

5 Crucial Lessons the Marines taught me about Business

Someone asked me the other day to help him with his thesis for graduate school. His question was centered on what I learned in the Marine Corps that has helped me in my business life.

What a great question! When I reflect on it, the Marines teach amazing business skills:

1. Even when the challenges seem insurmountable; if you have the right motivation, you will find a way to overcome whatever you are facing. Anyone who has experienced a USMC Drill Instructor in his ear when you're tired and think you cannot go on, knows that you CAN find a way to go on with the right motivation. It is the same for your business. If you find yourself not doing enough to grow your business, it is usually because you have not given yourself the right motivation in terms of a goal. It does not HAVE to be money. In fact, if you've written down a dollar figure time and time again; but STILL find yourself not doing enough, then it is probably time to re-examine your goals.

2. A good leader knows how to help people do what they sometimes do not want to do, by helping them see the bigger goal. Contrary to what some people say, Marines do not all have a "death wish." In reality, they do understand how important their roles are in achieving victory. This is essential whether you are leading people into battle; or leading a team in the corporate world. As a consultant and coach, I see business owners constantly complaining about how their team is "lazy" or "unmotivated." However, usually this is because the team does not understand the vision for the company as well as how each team member's tasks contribute to achievement of that vision. Or, it is because you have hired the wrong person. It is YOUR ROLE as the leaders hire the right people, and then helps them make that connection.

3. Chaos and lack of success are YOUR fault; because you should have had a clear plan and done the scenario analysis in advance. Great battles may look like chaos from the outside, and almost never go perfectly according to plan. However, they are usually won or lost by the strength of the strategy, clearly defined goals and leadership set in place beforehand. We had a simple saying we called the 6 "P's: Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance (yes that is 5, because the 6th was censored 😊)

4. Don't wait for the "other guy" to do it; be willing to be first. The Marines have a saying: "First to Fight." As the first ones in, the Marines believe that their training, preparation, and leadership will allow them to overcome the uncertainty factor of not knowing EXACTLY what might happen. In business, the roadside is littered with people who had big dreams; but did not have the confidence to move forward without perfect certainty. To be clear: if you feel this fear, it actually may be well-founded if you have not taken the steps to train and prepare. So, perhaps you do not hire people because you are afraid of the challenges of managing them. Or, you do not invest in marketing because you do not understand how to write good copy, test, and measure results to maximize Return on Investment. But, all of this can be learned.

5. Finally, know your information, your history and the lessons they hold. On the first day of Marine Corps boot camp, we got a book we called our "Knowledge." It contained rules, regulations, and a lot of history about great battles and leaders. Were they expecting us to learn

the ENTIRE contents? Actually...yes. I am NOT saying that you should do everything like it has been done in the past. I AM saying that, unless you understand history and the “rules of engagement,” you will tend to make far more mistakes. MANY businesses fail because the owner has bought into the myth that the best teacher is the “school of hard knocks.” Yes, that is the MOST EXPENSIVE school, but it is not the best. If you want to grow a big business that makes money and does not require you to work 16 hours/day; then learn from someone who has been there and knows what it takes to help grow a big business (Yes, that IS me 😊).

By Roger Boneno