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Finding True North When Things Seem to be Going South: Five Principles for Creating Growth in Challenging Times

No one likes change, but everyone must deal with it.

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Whether you are in Houston, TX or Moscow, Russia, the business world has changed. While the economy may trend up and down, change is a factor that stays consistent. Even if your business is currently suffering, when it returns to the good times, the industry will not be like it was during the last period of prosperity. No one likes change, but everyone must deal with it.

The key to your business coming out on top of change, is knowing the five principles that will never change:

1. Basics: Vince Lombardi had just taken over the Green Bay Packers and was being interviewed for the first time. The questions went something like this: *"Mr. Lombardi, as you know, the Packers have been terrible over the last year, what do you intend to do to change the fate of this team? Will you change the plays? Will you change the players? Will you change the offense? Will you change the defense?"* As Mr. Lombardi looked up at the press, he responded by saying, *"No, we will not change the plays, players, or any formations. We will become the best in the NFL for catching the football, throwing the football, tackling, blocking, and being in the best shape; gentlemen, we will become brilliant on the basics."*

As businesspeople, it is easy to get caught up in the emotions of the press and depart from the basics that drive your business. When times get tough it is the basic cornerstone for growth, which moves your business toward "true north" while others fall to the south.

2. Control: It becomes very easy to find yourselves focusing and spending time on events and people that cannot be controlled. From a family member who might be "off track," to the meltdown of an economic system, at times everyone feels helpless. Each hour spent focusing on things that can't be controlled depletes energy, which could be utilized for creative thinking. There are three areas every businessperson can control:

- **Attitude:** your personal attitude-to be positive vs. negative.
- **Response to Challenges:** your response to the challenges life brings, for life is not what happens to you but how you respond to what happens.
- **Personal Production:** set examples and create a productive environment for them, I can only control my personal output.

3. Relationships: Bill Marriott, Jr., was once asked how he managed his hotels. How did he keep his folks so upbeat? *"Relationships. I work to have a good relationship with my general managers; in turn my managers seek a relationship with their department heads, the department heads work to create a relationship with the staff. As a result, our staff creates a pleasant environment for our customer."* During the good times, it can be easy to overlook the importance of relationships. Things are moving in a positive direction, sales are up, new customer recruitment is up, cash is coming in the door, and managers often begin to neglect those existing customers and employees who have supported the efforts month to month. During the past several years the buzzword for many companies has been "shareholder value" - failure to understand shareholder value is a result not a strategy. Today, many corporations are paying a high price because they simply took for granted the key relationships with senior staff, key leaders, employees, clients, customers, and vendors. Reward at the expense of relationships is never true reward.

4. Vision: A simple truth: *"Your life must follow your vision."* What is your current vision? How do you view your existing challenges? How do you envision your future? Daily the negative press, from print to television, is bombarding. Many negative issues challenge both in business and personal lives. However, if one wishes to advance in corporate and personal growth, a positive vision is a necessity. Leaders have always found that desperation is the mother of invention; as one person shared, it causes "forced entrepreneurship." There is a vast canyon between "hoping" to win and "expecting" to win. Those who succeed in the up times and down times have a vision of expectation.

5. Humor: It has been said, *"You have been given two legs and one sense of humor. If you are to lose one, it is best to lose a leg."* During challenging times, it is imperative to keep a sense of humor. There is no stress worth a heart attack, stroke, or mental breakdown. Business is adapting to constant change. A new marketing plan has a shelf life of six to nine months before competition strikes. Quantum growth soon becomes measurable growth as external conditions begin to affect manufacturing or sales. So it is, and those who grow are those who can lighten up during stressful times. So lighten up, enjoy your mate, enjoy your children, and cherish the time with good friends.

A cheerful heart is good medicine.

> ***"Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do."***
> - Pope John XXIII

Bob Goshen is a man who tells it like it is. It is obvious he is a man who has earned the right to talk the talk because he has walked the walk. He speaks with the innate authority of someone who has seen battle, and has the scar tissue to prove it. He understands leadership, at the intellectual level, at the heart level, and at the gut level. He knows what works, and what doesn't work. And more than anything else, he understands the power of leadership and the value of common sense in a high tech world where it is believed all problems can be solved with the keystroke of a computer. Check out more about Bob at his website: http://www.bobgoshen.com/