

Strategies for **NOW**

Operate in the Zone of Passion. Employ people smarter than you. Remove rules and inspire your team to achieve, says MARK ROBOTHAM.

Three interlinked activities: “succinct story”, “operating in a zone of passion” and “operating an actionable live plan” make up the core of the Now Strategy. In the last issue, we discussed creating a “succinct story” for your business. Now, we’ll explore operating in the zone of passion.

How often have you heard someone say: “People are our greatest asset”? Those who live by this statement bridge the void between wannabe leaders and the truly inspirational leaders who run successful businesses. Business is not a solo sport. In my experience with start-ups, solo operators will not succeed – the quicker you convince someone else to give up their day job and join you, the quicker you will succeed. If you cannot convince someone else to join you, you have the first red flag of your business. It may be time to switch to plan B.

But what is this “zone of passion” and why is it important? The zone of passion is that state of heightened productivity and efficiency where “things just happen” with a momentum of their own.

The success of any modern organisation is determined by its ability to adapt, take risks and achieve goals.

As companies grow in size, the efficiency fades. To counter this phenomenon you need to create a culture that is not bogged down with bureaucracy. You must be able to rely on empowered staff who can make decisions on the fly.

Do you operate your business in the zone of passion? Here’s a checklist:

- Everyone knows what success is and how to spot it.
- Decisions can be made on the fly without the boss.

- Customers, staff and stakeholders share a common value set.
- Diversity is encouraged – it’s okay to challenge each other’s ideas.
- Each hire increases the average power of the team.
- Killing puppies is okay.

Success and Yellow Cars

How many yellow cars have you seen today? None? Five? Fifteen? They are rare, but they are there, just like opportunities for your business. If you know what you are looking for, you will find it.

I once began working for a company designing greenhouse controllers. I’d driven down the same roads for years, but all of a sudden I started seeing glasshouses on the other side of hedges.

Define what success is, and make sure your staff know what it is, and they will spot the yellow cars every day.

Empower rapid decisions

The Williams Formula One team have a motto: “We make the car go faster.” An engineer is faced with a decision – do I use part A or part B? There’s no form filling or asking the boss – he knows the answer: it’s what will make the car go faster. If your staff are clear about the principles to make decisions on, then they can make decisions. Knowing they are on target to achieve the mission ahead, the uncertainty of doubt is removed.

Military people use “mission intents” rather than detailed plans. If your plan is rendered useless by the unexpected, then “take that hill” is a clear intent and it gives the troops the ability to make informed decisions on

the fly. Tell your team your mission intent, removing doubt and hesitation.

