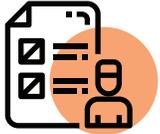

On, not In

For the last several weeks, I have had the privilege to dialog with and study various entrepreneurs from all over the country.

The spirit and optimism of these amazing people, who have endured and survived one of the most historically challenging twelve-month windows small businesses have ever faced, was truly inspirational. When reflecting on all these conversations, I have noticed some very consistent and distinct differences between those that just survived and those that thrived and were in the upper echelon of performance.

Hire Well and Fail Fast: Almost without exception, those entrepreneurs that made the best hires early on performed the best. They understood that as the owner, their job was to work on the business and not in the business. Sure, they had to understand all of the details but they knew that to maintain the larger vision and work that vision, they would need to make excellent hiring choices with people who would be trustworthy, reliable, enthusiastic, and proactive. Those people became key leaders who in turn made additional quality hires, solidifying a winning culture with a unified goal. Those who wanted to work “in” the business struggled to release control, cycled through manager after manager, and ultimately lacked results. There were a couple who had made early personnel missteps but recognized this and as one particular entrepreneurial hero of mine said, “Mike, if you’re going to fail, make it spectacular and quick, learn all that you can from it, and get better.” When I look around commercial real estate right now, I see too much working “in” the business and not nearly enough of people stepping back and getting real about the change underway. It’s real, it won’t be all or nothing, and it will require some great people who can lead, fail fast and get better even faster.





Working Smarter, Not Harder: No one I talked to fell into the category of “lazy,” but there was an interesting correlation between hours worked and performance. Those that were achieving the most success had whittled their business down to a handful of key performance indicators and had their team dialed into those. There were implied and supporting tasks that fed into those, but this approach allowed their teams to all be aligned and afforded the owner far more time to be strategically and thoughtfully contemplating their next move for growth. On the flip side, those I talked to who were working “in” the business were frazzled and basically firefighting to keep their head above water. In several cases, growth originally built into their business plans had been abandoned simply because they were overwhelmed. Their inability to isolate and focus on key drivers of their success paralyzed them. There is no lack of hustle right now in commercial office, but I wonder if many people who are frazzled and wheel spinning just need to step back, regroup and take more decisive steps in the direction that companies of all sizes are signaling that they want to go in.



Compelling Sales Pitch backed up by a Compelling Experience Wins:

Again, those entrepreneurs I spoke with who excelled, had dialed in their sales process to something so compelling and natural, and the delivery of the actual service was consistent with that promise, that the economic performance followed. Where the sales process floundered, poor performance was not far behind. One sales executive equated it to soccer with frontend salespeople being goal scorers and the operations team being the defenders and protecting the business they have secured through outstanding service delivery. I have beaten this drum quite a bit, but the sales pitch for the “office” stinks right now, it is not cohesive, and is being made in some cases by those who have not ventured back to the office themselves. I am terrible at selling what I would not buy. We need dedicated workspaces but not to “work”. We need them so we can: develop teams, collaborate to produce better ideas, and recapture some efficiencies.



Entrepreneurs play for keeps. They have risked it all in many cases to create something new – for themselves and others. Those who excel exude optimism, meet the market, and stay laser focused on the metrics that drive success. It is time for commercial office to start focusing “on” the business instead of continuing to stay “in” the business. We need to quit moving deck chairs on the Titanic. That is why we started Workng. I was asked to by a large office owner struggling to make sense of it all. Creating compelling work (life) environments is our passion and we are most fulfilled when we can help owners work through all this industry’s complexities by keeping it simple.



Mike Fransen
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