

STICKY IS GOOD

BY ROBERT M. GIGNAC

“Success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by the opposition you have encountered, and the courage with which you have maintained the struggle against overwhelming odds.”—Orison Swett Marden

I hadn't thought about this particular quote in a long time and might not have at all had it not been for a unique set of circumstances two weeks ago. I was celebrating my birthday in a pub in London, England with my wife and parents and after dinner, we decided to order “pudding”—the Brit word for dessert. Fortunately for Mom, “sticky toffee pudding” was on the menu. Watching her eat (yes, I had my own) I asked her what she thought and she replied: “Sticky is good”.

I know you are thinking two things: 1) What's my point? 2) How does this relate to the quote? I'll deal with the second one first. Orison Marden is credited with many things, and I believe one of the most significant is the word: “stick-to-it-iveness”.

As business professionals we have no shortage of ideas and inspiration to help us 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'll 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...”, “We don't see the value in...”, feel free to substitute any rejection line you've experienced here. A single rejection doesn't doom us to failure, but fear of failure and repeated rejection can certainly hold us back. It paralyzes action. It makes future failure almost inevitable.

How does “sticky” apply to our businesses? 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.” No argument there. But what is the most important thing they do? The most important thing they do is stick to the package or envelope until it gets to the intended destination. 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 could get dumped into the “undeliverable” bin, after all the postal service doesn't

think much of delivering packages without postage. It could be returned 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. 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 getting our well-crafted proposal sent back to us as “undeliverable” and making the effort and taking the time to make it deliverable. 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 resubmit.

In all cases we must avoid the “postage due” to the recipient when the package arrives. Why? Clients get upset (rightfully so) when they are asked to pay for things they expected to get as part of the package. This is what happens when we sell skills and talents we don't already have before we get hired to execute for a client. 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 must possess in order to make our business a success. It is the mark of a professional in any organization. It will keep us going on the days when things don't go as planned and it is what kicks us out of bed in the morning on days when another two taps of the snooze alarm seems like a great idea. You can call it perseverance, dedication, focus, commitment, endurance, stubbornness, persistence, or any other term you like—but I like Orison's concept of “stick-to-it-iveness”.

Now I'll deal with the earlier question of “What's my point?” Recent interactions with business professionals across North America and Europe have revealed a great amount of pessimism and concern. In the midst of all of this we are all focused on continuing to generate new business, over-service our existing clients and in search of the next big idea. At that point where you are just about ready to give up, take a moment to think about stamps, Orison's quote and my Mom's dessert “sticky is good”. Stay sticky and persevere. **E**

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