

PRESIDENT'S RESOURCE ORGANIZATION

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Spring, 2002

PRO's Prose

by
Ray Silverstein,
Founder and President

I've been thinking about Charles Darwin.

I seriously doubt that Darwin considered himself a small business expert. Yet some of his theories certainly do apply. Consider the theory of evolution: in order to survive, you must be able to adapt to a continually shifting environment.

Yet as individuals, many of us are resistant to change. In an uncertain world, stability and predictability are nice to have. Until you become extinct, that is.

But YOU'RE not on the endangered species list! The fact that you belong to PRO indicates that you rank among the fittest. Each time you attend a meeting, you demonstrate that you are ready to make changes to help your organization thrive.

With that in mind, I ask you to turn your thoughts to the possibilities of change. As your company visionary, it's your job to chart the way. Consider what paths you might choose to explore and who among your staff can evolve along with you. Who can help you identify—and seize—bold new opportunities? And who, on the other hand, will join the ranks of the saber tooth tiger?

Change isn't easy, and it's certainly not always fun. But as you consider your company's future, remember this: the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change.

P.S. My sincere thanks to all PRO members who recently made their video debut on CLTV's program highlighting advisory boards. *Bravo!*



Ray

Spring Thaw! Cultivate Your Business as the Economy Warms

Spring is here, and summer will surely follow. The sun is out and the ice jam of the economy is slowing thawing. It appears we are going to make it!

But what was it we just experienced? A number of PRO members feel that we were in a "whiteout"—a temporary condition that appears quickly...lasts an indeterminate period...and for its duration, obscures top from bottom. But now, many members are reporting positive signs: increased requests for proposals, budget discussions about future programs, and—most importantly—an increase in business.

During the whiteout, PRO discussions often centered on strategies for survival: conducting careful analysis, practicing cost avoidance, and capitalizing on our competitors' shallow pockets.

But now that the fog is lifting and our vision is clearer, it's time to adopt a new strategy. No more hunkering down to ride out the storm—now is the time to spring into gear! Start by following these top ten "Dos and Don'ts" for cultivating your business in the new growing season:

- DO make sure you have the resources in place to fully service customers as business increases.
- DO review your personnel capabilities. Right now, there are many qualified people available—people who could upgrade your company's expertise. You might even be able to take them on without increasing your staff...if you are willing to let marginal employees go.
- DO give your employees additional training. Position them to take advantage of the business opportunities that will soon become available.
- DO make sure you have the financial resources to fund an increase in business. Many companies have exhausted their credit just staying alive, but you may need to identify new credit sources to finance new volume. Now's the time for a discussion with your banker.
- DO make sure you have a strategic and tactical plan in place that enables you to take quick, full advantage of new opportunities.
- DON'T assume that doing business the "old way" will bring you success. It's a new day.

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Are You Still a Player? Or Have You Transitioned to Coaching the Team?

By Harold Larson, President, PRO of the Rockies
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As our company's leaders, we face decisions and emergencies everyday. We start each day with a checklist of "To-Do" items...and add new ones hour by hour, creating another list for tomorrow. We role up our sleeves and dig in. We are the firefighters and the safety valves.

Although we sometimes complain, can't we also confess a sense of pride and a feeling of comfort in our role?

But when we believe that no one can do it as well as we can, when we meticulously oversee all the business decisions and interactions of our employees...then we become trapped.

Have you ever caught yourself saying: "I don't have the time to strategize or plan; I don't have the time to train my people. How can I possibly delegate?" Time out!

At first blush, the superficial solution appears to be finding the time. And that's not hard: many resources can help you reengineer your daily routine, flushing out non-productive activity and outsourcing administrative duties.

But this will fail you if you only turn around and pick up another shovel! It won't work if you only start recreating more activity with new customers and initiatives. Yes, you may grow the company and make more money...but you remain a victim.

