

Why You May Be Running Your Business like Captain Ahab

I love classical literature. Not only is it well-written; but it also can give us great insights into our own lives.

Take Captain Ahab, from Herman Melville's classic novel *Moby Dick*.

He is absolutely what many people would call a “tragic figure.” That said, many business owners are incredibly similar to Captain Ahab in the way they run their businesses. Melville says that Ahab is a “Monomaniac”: someone obsessed by something to the point of (or past) insanity; but whose insanity is confined to that one area. A lot of business owners run their businesses the same way. They are very smart people; but keep chasing the wrong thing in the wrong way.

Before you dismiss this thought, consider which of these are true of you:

1. Have you ever caught yourself thinking about how hard you have worked and are still working; and feel puzzled by the fact that you have not achieved the dreams you had set for yourself? Like Ahab early on with his whaling business, is this because you have just been doing an activity, but have not had a specific, crystal clear understanding of what you REALLY want?

2. Is the business you are “chasing” REALLY good for you, or even what will make you happy? In the book, Captain Ahab gets chomped by Moby Dick; and then becomes obsessed with chasing his newfound nemesis. Similarly, I see business owners who have a two-step decision-making process for deciding what they want to do:

Step 1: They want to “control their own destiny” by not working for someone else;

Step 2: They start a business based on what they have done at their “jobs” and/or what they see other people doing to make a lot of money; instead of truly doing what they love to do.

Sadly, they never define **specific** goals and objectives (for either their business OR their personal lives), align those goals with their true passions, then define the most efficient way to get there. Keep following this in the next point....

3. Has your current business “bitten” you, and you have gotten “perseverance” confused with “obsession”? Do you have a business that does not pay you, causes you stress, and eats up your time; but you believe that it will just take “perseverance” to succeed? Unfortunately, you cross over into “obsession” when you keep using methods that are not working for you. Doing the same thing again and again, and expecting better results is not perseverance, it is insanity. To mix metaphors a little; Thomas Edison persevered, but he was also smart enough to TEST, MEASURE, and try DIFFERENT tactics.

So, you have the same marketing message that has not worked; and you just put it in more places. Or, you are not getting any leads from your networking; but you just attend more events.

None of your “Strategic Partners” are giving you referrals; yet, you have more coffees and lunches.

For those of you who have never read the book *Moby Dick* (or it has been a long time); Captain Ahab dies by the very tactic he is using to kill Moby Dick. Ahab throws his harpoon at the whale, but the rope catches Ahab’s neck and pulls him into the water to strangle and drown. If you are running a business that is not paying you, takes up all your time, and creates enormous levels of stress; then your business is that same rope. You are throwing it at “freedom,” but all it is doing is strangling your happiness.

This weekend, sit down (preferably with a spouse, partner, or trusted friend) and ask yourself honestly if you are Ahab.
