



## GROW YOUR BUSINESS

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## What Makes Your Business A Great Place To Work?

As with every other aspect of small business management, let's go right ahead of throw the notion of perfection out the window. Being a perfect place to work? Not going to happen!

But building a great team and keeping them motivated, fulfilled, productive and satisfied is a lofty, but reachable goal. The ideal situation is to manage at a 2:1 ratio- two engaged employees for every one who is disengaged.

Strive to make as many people happy as you can, recognizing that you will not make 100% of your employees happy 100% of the time.

That being said, being respected as a great place to work boosts morale, increases productivity and highlights your strengths as a leader to those outside of the company, be it clients, vendors or competitors.

Perfection aside, there are some things that well-liked businesses have in common when it comes to keeping employees satisfied:

1. Treat people like grown-ups, with respect and always fairly.
2. Take an active interest developing and improving upon employees' career goals.
3. Recognize employees have a life outside of work and maintain boundaries.
4. Promote humor and fun in the workplace.
5. Clearly define goals and how each employee's role works towards achieving those goals. Personalize their involvement in the overall company.

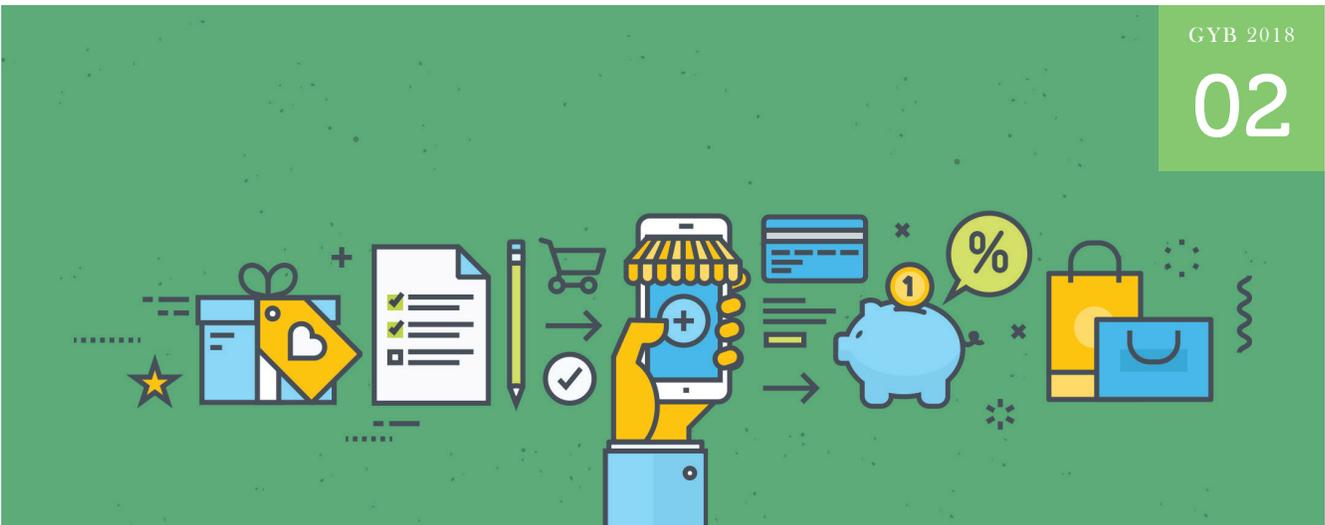
Recognize how you as a leader have a direct impact on the workplace. Being a curious, active, well-respected leader

engages employees and inspires them- two things that will cultivate a good working environment.

Your attitude affects everyone- curb annoyance and frustration when not in private, and strive to be a more connected and invested leader to each individual whenever necessary.

A rock solid HR team is another trait that the 'great places to work' all display. Employees must feel like they have back up, someone in their corner when it comes to those difficult situations.

Other experts recommend using recognition to reward positive performance and valuing ideas over status. These strategies develop a workplace that challenges and inspires employees to be the best versions of them, which in turn, inspires and motivates others.



