

KEEP YOUR HEAD UP



One of the many things I do for fun is coach middle school track in the spring, and cross country in the fall. I imagine one of the reasons I enjoy it so much is I get to help these kids become more disciplined, and learn to push themselves beyond what they thought was possible. Distance running, in general, has a lot of similarities to running a business. But, the one that stood out to me recently as I was working with a group of runners is the idea of keeping your head up.

When running, as you become tired, it is a natural tendency to lower your head and start staring at the ground about three to four feet in front of you. When this happens to a runner, all kinds of things begin to go wrong. you begin to slow down and end up getting passed. Having experienced this personally, I know how easy it is to be lulled into the hypnotic feeling of watching the ground move by under your feet and feel like you're still keeping a good pace. But, when you look you look up and get perspective you realize how slow you've been running.

Young runners often think it's a good thing to keep their heads down because they feel they need to see exactly where they are running and don't want to trip over anything. In reality this has the exact opposite effect. I continually tell my runners to keep your head up and encourage them to run faster. As they run, they need to have perspective on what's coming up, where they are in relation to the competition, and keeping their eyes set on their next goal - to pass the next runner ahead of them.

“..what we ought to be doing is looking out on the horizon so we get an idea of what problems may be coming our way and be prepared for them.” when they arrive.

In your business, the exact same thing applies. We naturally want to keep our heads down and work on the problems that are right in front of us, when what we ought to be doing is looking out on the horizon so we get an idea of what problems may be coming our way and be prepared for them when they arrive.

There are at least four benefits to keeping your head up in business.

1. Avoid problems. Being surprised is fun on your birthday, but in business surprises typically aren't good things. While your head is down and you're working frantically on the next project that has to get out the door, you're missing signs of things to come. When you are able to identify a problem way off in the horizon you are given the special gift of time to prepare. With

this time you can change the course you are on to swerve around the problem all together and avoid walking into something that can cause damage to your business. These things on the horizon could be things like a new competitor in the market, a shift in the economy indicating it may be harder to finance your expansion, a supplier struggling to provide crucial materials, or a change in the way customers want to interact with you. Had Sears had their head up in the late 1990's and early 2000's, you very well may be purchasing your spouse's anniversary gift from sears.com instead of Amazon.

2. Minimize impact of unavoidable problems. Some problems really are unavoidable. While you can control many things, you can't control everything and being able to see a problem coming doesn't always mean you can avoid it. But seeing a problem coming does allow you to brace for impact. Founded in 1966 and rebranded as Best Buy in 1983, the consumer electronics store had its chance to prepare for being a blended in store and online retailer as the internet grew into what it is today. Best Buy couldn't avoid the competition popping up offering easy access to the same products online, but they were able in part to minimize the damage that would have occurred if they kept their head down.
3. Prepare for opportunities. While avoiding problems is always nice, there is something incredibly rewarding about being able to spot an opportunity from a distance and being able to prepare to take advantage of it as it gets closer. With the idea that hindsight is 20-20. Seeing the future before it gets to you is even better because while you can't change the past, you can prepare for the future. Businesses owners who are able to spot opportunities on the horizon are able to expand offerings, staff up for a rush, and build cash reserves to be able to pounce on the opportunity when the time is right.
4. Stay ahead of the competition. If keeping your head up was easy, everyone would be doing it and it wouldn't give you any advantage at all. But, obviously not every business does this and those who don't suffer the consequences. If you are looking at the horizon for what's next and your competition isn't, they will be slowed down by it and won't be able to take advantage of the opportunities that you will, so you will stay ahead and eventually leave them in the dust.

Keeping your head down puts you at a disadvantage. Focus on keeping your head up and running faster.

