I have a great job! I volunteer my time to work with folks throughout several states who also give their time to mentor small businesses. One of the common stories that I have heard from these folks is when a CEO says, “I cannot put my finger on what is wrong, but it seems like I am losing my entrepreneurial “juice” and I am wondering how to tell if that is what is happening to me in my business”

WOW! Great observation and introspective thinking!

An entrepreneur is a person who identifies problems and opportunities and who devises solutions. He or she doesn’t implement those solutions personally, but delegates to others. Think of it this way: An entrepreneur isn’t a builder, but rather an architect—providing plans and solutions for other people to use.

However, even entrepreneurs can max out if tasked with too much. Many businesses stop growing when they employ a staff of three. It’s not that these businesses aren’t capable of more growth; it’s that three employees maxes out the entrepreneurial skills of many business owners.

One of my favorite business persons is Mike Michalowicz who is the CEO, of Provendus Group. He wrote some very insightful comments on this topic. I will try to capture some of his ideas to share with you. Here are some signs to look for that indicate you, and your business, may be about to run out of those “juices”.

1. When you’re doing all the technical work

Let’s say you’ve got technical skills and you started your own IT business. If you’re the one in the trenches doing the tech work, then your business won’t thrive. You’re working like an employee, rather than an entrepreneur. Given all the risk involved in starting a business, you might even be better off working for someone else if you’re not willing to delegate. Being an entrepreneur means generating new business, developing growth strategies and thinking on a larger, longer scale. If you’re doing the grunt work, something’s wrong.

2. When you are the sole problem solver

Sometimes it will be your role to step in and save the day. But if you’re constantly troubleshooting, you won’t have the energy or time for what you really should be doing: developing systems. Systems are what enable your business to grow beyond that three-person size; and in order for systems to work, you have to relinquish some decision-making power to your staff. Empower them to solve their own problems.
3. When you hear yourself say, “I can do it”

Whether you’re trying to economize, or just demonstrate your broad skill set, jumping from task to task isn’t the wisest course of action. Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you can do it well. Competence isn’t necessarily mastery, and rather than running around reacting to situations, you could designate your staff as problem solvers and start acting like the captain of your corporate ship.

4. When the passion is gone

When you find the role that is a natural fit for you, you’ll discover that it invigorates you. Even though it’s a challenge, you remain energized by the company you’ve created. When you lose your enthusiasm for your business, it may be a good sign that you’re maxed out. Running a company is hard work, and if it’s not paying off (financially or emotionally) the way you need it to, you might have reached a plateau.

5. When you feel threatened by your employees

Good entrepreneurs tend to hire wildly talented folks, praise them to anyone who will listen and realize that it’s impossible to do everything solo. When a business owner starts to feel overshadowed by his or her staff, it’s often because they’re not fully inhabiting the entrepreneur role, but rather they’re occupied with small scope matters that should be delegated to the staff. If you’re out building new business and planning for the future, you’ll thank your lucky stars that you landed such skilled and loyal employees.

Every business owner ends up pitching in and helping out with the grunt work and to a point, that’s a great thing. You want your staff to know that you appreciate their hard work and that nothing they do is beneath you. But if you’re not out working on the big picture, you’re more likely to stall and fail to grow, not because you’re not brilliant and talented, but because you’re spending your energy on the wrong things.

Remind yourself—daily if necessary—that you’re not just the boss; you’re an entrepreneur. You’re the one with the big vision, and you’re the one responsible for guiding your company to new success. Don’t let yourself get bogged down by inconsequential stuff. Keep your eye on your long-term goals, and success will hopefully follow.

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