## Building a Customer Journey Map

Starting with, of course, what the heck is a customer journey map? Consider it the bare-bones framework for tracking the best methods of creating true customer satisfaction. It should provide an internal birds-eye view of the customer's perspective throughout their journey with your business, hence the name.

A good customer journey map will provide real client data, behaviors and tendencies at different stages, points of potential interaction, and opportunities for cross-team resourcing. It will ultimately highlight what motivates your clients to stick with you in the long run.

The benefits of a customer journey map as opposed to traditional marketing approaches is that it is non-linear, allowing you to move within the framework and study varying interactions at different stages. Also, it is based on research and may assist in predicting gaps in the market and inspire new products or services based on customers' needs.

When it comes time to build your map, consider the following tips:

1. Identify as clearly as possible, who your customer is. Whose journey are you mapping? A research-based persona that represents your market niches is necessary to move forward. Consider this your mapping avatar.
2. Map out customer stages, or touch points. These are the interactions your client is having with your business along the way. Physically sketching them out is recommended. Common stages may be discovery, research, explore, choose, purchase.
3. At each stage consider the customers': actions, motivations, questions and obstacles.
4. Identify the goals of the customer, at each individual stage. Each stage should have several goals. Add these in to the diagram/sketch.
5. Build a timeframe around each touch point and stage, how long should it take to achieve the goals set forth?
6. Fill in the gaps at each stage, listing which team members/departments are responsible for assisting in the achievement of the goals. This will give you a good idea of which areas of your business need improvement and where there may be holes.
7. Remember that real information is the key here- this map must be based on actual customer research in order to be productive. Don't skimp on the research phase.

The design of your map should reflect your business and should incorporate industry-specific and company-centric verbiage. Once complete, the journey map must be shared company-wide for maximum benefit.

Your finished product should aim to assist you in understanding your customer relationship life cycle. Actions that improve overall customer satisfaction, drive up ROI and encourage long-term relationships.



## Many hands make light work: The value of mentoring

Entrepreneur's possess a seemingly infinite to-do list; constantly checking things off and adding more to the agenda. In the pursuit of operational perfection, self-development and improvement are often overlooked.

Choosing a mentor is the best way to ensure that you as a business owner continue to grow, learn and progress along with your company.

Begin by accepting the fact that you, in fact, do not know everything. Play up on your strengths and identify your weaknesses, selecting a mentor who compliments those limitations.

Not sure how to find a mentor?

If you don't have someone in mind, join up with professional or industry groups, attend seminars, and get involved in your community. This is the easiest way to be surrounded with other like-minded entrepreneurs who

are generally willing to act as a teacher to other self-starters.

Start by shadowing your selected mentor to get an idea of the day-to-day responsibilities. This is the time to ask questions and take notes, however, be mindful of the fact that they are running a business and generously allowing you to gain valuable experience through their eyes.

As you start up, advice will begin flowing from unexpected outlets- family members, friends, colleagues- everyone will have something to say. A mentor is a great way to help sift through the pile of suggestions, as they have the "been there, done that".

Business mentors are there to answer questions and provide perspective, but like any other type of coach, they are also there to boost confidence and provide support and encouragement.

Be sure to choose someone who you respect, with similar values and who you feel comfortable with. Go with your gut instinct on this one, and select a mentor who will challenge you to always strive for more.

Additionally, being able to challenge your mentor is how you encourage collaborative learning, allowing your mentor to also gain something from your interactions. If your mentor intimidates you, you will not enjoy the fruits that this symbiotic relationship aims to provide.

Remember that securing a mentor is much like any other acquisition- you must consider the return on investment. The relationship must be constant, the impacts tangible and the developments obvious.



## Filling the Gaps - Revisit Your Business Planning

We know it is true—a good business plan is built with sustainable flexibility. Companies that adhere to their inherent flexibilities are the ones that sustain in the long run.

That being said, flexibility is not the only foundation on which a business plan should be laid. A business plan should never be viewed as a task to be checked off the to-do list. It is an ongoing, creative process that requires constant nurturing, adjusting and general attention.

Revisiting your business plan at least annually will allow you to make the necessary adjustments and to always remain true to your vision.

