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JIM NATICHIONI, PATH GUIDE



I am Jim Natichioni of RightLivelihood.com and I have written the inspirational book: **Finding Your Path, Tales of Right Livelihood**. This excerpt is from Chapter Nine: “Lessons in Attracting Clients” and relates to knowing when you are and are not on the right path. To read more please visit RightLivelihood.com.

Finding your path and right livelihood: You know you are on the wrong path when you don’t want your business or your job to grow. A business will stagnate without sales, as a result those who have the ability to sell are always in demand. Being considerate in the way you ask people for business and providing good customer service is part of right livelihood. Your attitude and ability will attract customers to your level, so follow a path that attracts mutually beneficial relations. Finding your path, finding customers, operating a business with the principals of right livelihood, doing what it takes to enjoy long-term success is a cycle in which each step must be completed and none left out. Always prepare the path ahead and when the road gets rough be prepared to handle rejection and hardship with your strength and flexibility.

The willingness to manage your database:

The book Your Money or Your Life establishes the premise that one should choose the vocation that makes him or her the most money, allowing precious time for fulfillment through their favorite avocations and hobbies. We all have to make a choice as to how we spend our time and how we earn our income. The decision about our lifework should include sustenance and happiness otherwise we will have failed. Although I yearned to do something natural and significant, I settled for painting because that was the skill I thought would pay me the most at the time and allow me to pursue my bliss during my free time. Also, I possessed a unique set of skills. No one could duplicate my brush strokes or sell exactly as I did. I placed my uniqueness on display, as I do here, and capitalized on my advantage. But because I was not using my skills, body, and heart to their highest and best use, my business began to stagnate and perish, only to surface again and again over the course of my lifetime.

Unwillingness to ‘sell’ your business leads to stagnation:

I suspected that I could make more profit by expanding: placing signs in yards and on my vehicles; knocking on doors in communities I worked; advertising, sending flyers and mailing thank you/prospecting letters to past customers; meeting general contractors, etc. But I did not like that part of the business, and preferred not to make these efforts. My business generated profit, but whether my aversion to toxic paint, ambition or marketing caused my ambivalence, I never wanted it to grow. This ambivalence permitted the business to become stagnant. I have heard that the Chinese language doesn’t even have a word for stagnation.

In any business there is a critical tipping point where you either grow or decline. A successful business follows a natural sequence of steps from the planning stages to the starting phase and the various growing cycles. To link the stages you need transitions. Andrea, my editor from Davidson College used this analogy: think of your book as a bridge made of toothpicks that have to hold a brick. If there's one weak place; you will lose a reader. If I can't take you from toothpicks to skiing to solving your career challenge in the next paragraph I run the risk of losing you. In a career if there is one weak link you may lose your continuity and momentum.

In my career and in many peoples the missing link is passion. Transitions will not be a problem if you love what you do, and let the *work* provide the momentum. I did not love what I did. The best and only ski instructor I ever had was a Frenchman named Pepi who taught at Stowe Mountain, in Vermont. After watching me bump and grind my way through the icy snow instead of carving crisp turns, he gave me one bit of advice only, "Let the *slope* of the hill provide the momentum. Do not fear it or fight it; *work* with it." All I had to do was relax and supply a little technique. Compare this to my business experience. At first, I had built momentum out of sheer enthusiasm; once I moved into the next stage and the reality of prospecting and nasty work set in my momentum lost ground in proportion to my waning desire.

You may like the business but not the (essential) sales or marketing end of it. Without a boss, what would it take for you to do something that lies outside of your comfort zone, and then do it over and over again? *This is where you will find the proverbial weak link, where the entrepreneur faces reality while disconnecting from the process that leads to success.*

To the 'old pro' an end is always in sight, the means remain clear, and all is well or 'in process'. To the amateur entrepreneur, life remains an unsolved mystery. Because the amateur tolerates his or her chosen field, they feel willing to make the sale and/or perform the service. But as I have said, there stands a good chance the amateur has difficulty mustering up enough fortitude to string together a week's worth of prospecting calls, let alone make a life-long habit of it. They like having the clients but hate going out and getting them. My technical term for this is the 'Reluctant Salesman Syndrome'.

Everyone is in sales. In "Salesman in Beijing" Arthur Miller says that "we must all sell ourselves, convince the world of a persona that perhaps we only wished we possessed." Whether that involves selling to: an internal or external client; a potential employer, a vendor, or prospect, or your own child, you have to learn how to make a sale. Competition for that sale comes with the territory. To gain the upper hand over the competition salespeople gain by degrees; pursuing degrees, certifications, industry designations, or continuing education credits. In perhaps the finest American play ever written three decades of sales tricks added up to the emptiest kind of life imaginable.

Arthur Miller wrote about the age that saw the death of the old school huckster who knew how to delight the customer, in a classic play/movie called "The Death of a Salesman." After three decades of working for the same employer the aging salesman called Willy finds himself without money, respect and ultimately without dignity. His failure is an indictment of the American capitalists dream. The embodiment of the faceless employee peddling the nameless product Willy hits rock bottom despite his drive to succeed and apparent mastery of all of the requisite sales tricks and tools. The movie

version reminded me of the many selling tactics I was taught to apply, like Willy to little or no avail.

I have had plenty sales-trainings in my day. Sadly, none of that training has worked very well. After all, what trainers of this kind sell is motivation, and if you cannot motivate yourself, then no one else can either. In the following snippets I explore the light side of sales seminars, trainings, and on-the-job sessions I have attended and/or experienced over the course of several decades.

Amateurs who have some romantic notion of entrepreneurship keep trying their own personally devised strategies, without rhyme or reason, instead of proven successful systems and models. Creativity and originality is behind everything successful entrepreneurs do but that doesn't mean they do not learn new strategies from the experts, learn through their mistakes, and implement these lessons into their sales process. Only what *you* make of a system counts. Whatever process or system you adopt it all must start at the beginning and the beginning is always your database and how you feed it and work it. Gary Keller of Keller Williams Realty taught me that.