Or as Abraham Lincoln once put it: "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

Don't let events control you! Unless you can visualize what a true strategist is—and move quickly into the role—you will become idle. The gravity of old habits will pull you back into your old patterns. When you first pull away, making room for your staff, the danger is greatest. You've created a temporary vacuum. If it's not filled immediately, your run the temptation of indulging in your own addictions.

In other words, "a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

So, ask yourself: are you truly aware of your motives? Do you accept the need to change your management patterns? If not, spare yourself and your staff! Don't introduce change when it has no chance of competing with the force of your current habits.

But if you are prepared to make a change, you can do it! Begin by confessing those habits to your board of advisors. Work with them to develop a transitional strategy. As a manager, you need to define your future role and create a model that you can look at to benchmark your progress. And be accountable to your mentors and confidants. They can provide you with the encouragement that will guide you through this new period.

Is it time to take the training wheels off your organization? You must trust that it will find its balance and learn how to motor through traffic. Yes, you are the momentum. You set the direction. And you probably do not want to take your firm on the freeway until it has mastered the necessary skills. Keep asking yourself: am I ready to let go off the handlebars? Is the company ready to steer itself?

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- DON'T wait for business to come to you. Go out and get it!
- DO be careful not to over expand. Control your growth or it will control you.
- DO get your company prepared in every respect.

And last but not least...get out there and DO your thing!

Some of these thoughts were inspired by that most esteemed business mentor...Dr. Seuss. Therefore, we will conclude with a thought from his book "Oh, Say Can You Say?":

*There are so many things
that you really should know
And that's why I'm bothering
telling you so.*

Go forth and prosper.

PRO chatter...

Congratulations to **Kati Spaniak** (Indico Bellum) as the incoming President of SMEC (Sales & Marketing Executives of Chicago). And speaking of closing a sale, congratulations are also in order for **Gary Pollack** (Harris Equipment) on his recent marriage to Laura Klein. Congrats also to Bob Weeks (Weeks Publishing), who along with Ray Silverstein, has been appointed to the board of Dairfair Foods, Inc.

PRO families are busting with pride! **Michael Sullivan** (Goldberg Kohn) has just welcomed his first child, while veteran dad **Mitchell Roth** (Much Shellist) has made room for a third. We visualize happy days—and long nights—for both households. Proud indeed...cheers to new member **Larry Penar** (Comfort Keepers), whose daughter just graduated from college. And speaking of smart kids, the son of **Roger Feldman** (Roger Feldman & Associates) has just been assigned to Army Intelligence in Germany.

PRO also has reasons to be proud of our own. **Jody Hass** (RTA) has been elected to the board of JVS, Jewish Vocational Services. Our proverbial "strong man" **Casey Swistun** (Swistun, Inc.) not only carried an American flag for all 26.2 miles of the Chicago Marathon, but was one of 80 to participate in the Iron Man competition held in Salt Lake City. And speaking of great physical feats, **Willie Fuchs** (Fuchs Devries) is now a dog sledding expert. *Woof!*

PRO grows! We warmly welcome **Harold Larson**, President of PRO of the Rockies. Harold, who is aggressively developing western territory, has much to celebrate these days, including the engagement of his daughter and his new home in Monument, Colorado. We are also very pleased to welcome **Jay Cash**, who will be expanding PRO into Lake County, Illinois and Southern Wisconsin. As for veteran PRO leader **Ray Silverstein**, he recently spoke at the Leadership Oakland conference held in Detroit.

Do you have news? Please share it with us!

PROfile

CASEY SWISTUN SWISTUN, INC.

If there's one thing Casey Swistun knows how to do, it's take a risk.

That's why in 1984, he left a comfortable management position in Poland and came to the United States...without speaking English.

That's why, after just one year as a contractor's helper, he struck out on his own. That's why he picked an industry with one of the worst possible reputations—aluminum siding installation—and made it his specialty. And why he offers one of the most ridiculously comprehensive guarantees in the roofing and siding business.

"I've gotten used to people telling me I'm out of my mind," says Casey, owner and President of Swistun, Inc., an exterior contractor based in Prospect Heights. "It's a good thing."

