

Act like a stamp

by Robert M. Gignac

Does the name Orison Swett Marden ring a bell? Perhaps not, as he passed away in 1924. Fortunately, he left behind an impressive legacy of writing, close to 60 published works, and is perhaps best known as the founder of *Success* magazine. He spent his entire career writing about success and encouraging others to attain it at a time when entrepreneurship was in its infancy compared to the environment in which we pursue our businesses today.

So why bring up the writings of someone who has been gone for close to 80 years? Marden concluded that success was a two-part solution. The first part he referred to as “get-to-it-iveness.” The second he called “stick-to-it-iveness.”

Every small business that has ever been started required an act of faith and courage, someone taking a leap into the unknown. It has been estimated that only one in ten people who want to start their own business actually develop the courage to begin it. For those willing to make the effort, the failure rate is estimated to exceed 70% - showing that still fewer have enough “stick-to-it-iveness” to continue.

Get-to-it-iveness is the easy part of the equation. As entrepreneurs, we have no shortage of ideas and inspiration to help run our business. In fact, most of us have so many ideas that we sometimes have trouble deciding which ones to pursue, how they should be prioritized, and most importantly—which ones make good business sense. So I’m going to set this discussion aside. After all, if you are reading this magazine, you’re either in business or thinking about it.

Stick-to-it-iveness is where the rubber

meets the road. Handling the “We’d like to do business with you, but...”, “We just don’t see a need for...”, “I don’t see the value in...”, feel free to substitute any rejection line you’ve experienced here. Our first rejection doesn’t doom us to failure, but fear of failure, more than anything else, can certainly hold us back. It paralyzes our action. And it makes future failure almost inevitable.

So what does all this have to do with acting like a stamp? Think about stamps for a moment—what is the most important thing that they do? I can hear you thinking, “Well Robert, stamps facilitate the movement of a letter or package from Point A to Point B.” Sure, no argument here. But what is the most important thing they do? I agree that they facilitate the movement, but I feel the most important thing they do is that they stick to the package or envelope until it gets to the destination intended. I believe that is the true value of a stamp. Now I can hear you thinking, “So what?”

Ok, so the stamp doesn’t stick to the package. What then? Should our stamp fall off the package at any point during the journey, what happens to it? It might get dumped into the “undeliverable” bin. After all, the postal service doesn’t think much of delivering packages with no postage. It might be sent back to us with a request to add another stamp and try again. It might be delivered to the destination, but with a “postage due” notice for the recipient to cover the cost. Sometimes our stamp sticks just fine, but we don’t have the right amount of postage on the package. These generally are returned to us with a polite

request for more.

Again I can hear you thinking, “So what?”

Think about the term “stick-to-it-iveness,” because this is where it becomes important. Stick-to-it-iveness is about not giving up. It’s about having made the effort and taken the time on our best proposal or idea, and having it sent back to us as “undeliverable.” If we are informed of “insufficient postage,” we make the effort to add more content, change the focus, provide more relevant data, or perhaps start over from scratch before we resend the proposal.

In all cases, we must avoid the “postage due” to the recipient when the package arrives. Why? Clients get upset (and rightfully so...) when they are asked to pay for things they expected to get as part of the package (no pun intended!). We shouldn’t be selling skills and talents we don’t already have before we are hired. Clients neither expect nor want to be paying our “tuition” while we develop the expertise on-the-job for them.

Stick-to-it-iveness is a characteristic that we all must acquire in order to make our businesses a success. It will keep us going on the days when things don’t go as planned, or when we aren’t sure if our own business was such a good idea. You can call it perseverance, dedication, focus, commitment, endurance, stubbornness, persistence or any other term you like - but I like the term “stick-to-it-iveness.”

When you make your next trip to the mailbox, take a second look at the stamps that are taking your mail out, and those that brought your new mail in. Resolve to be just like them—stick to it until the job is done. SBCM

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