Three key office systems you need to manage your business

These days we are so overloaded with information that it's easy to lose sight of the basics of running a business, and you very quickly become overwhelmed and suffer from information overload! Just take a look at some of the ebooks, products, ecourses etc. you have stored on your PC - I bet they all relate to marketing your business, getting more clients, increasing your income etc. but I bet NONE of them tell you how to manage your business!

Building a successful long-term profitable business isn't about "marketing" your business, it's about "managing" your business - the marketing comes once you have your management systems in place.

You cannot begin to market your business if you can't find the information you need, don't know who you are marketing to, and don't know where you are in your business.

So, let's go back to basics and take a look at the 3 key office systems you need to "manage" your business before you can start to "market" your business.
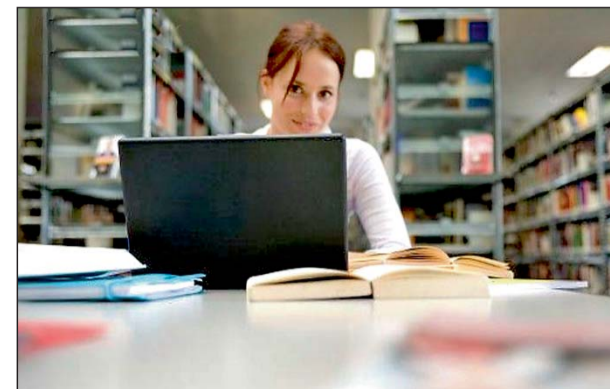
Filing Management System

Creating and maintaining a filing system is the very foundation that your business is built on, so this is the very first system you need to put in place - an efficient and effective filing system.

With a proper filing system in place you will very quickly and easily be able to find the information you need, when you need it.

Contact Management System

After you've got your filing system all straightened out, you then need to set about organizing your contacts. This is another crucial area of managing your business. If set up correctly your contact management system allows you to:

■ Keep a note of clients, potential clients, and colleagues contact information.
■ Easily and effectively follow-up with a prospect.
■ Locate critical client contact information quickly and easily.
■ Build your business.

Financial Management System

The is the final key office management system you need to put in place for managing your business. Once you know where you are in your business financially, you will be able to much more effectively market your business.

Having up-to-date, critical, financial information available at your fingertips allows you to efficiently manage cashflow and be able to know straightaway if you can take advantage of opportunities that come your way.

So remember, go back to basics and first "manage" your business before you "market" your business.

Fluency: Leading in the Midst of Change

Some of you may remember the 1985 hit song, "We are the World," produced by Quincy Jones and an inspiring cast of musicians who sang about working together, past our differences. Or perhaps you remember the tremendously successful United Colors of Benetton ad campaign back in the 1980s, celebrating young faces of every color, signaling the look and feel of a world without borders. Media images like these showed us the world and nation, as we wanted ourselves to be -- pictures and soundbites of many races cooperating, communicating, and sharing opportunity and fortune.

If only it were that simple. Almost 25 years later, we are still struggling to make that vision real -- in our business practices, in the running of our cities, and, now, in the context of great cultural, demographic, and economic changes brought on by globalization.

As 21st century leaders, you know that building, guiding, and sustaining truly diverse communities is tremendously difficult work. Over the last decade, city populations and workforces have changed faster than at any point in history -- job relocation, mobile commerce and ease of travel have changed our cities' demographics quickly and often. Immigrant and new communities continue to influence and change the culture of our cities. Young families and children supplant the aging baby boomer generation, again, changing the character and priorities of a community.

At the same time as we become a more diverse, more prosperous nation, our cities have also become more segregated. In fact, studies from SUNY Albany, UCLA, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education have reported that segregation of our children has worsened over the last decade, even as we live in more integrated areas. As newcomer groups grow in critical mass, so does the tendency to organize along racial, ethnic, or other group-affiliated lines. Changing demographics and the growth of ethnic enclaves have made race awareness and identity politics an effective means of voicing the needs of some of our cities' otherwise marginalized groups.

Amid all of this, civic and corporate leaders are confronted with difficult choices every day. Worthy projects from different community sectors must compete for limited resources. Appointments and commissions must be assigned in ways that satisfy all the interests represented in our constituency groups, assuring each of them adequate representation. From time to time, leaders also face crisis-fueled change, forcing them to guide their communities quickly through controversies.

Does this sound stressful? Indeed, scenes of a diverse community can be those of chaos, fiefdoms, even balkanizing, as some futurists and scholars predict. Alternatively, some see these times as momentous, opening the door to the grandest and most inspiring of challenges.

How does one lead a community, whether local or global team, in the midst of huge demographic and economic shifts? How do leaders create communities where all constituents feel included, counted and equally receiving of the opportunities offered by a community? And how do we have difficult conversations that turn our best intentions into action and accountability, not only from our leaders, but from ourselves?

The answers to these questions are certainly many and varied, depending on a community's specific composition and the issues it faces. Nevertheless, one of the most important skills of a leader through changing times will be a skill set of cultural fluency. This is not necessarily language fluency, as that term is usually used. Fluency is the skill set of understanding and being understood past apparent borders. To know one's constituents and address their needs effectively, 21st century leaders must practice and hone their fluency skills.

Over the past few years, I've talked to many fluent leaders: opinion shapers, thought leaders in business and communities, artists, teachers, media creatives, all who understand that their ultimate success depends on how deeply and quickly they can identify common ground and transcend boundaries between their constituents. Fluent leaders are servant leaders who willingly assume the place of liaison, the diplomatic negotiator, the arbiter of compromise.

What are some of the qualities of a fluent leader? They understand the value of nuance. They readily deal with complexity, knowing that solutions to real problems require many levels of information and analysis. Every one of the fluent leaders I've interviewed is also insatiably curious. They are lifelong learners who have honed their vision and their life's purpose through constant exposure to different experiences.

Perhaps most importantly, these leaders also understand that the practice of fluency is not a Pollyanna-esque, naive vision of the world, where a handshake, a kind word, or a dabble into a diversity program will suffice. It is quite the opposite. Fluency work is hard "detail" work that requires courage. To be a fluent leader means having some enemies, crossing boundaries, and entering into the necessary struggles to challenge leaders and systems that benefit from closemindedness, fear, and simple formulae.

As we work toward uniting our communities, we have shown that we want to trade together, learn about one another, work side by side, make money together, and even build our families -- across cultures and across our differences. Yet without knowing how to bridge what are often daunting chasms across race, religion, class, and culture, creating workable diverse alliances can often be impossible. Basic misunderstandings can thwart our earnest attempts at generating commerce and a vibrant exchange of ideas. Communications break down. Relationships fail. In our quickly changing communities, the art of fluency becomes a crucial leadership approach for anyone wishing to become an aware global citizen and an effective global leader. And it is the only way forward if we are truly committed to creating a world, and a nation, where all can flourish to their fullest potential.

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