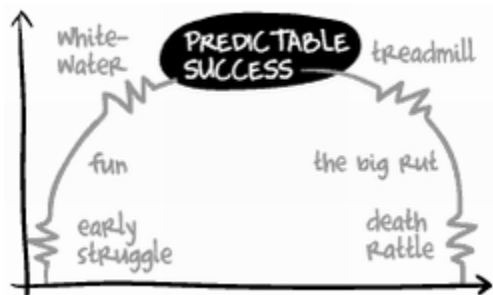


Predictable Success: The Lifecycle of Successful Businesses

By Gini Dietrich

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Never have I felt so normal in the five year life of Arment Dietrich. I'm reading Les McKeown's book, "Predictable Success" (due out in June, but you can get a copy of it electronically now), which is about the stages businesses (and their leaders) go through as they grow.



The drawing above is of the business stages Les discusses in his book, but I'd like to devote today's blog solely on the stage he calls "fun."

Sounds like a good stage to be in, right? Why would a business leader ever want their business to reach beyond the fun stage?

For us, 2007 was the fun year. We were growing by leaps and bounds. We couldn't lose a new business pitch. We were adding talent to support the growth. We added a leadership team to help free up my time to do what I do best. And then the recession hit.

We had to ask employees to pay half of their healthcare expenses. The leadership team took a 20 percent pay cut (and I stopped paying myself). We removed culture benefits, such as summer hours and company-paid wine:thirty. We no longer had groceries delivered every week. We stopped baking cookies every afternoon. We stopped winning new clients. In fact, clients were cutting their budgets and we had a bad streak of receiving letter after letter from clients saying the recession had hit them badly and they could no longer use our services.

We hit the whitewater stage in the middle of the worst recession our country has seen since the Great Depression. Les explains in his book that the whitewater stage is when a business goes from feeding sales and creating phenomenal client experience to fighting fires and finding mistakes and emergencies daily. I remember having a conversation with our president when she said, "I'm no longer doing my job. I only fight fires." How depressing. At the same time, more than one client told me that if I didn't get back to working directly with them, they'd find an agency where they didn't expect to have a relationship with the CEO. I've blogged here a lot about what that did to my psyche...and I knew I had to do something.

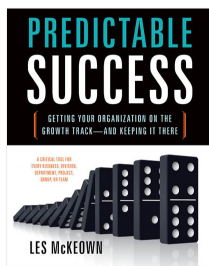
That's when I began to have thoughts of the fun phase. What did I do right back then? What did clients get from us that they no longer had? What did we do so we were able to enjoy the little

perks? At the same time, I was having fun learning about social media and applying the platforms to business growth. And I decided to make some pretty drastic changes to get back to the fun.

If I were to put us in a phase, according to the diagram, I'd say we're coming out of early struggle (again) and entering fun. But what Les is teaching me through his writing is that the fun lasts only so long and I have to get through whitewater to get to predictable success.

I'm ready for it this time. I know what changes need to happen and I know which flags to watch for so I can lead us into predictable success. Plus I'm reinstating summer hours!

Anyone want to place bets on how long it takes us to get to predictable success? To heck with that! How long will it take YOU to get to predictable success?



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