



Optimism and Pessimism

Are you feeling optimistic or pessimistic about the prospects for the next six months? Be careful which attitude you choose as the consequences for your business could be disastrous. Professional business coach Chris Baxter is here to explain why.

If your sales team aren't under pressure to bring in a lot more enquires and sales, then you are in a very fortunate position. Almost without exception businesses are finding that the world in which they operate is a very different place from what it was only 12 months ago.

Customers have changed their buying behaviour: they don't necessarily want to buy the products and services they used to, the way they make decisions has changed, and most customers have less money to spend. All of which means that the rules of the game have changed, but do you know what the new rules are?

But perhaps the factor that has changed with more significance than any other is ambition. Too often it seems to have evaporated, or at least morphed into something quite unattractive: survival!

Consider this scenario for a moment. You are recruiting for a job vacancy and you are presented with two candidates. One describes their ambitions as "to become the best I can be, make the biggest contribution I can, and to help my employer grow and develop their business". The other says their ambition is to survive the next 12 months. Which candidate would you choose? I expect the first candidate because quite obviously their drive and ambition means that they will make a far greater contribution to your business. You might also wonder whether the second candidate is a little mad.

So if your businesses ambitions are "**survival**" does this make you a little mad? Not necessarily, because the threat to the survival of your business may be more genuine than the unrealistic fretting of a neurotic candidate. However, if your ambitions are "survival", then just like the neurotic candidate you are likely to be far less appealing to your customers than a competitor who remains optimistic, creative, and positive. One of my business local heroes, Keith Miller recently described how his business makes a difference: ***"...we've got to see the positives. Our sales team and managers are looking at opportunities. Our vision is when a Miller person comes to see you it's like a breath of fresh air; it makes you feel better, and delivers the right message."***

The good news is that if your competitors are so pessimistic about the future that for them "**not going bust**" is a good outcome, this creates a fantastic opportunity for those businesses resilient enough to have retained an optimistic outlook. Whilst a pessimistic business is concerned with not loosing, the optimistic business is thinking of ways to win. Whilst a pessimistic business is thinking of ways to reduce costs, an optimistic business is thinking up ways to grow sales. Whilst a pessimistic business is thinking about shedding staff, the staff in an optimistic business are thinking up ever better ways to serve their customers.

Pessimism and optimism are usually self-fulfilling prophesies because in the long-run you generally get what you expect. For instance, if there is a contract to bid for and a competitor is in the best position to win, a pessimist will focus on the probability of losing and fail to put the kind of effort that might steal the contract from under their competitor's nose. "**Why bother?**", they will say "**We're not going to win it anyway**". However, an optimist will focus on the chance of winning and muster up the determination and imagination that will ensure that they put together the most innovative, competitive and attractive bid possible. Whilst the optimist will maximise their chances of winning, the pessimist will maximise their chances of losing.

So if the credit-crunch has brought out the pessimist in you, your focus is likely to be on the past, all of your problems, and merely surviving. Whilst if you've maintained an attitude of realistic optimism then you will be open to the many possibilities that are still out there and on things you can do to grow your business. Things like, getting the best from your people, developing a better understanding of what your customers want, how you can sell it to them, and rolling out a new innovative marketing strategy. None of which will cost you much money at all, because they're primarily about using an optimistic outlook to stretch yourself and figure out what's really possible.

If you believe that being good enough to survive will be good enough, then I'm sorry to have to tell you that it's not, because good enough never is!