But there are other things that Casey also knows how to do—like asking questions, then using the answers to create strikingly original business strategies. And it's paid off: over the last 17 years, he's not only developed a very profitable business, but an intensely loyal customer base.

"You have to ask your customers what they like—you can't assume," he says. "You have to meet or exceed their expectations."

Casey looks for knowledge in many places. He reads voraciously (he often quotes marketing guru Jay Abraham). Early in his career, he'd call builders out of the phone book and ask them for advice.

"I'd call them in my very broken English and ask how they do things. And because they thought I was dumb, they'd tell me," he says. "And then I'd put all the pieces together."

Who's dumb?

And in 1993, Casey joined PRO. In fact, he is PRO's second oldest member.

"If you come to a PRO meeting and do not share any problems, you're not gaining much," he says. "Put your worst problem on the table and ask for help—and you will get it. Often, you get more than you need."

"I believe in learning anything I can get."

PRO is Coming to Lake County!

Do you have business associates or friends in Lake County who could benefit from PRO?

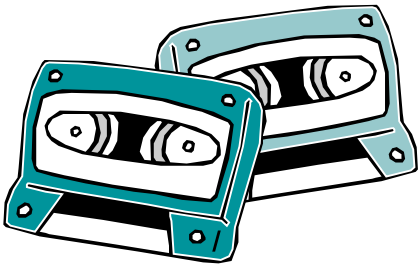
With the help of our new North Suburban facilitator Jay Cash, PRO is expanding north!

Jay has experienced the ups and downs of small business ownership. A charismatic speaker and excellent facilitator, he has particular experience in real estate management and in organizing and promoting celebrity golf events. Now, he will be organizing and promoting new PRO groups!

The group's first meeting will be held on June 26th from 8:30-12:00 at Bank One, 1201 S. Milwaukee Ave. in Libertyville. If you know someone who may benefit, pass this along. For more information, call Jay Cash at (847) 722-1413.

Audiotapes for On-the-Road Learning

Turn your travel time into learning time! The Institute for Small Business Success is now making its 2001 educational series available on audiotape. Each cassette runs about one to one-and-a-half hours—which makes these ideal for commuting and business trips.



The tapes are available individually or as a group. Topics include:

- Raising Money to Respond to Growth
- Make the Web Work Better For Your Company
- Upgrade Your Sales Force and Skills in 30 Days or Less
- Succession Planning and Family Business Ownership
- Prescriptions for Managing Health Insurance Costs
- What's Your Business Worth When It's Time to Leave?

The cost is \$15 per cassette or \$75 for the complete set. For more information, call (312) 337-3658 or email RSPROPRES@aol.com.

Upcoming Programs

Mark your calendar for the following programs, sponsored by the Institute for Small Business Success. Each program will be held from 8:15-10:00 (Power Networking breakfast begins at 7:30) at Maggiano's Restaurant, Old Orchard Shopping Center, Skokie. For more information, call (312) 337-3658.

September 24 – How Your Business Plan Drives Profit and a Vision for Success

How do you create a roadmap for future business? Learn the benefits of a SWAT analysis and find out how to nurture a "living" business plan.

October 29 – Selling Faster: Getting Customers to Say YES Faster

Want to accelerate your sales cycle? Hear how to pave the way to successful sales calls, receive responses in days instead of weeks, and effectively manage your buying/selling process.

November 26 – Management Techniques for the Entrepreneurial Company

What worked when you began may no longer work as your company grows. Find out how to retain your entrepreneurial spirit...and help your people make a successful transition.

Words of Wisdom

"Entrepreneurs have a very tough time admitting they need help. But the smartest entrepreneurs I know aren't too proud to seek outside counsel and objective perspective."

—Jane Appelgate, 201 Great Ideas for Your Small Business

"If a window of opportunity appears, don't pull down the shade."

—Tom Peters

It's aPROpos! is a publication of PRO—President's Resource Organization, 100 East Bellevue, Chicago, Illinois 60611.



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Ray SilversteinPresident and Founder