There are generally four key areas to examine when filling the gaps:

1. **Services/Product:** Take note of customer feedback here and remember to touch base with long-term and new clients to inquire as to your performance.

This is a weeding-out process, what stays, what goes?

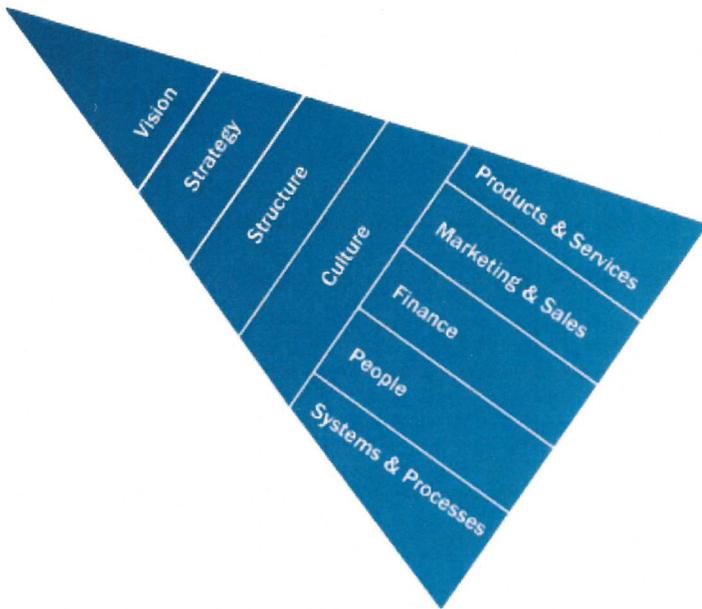
2. **Industry/Competition:** Reviewing the changes made in your industry and assessing the strengths and weakness of your competitors can help you bolster your plan of attack. Work on building up your unique assets and incorporate differentiators into your plan.
3. **Marketing/Sales:** This is an area that should be under constant scrutiny. If something is not turning working, make a change. Don't spend the money unless you can prove the result. Consider bringing in an expert to weigh in on your current methods and help to craft new and creative methods.
4. **Finances:** Take a long hard look at the actual numbers. Are you reaching goals? Where can cut the proverbial corners?

Once you have evaluated these areas, there should be obvious changes to the plan.

As you tackle each section follow these guidelines:

1. **Focus.** Narrow the scope, zoom in and then look at the bigger picture.
2. **Observe.** Take in your surroundings and apply accordingly.
3. **Resolve.** If it is not broken, don't fix it. Stick to putting energy into creating solutions.
4. **Compute.** Break out the calculator folks, this is all about equations.

Many experts comment on the importance of creating a “living document” when it comes to your business plan— one that never remains stagnant and is always evolving. This is how you as the business owner remain accountable and derive direction.



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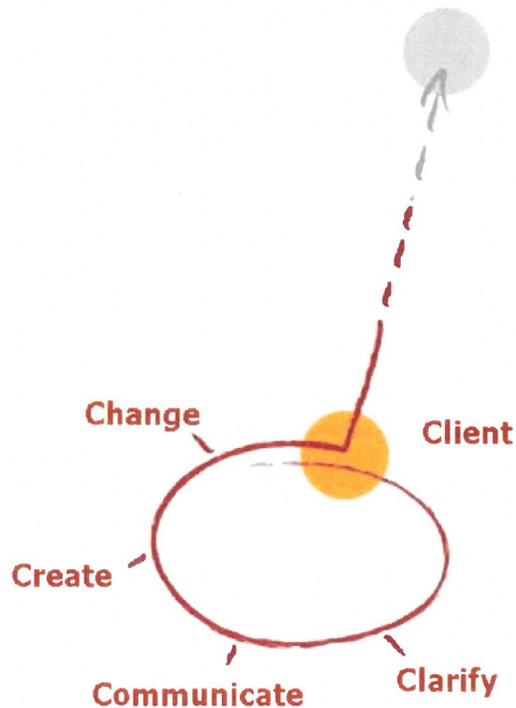
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