Be true to your brand

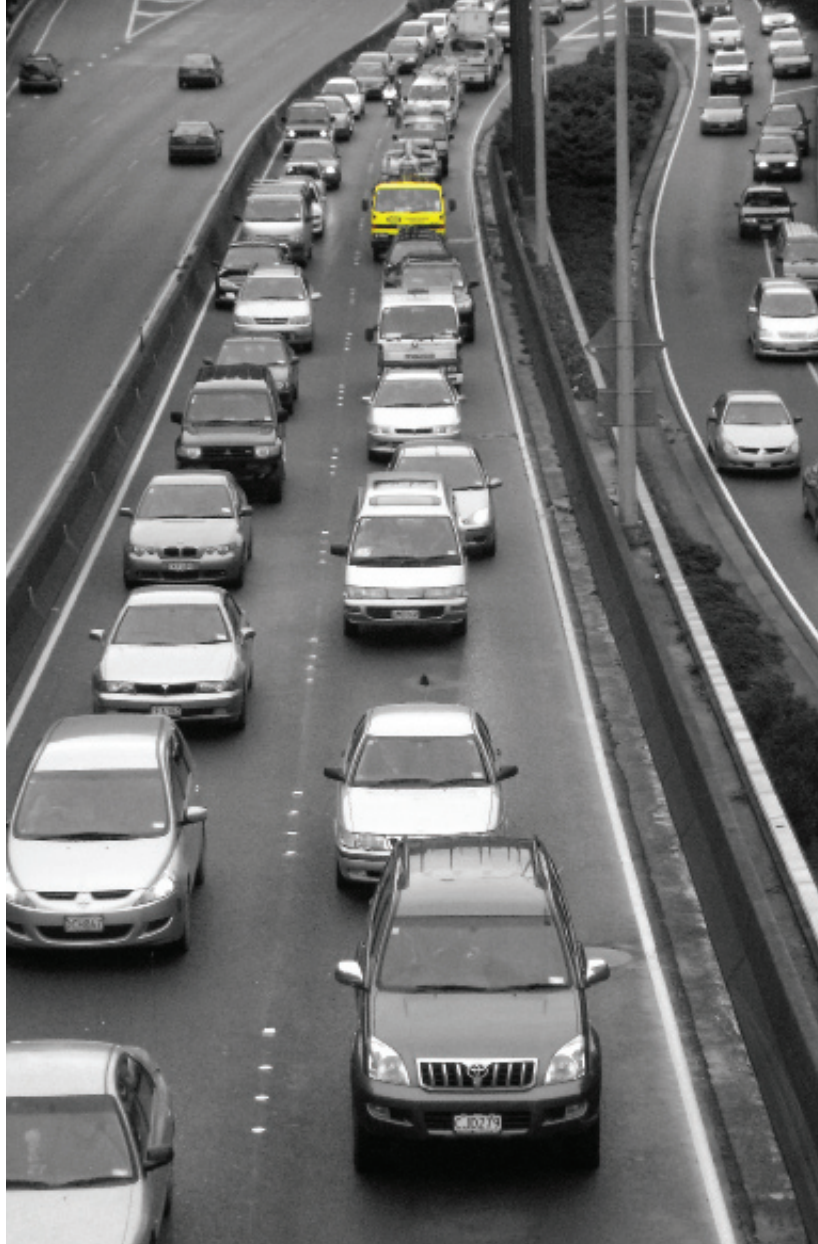
Why do some people just fit in and others not, whether it be customers, investors or clients? Values drive behaviour. Values are the principles and standards that guide human behaviour. For most companies it’s the common overlapping values of the founders that are the foundation of the culture of a business. The best indicator that one of your values has been violated is when you get that knot in your stomach, or just plain and simple get pissed off with someone.

Spend time documenting and discussing these behavioural values and driving philosophies in terms of how you operate. A few simple value statements will avoid rule books and give your people freedom to operate and make rapid decisions. Once complete, merge these into your brand story. The next time things are going off the rails, check in and see if you are operating on brand or not.

A great example of values with purpose are those of Atlassian, a high-growth Australian company. They are bold and heartfelt and certainly capture the spirit of the founder, Mike Cannon-Brookes. They choose their values based on Jim Collins’ MARS model. (If you were going to send five employees to recreate your company on Mars, what characteristics would they have?)

An empowered team

Hiring people continues to be the hardest and most feared decision for any business owner. Get it wrong and you will suffer the death of a thousand cuts. Some simple tips:



Killing puppies

All organisations have puppies: cute, beautiful pet projects or processes that are born with great meaning and purpose in the world. The trouble is, we all love to create these pets, to the point that organisations have too many and not enough time, money and passion for all of them to live a full life. So sorry folks. As repulsive as killing puppies is, some of those pet projects must die. Kill a few puppies and give your teams' a chance to succeed.

Leadership is not a lost art

It just isn't practised much. On its rare showings, it is the spearhead of successful businesses. Behind all great companies are great leaders and teams. Creating performing teams takes hard work and focus: make it one of your yellow cars to focus on and then we can create some more inspirational leaders who will inspire teams to achieve great things.

Creating high-growth businesses is hard work. Overnight success appears overnight – five to seven years down the track – and many will fail on the way. Business can be and must be fun to succeed against all the odds.

- Hire people who know more than you do. Ignoring this is suicide.
- Attitude outweighs skills. Never employ someone with an incompatible value set who lacks behavioural competencies that

support your brand and values, no matter how skilled they are. There are simple tools available to help (try www.lominger.com).

- When you get it wrong, act *now*. Or risk losing your good staff.

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