

Zen and the Art of Restoration

My understanding of Zen tells me that the meaning of life is that life, just is. A Zen master might tell you that there is nothing more important than being fully engaged in the present. I am not a practitioner of this Eastern meditation but have a passing understanding of Zen and have become aware that with a modicum of understanding of Zen you can transform your business. I make this statement in more of a practical than contemplative manner. My lack of understanding requires that I take a matter of fact approach to the discipline of Zen. My basic understanding of Zen is from *The Book of Five Rings*. This is a book that was written in 1643 AD by Miyamoto Musashi. The book is a discussion of martial arts and a guide to confrontation. I found many of the lessons taught to have a nebulous relationship to the business world but in the preface there was a discussion of how the Samurai Warriors practiced Zen. One of the disciplines from the warriors was to stand at a canvas and paint. These paintings were the result of disciplined repetition and practice. This discipline would lead to a state where the Warrior would stand at the canvas and paint a detailed picture without thought. The hand would move and a picture would be created. The concepts from this understanding of Zen can be used to create exceptional performance in your business.

The Zen of restoration requires you to fully live in the moment in your business. This will help you create the success that you desire. There are several salient points to this concept. If you and your staff are fully engaged in the present then you will create cheerleader customers, profitable jobs and in turn a profitable company. I read an article over ten years ago in the *United Airlines Hemispheres* magazine that made a similar point about success in the future of business that is relevant to this topic. The article was an interview with a group of Japanese businessmen and a group of American businessmen. They were discussing the keys to success in the next millennium. The American responded first: they all agreed that they would need to provide exceptional service and that would be the key to their success. As I was reading the article I was impressed that the American businessmen finally understood the importance of meeting and exceeding the customer's expectations. I was then humbled as I read the Japanese response. They stated that great customer service was so important that it was merely an invitation to compete. They felt that great customer service was ubiquitous and that they needed to provide exceptional service every day simply to stay in business. They went on to say that the key to their success was to be able to adapt to a changing environment on a moment's notice. They realized that the rate of change in business was accelerating and that the fundamentals of their business would have to be ingrained in their culture.

The *Hemispheres* article and Zen have a practical application to your business. As a small business owner you need to understand the changing landscape and be aware of the fundamental requirements of your business as well as the changing landscape of restoration and small business in general. I recommend that you take a step back from daily operations and understand the basic requirements of your business. I believe these requirements today are service, communication, efficiency, speed and quality. You may decide the core business requirements are different for your business or your marketplace. The purpose of this article is not to define the essential elements required in

your business – only that you understand what is needed in your company. The lesson of this article is to analyze your business and then define the items that are required to compete.

Once you have identified the core elements of your service then it is up to you to practice the Zen of restoration. If there are core items that are important to your company then you need to put in place the training, systems and procedures that assure these items become second nature. You need to start with your orientation process and continue to your senior staff and make sure that these core business requirements happen every day, all the time, without thought.

For example, if great customer service is a fundamental requirement for your business, then you need to assure that your systems, procedures and training facilitate this happening all the time. When you do this then you do not need to focus or manage your service delivery because you know that it is happening everyday all the time. When you do not need to focus on the basics of service then you can spend your critical time on the next level of business activities. This is similar to the Shogun Warrior that stands at the canvas and creates a beautiful picture without thought. The key to achieving this level of performance is consistent and disciplined practice.

Another element of Zen that will improve your business is the awareness of the importance of NOW. As business leaders we always hear the importance of planning for the future and we all have the tendency to relive the past successes and more often failures. While planning and assessing past business situations are important, the only part of your business that you truly can impact is the present. Planning the future is important but the manifestation of your plans comes from execution. Execution is the daily application of activities that will allow you to achieve your goals in the future. When you are fully engaged in the present, you are majoring in major activities. True awareness of your time will require that you are accountable for your daily activities.

The restoration owners and managers that I work with are all very busy. One of the things that we work to accomplish through our consulting service is to help managers focus on high impact, high priority activities. In order to do that you have to have a solid plan but then as you proceed through your day you need to make many decisions regarding your involvement in certain activities. My friend Warner Cruz, President of JC Restoration just received the runner up award for the best small business in the United States. This is quite the honor to be selected as one of the best from the millions of small businesses that operate in the country. After returning from the ceremony at the White House he gained the realization that he was putting himself in the middle of too many small decisions in his company. He realized that he had a great business full of great people that were able to make wise decisions. This awareness does not need to come from national recognition, rather it can come from being fully engaged in the present and being accountable for your time. The Zen of restoration dictates that you are aware of the limits of your time and that you should be accountable for every minute that you spend on work activities.

You do not need to practice Zen to understand the concepts discussed in this article. There are several important things that you should understand that will help your business. The first is that you need to define the required business practices that your employees and clients expect and then work to make these all second nature to your business. The next thing you need to do is create a solid plan for your company. It is appropriate to visit your plan routinely to make adjustments. In order to be successful with your plan then you need to focus every day on the important activities that will help you execute this plan. This focus will come from being accountable for your time and activities on a daily basis. When you are able to master these items then you might be considered a Restoration Zen Master.

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