Take a moment right now, or save this article and pull it out some Saturday morning over a cup of coffee, and ask yourself how your organization is really doing. Write down everything that comes to mind as you consider the answers. Remember, there is no right or wrong; there is simply the act of recording your thoughts. Then, invite an honest friend (or friendly business consultant)—like my friend Stacy—over to share a cup of coffee or glass of wine, talk through your answers, and help you decide on your next steps.

Q1: Human Resources - Your people are the lifeblood of your organization. With the right HR philosophy, strategy, and processes in place, there is no limit to what an organization can achieve. Is your HR philosophy well-defined? Do you have a Human Resources strategy? Are your HR processes (ex. hiring, onboarding, training) documented and utilized by everyone in the organization?

Q2: Operations - A well-defined operations strategy - along with the ability to execute - is vital to organizational change, growth, and prosperity. Too often brilliantly outlined strategies take the backseat (where they are eventu-

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ally forgotten about) in favor of more 'pressing' day-to-day issues. Do you have an operations infrastructure that allows you to work on strategic plans vs. putting out fires all day? Does your operations plan open up capacity for you to grow the business, or does the lack of an operations plan stunt your growth?

Q3: Culture - Organizations with well-defined values and goals infused in daily operations will succeed, and those that instill a culture of trust and align strategic decisions with corporate values will outperform competitors. Companies that devote time, energy, and resources to culture management can gain additional market share—just by focusing on this one, incredibly important business function. Are you satisfied with the vibe in your company? Do you have a culture of accountability? Is your company culture what you've created it to be, or has it been created by default?

Q4: Leadership - Leadership is a nebulous concept. A combination of style, ability, confidence, and emotional intelligence, transformative leaders elevate their people and their companies. True leaders authentically attract high performers who consider leadership styles when deciding on employment opportunities. Have you developed multiple leadership styles to use in varying situations and with different personalities within your organization? Is your leadership style a fit for your organization? Have you participated in professional development to advance your leadership prowess?

Q5: Business Trajectory - Business trajectory

is a term used to describe the progression of your organization. Sometimes the trajectory is one of monumental success, sometimes it's one of steady, incremental success, and sometimes, sadly, it's one of catastrophe. Is your business on track to reach its 1-5 year goals? Are you on track to reach your personal goals? Are you taking the action you need to take to intervene before it's too late?

Taking the time to think about these key business areas will help you to refocus, better prioritize, and re-engage with your organizational strategy. Want some more specific feedback? Visit <http://goo.gl/SmJ174> to take a comprehensive survey assessing organizational health, and receive a free, customized report.

To learn more about the author, Erin Joy, and the upcoming Midwest Women Business Owners' Conference, go to: midwestwboconference.com.

Interested in purchasing tickets? Visit: mwboconference.com.