

Avoiding burnout

HOW TO FIND BALANCE IN RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS

BY MARK SCOTT

Rick Jones had put his heart and soul into Bluware Inc. Then suddenly it looked like he was about to lose everything he had worked so hard to build.

"Having doctors say, 'If you don't do something, you're probably not going to be around for much longer,' that will open one's eyes," says the company's founder, president and CEO. "I was in this Superman drama of doing it all and doing it all now."

The cold slap in the face delivered by his doctor taught him he needed to find another way. His IT consultancy business — and his life — depended on it.

"It's not better for me to do it all, and it doesn't all have to be done now," Jones says. "You need to schedule and pace. It's more of a long-distance race and not a sprint."

Jones turned his life around, and 20 years after launching his business, he is achieving success. Bluware hit \$7.6 million in 2007 revenue, and Jones anticipates 2008 revenue approaching \$10 million.

Smart Business spoke with the head of the 55-employee firm about how to share the burden of responsibility in your business.

Q. How can a leader's behavior affect the behavior of employees?

Back when I was doing most of the jobs, I was in the office from 7:30 a.m. to 8 at night. A lot of the employees were, too. I think they felt like they had to be because I was. There was a lot of burnout, and we had significant turnover.

People loved what they were doing, but it got to them after awhile. People really want to be part of a team, and they want to win. They want to be seen as part of the top echelon and will work hard to get there and stay there. They'll even burn themselves out to do it. That's not healthy.

Q. How do you support a healthy work environment?

The hard thing to recognize is that I'm not the best person for everything. Life has gotten better as I've turned things over to people.

The key for me was to assess my strengths and weaknesses. Where I'm strong, keep those jobs. Where I'm weak, hire.

I look at the places where I have stress. If I believe others in other companies are doing a better job than I'm personally doing in this particular role, then I need someone else to do it.

When I turn an aspect of the business over to someone who is talented and capable, and then I look at it a month later and it's doing better than it was when I was handling it, that only tells me I need more of this.

Q. How does this attitude help your business?

How can the Astros go and play 162 games in a season or any sports team? You're going to win some, and then you're going to get up and do it again. You're not going to win them all.

Let's not stress about that.

Let's win enough to meet our goals and not harm ourselves physically in the process. Life is there to be lived. I did, in our early years, let the business take over my life, and I was no happier for it.

I do use our metrics to show people where we are, what their progress is and what the next step up would be.

Q. How do you get your employees on board with you?

People love to hear stories. They want to hear that there has been considerable think-

I'm almost egoless in the process. In other words, I'm happy when they say, 'This isn't going to work,' because I'm happy to let it go. It's cheaper to do it at the discussion stage than any other time.

I like giving people ownership of their area, and I do not micromanage. It's really important that I set the business up so that when someone wins, no one loses. I'm strong at giving positive feedback, even on small things. Let people be responsible for their own results.

I've had people that I've worked with before. The moment they saw success was imminent, they would step in and take credit for it. I choose not to do that.

Give credit to whoever created the win. Don't steal someone else's credit. Make sure as many people as possible know about their successes. People like recognition.

Q. What's one characteristic you should avoid when hiring new team members?

Recognize when someone believes they are a victim. A victim drama manifests itself in many ways, and they are almost all bad for business. The way people say things and the things that they say.

If I'm interviewing a candidate and all they can talk about is how poorly they were treated at the place they were before, they are in a victim drama. Stay away from those people. They take their drama wherever they go. <<

— Megan Tackett contributed to this story



“ Give credit to whoever created the win. ”

ing behind the new idea that's being presented.

If they believe in it, they are on board. If they don't believe in it, they have to come up with a reason why not.

HOW TO REACH: Bluware Inc., (713) 335-1500 or www.bluware.com