



Three Great Excuses - three Smarter Questions

As business advisers, we often hear some good excuses for lack of success from business owners. We thought it would be worth taking some time to discuss the three most common ones and highlight the reasons why they are simply excuses rather than valid reasons for lack of success.

Even if you are not in the habit of making excuses and are proud of your ability to make tough decisions when the going gets tough, it is surprising how subtly these excuses can come to be accepted as a result of the normal business environment and therefore valid reasons for lack of success.

So what are these great excuses?

Here are my top three:

1. Customers don't appreciate quality - they only want the cheapest.
2. Government policies are making it almost impossible to run a successful business.
3. You just can't get good people these days.

Can you remember ever uttering these types of complaints? They are very common and almost accepted as the norm. However, I want to challenge your thinking as to whether these issues are real barriers to success or whether they are simply excuses. Let's look at each in turn.

Customers don't appreciate quality - they only want the cheapest

This excuse also comes in the form, "**The competitors are undercutting our prices and ruining the market.**" This is probably the most common problem voiced by business clients I speak to. The people who make this excuse are typically genuinely attempting to provide good quality and service, but are struggling to compete in a tight market where pricing seems to be the ruling factor in buyer decisions.

However, this is typically also an emotional reaction from losing this battle more times than they would like. Rationally and logically, the argument doesn't stand up. Even within their own product range they have differently priced products which all sell. So some people obviously buy at a higher price than they could pay for a cheap alternative, even if it is from within their own range.

The reality is that this is a marketing issue. Rather than complain about the customers' lack of appreciation, or competitors' pricing, they should be asking a critical question. **The question is, "Why would anyone want to buy from us compared to buying from our competitors."** Usually, business owners have no problems answering that question quickly. However, their usual response of "better quality and service" lacks any degree of substance beyond what you would expect their competitors to also say.

All things being equal, customers will buy any product at the cheapest price they can get it for. We all understand this and it is the underlying basis for this excuse. Business owners typically respond to this reality by trying to provide better quality and service, so that all things aren't equal. They try to create a competitive difference. However, what they do not do well is to communicate that difference to the market.

If you ever get tempted to think that your customers don't appreciate your quality and service, check yourself and ask instead, "How am I actually trying to communicate our differences to our customers?" Then ask a second question if necessary. "How well is that working?"

The problem here is not with your customers. It lies totally with how well you are describing and communicating your points of difference to your market. When you are able to clearly communicate your point of difference to your customers, you give your customers reasons to buy from you rather than your competitors and you give them reasons to pay more than for competitive offerings. Effective marketing and branding strategies will overcome the underlying issues that lead to this excuse.

So, if you ever find yourself excusing your lack of success by blaming your customers and their lack of appreciation of your value, stop. Instead, ask yourself, "**What unique value can we offer and communicate to our market** that will be appreciated so much that it will make pricing irrelevant?"

Government policies are making it almost impossible to run a successful business

While this situation often seems to be true, **in reality most governments in the world understand that their survival in government relies on the success of the economy**, which is enhanced by having a healthy business environment. There are times though, when they do implement policies that make it harder to do business successfully.

Without turning this article into a political essay, let me suffice to say that this excuse is easily exposed as such by asking if there are any businesses doing well in the same environment. When you find some, and you will, ask yourself, "What are they doing right that we aren't doing?"

Most business owners want everything their own way. However, abuse of power by some has led to government intervention to make things more balanced for everyone. Sometimes the scales tip further in one direction or the other. The reality is that governments will always affect the environment for doing business. However, the government effect is usually minor in relation to the effect that the skills and knowledge of the business owners or managers have on the success of the business.

So don't look for the government to make it easier or to stop making it harder to do business. Instead, look at yourself and find out how you can become more skilful at marketing or how to make your operations more efficient or how to be a better leader. **As Jim Rohn says, "Don't wish it were easier, wish you were better."**

Fighting government policies and getting them to change laws is hard work. Much harder than working on your own skills and capabilities. So if you find yourself tempted to blame the government for making it harder to do business, stop. Instead ask yourself, "What could I do to improve the way we run our business?"

You just can't get good people these days

This one is my favourite.

Again, there are environmental pressures that make this excuse easy to accept as reality. Twice today we have heard the phrase, "We are in a war for talent," from two different sources.

The baby-boomer population bubble is creating an aging society that means that the levels of human resource available are diminishing and,

The newer generation have little loyalty. They have been conditioned to wanting several careers during their lifetimes.

These factors all mean that it is harder to get good people. But to accept that you can't get good people these days is simply an excuse that results from not doing what it takes to get the best available people and having to fight over the what's left at the bottom of the barrel.

Again, the choice is to not accept mediocrity as the norm. **Don't make the excuse that there**

aren't good people out there. Instead ask yourself, "Why would anyone want to work here?" That question might open a can of worms, but it is the start of making your workplace environment an attractive proposition instead of a mediocre one.

The environment of today is different to how it was when most of us business owners were looking to get a job. People's expectations have changed, and are more sophisticated. **Workers want to exercise their right to choose. They will go where they are most valued and where conditions for work are more favourable, where the job is more interesting and where they get treated well.**

If you are not working at making your workplace an attractive proposition for your employees or future employees, it's time to stop living in the past and expecting good people to turn up. You've got to go out of your way and be proactive to attract good people. You've got to do more than your competitors if you don't want to scrap around to select the best of a bad bunch. If you find yourself thinking you can't get good people, stop.

Instead, **ask yourself, "What can I do to make our business the place where everyone wants to work?"** Then you will not have to worry about the lack of available talent. You will have your choice of the best available and you won't need to make excuses.

Conclusion

It's so easy to make excuses when it seems that there is so much evidence to back you up. However, excuses lead to mediocrity, while the right questions lead to exceptional results. **Don't fall into the trap of making excuses for your lack of success. Instead, take responsibility and accept that you can't change the environment but you can change your responses.** Start asking smart questions that lead to better answers than these three great excuses we so often hear. Your success is totally in your hands.

Don't make excuses, make changes based on intelligent questions and smart answers which lead to exceptional success.