

Danger of Distractions

Deadly Distractions or too Much of a Good Thing (Back to [Table of Contents](#))

Introduction

Everyone reacts differently to success and self-made prosperity can have unexpected side effects. Entrepreneurs can get totally immersed in building a business, but some have a difficult time when they find themselves with less to do and extra disposable income after success. Some have become distracted from their businesses with disastrous results. Numerous construction businesses have failed after the founder/contractor was distracted from or lost interest in the business. Common distractions include golf, sailing, gambling, politics, affairs, etc. One instance included a contractor who became so caught up in a business organization that he spent as much as 50% of his time at retreats and other activities with the organization (almost a cult-like attraction). Predicting who this might happen to is extremely difficult if not impossible and it sometimes occurs to those least expected.

The Contractors

The typical casualty were self-made, hard-driving, type A personalities who spent most of their early life building their businesses at the sacrifice of family and/or social activities. Most had little in the way of financial advantages early in life. The distraction from the business as the center of their life started as they accumulated, for the first time in their lives, considerable disposable income with limited time to enjoy it. The ages were mid-40's or older.

Hypothesis

Hard driving at work lead to hard playing at some activity like golf, gambling, politics, etc. that became addictive, much like a mid-life-crisis, and began to supplant the business as the primary focus of the their life. Most did not notice the obsession and/or believed it was not affecting their business. Self-made success seems to convince people that they can do both exceptionally well.

The Reality

The small and mid-size construction enterprise is a complex, high-risk business demanding a unique set of skills found in the successful entrepreneur/contractors. This is confirmed by the huge failure rate in the construction industry where those lacking the skills, drive and willingness to work around the clock are weeded out while other sacrifice everything for the business. The high failure rate following succession emphasizes the critical importance of the founder/contractor to the success of a construction enterprise. In the cases of failure following succession it is speculated that the successor lacked one or more of the critical ingredients of skill, drive or commitment that the founder had.

The Result

When time and attention are directed towards the new activity it affects concentration while working on business issues. Attention to detail appears to be affected and inadvertent or deliberate delegation too often generates inappropriate or unfavorable results. If the detracting from the business comes about slowly the impact is less noticeable and sometimes difficult to detect. However, where the distraction is rapid, massive, and quite noticeable to others, it is not

perceived by the contractor who shuns the advice of subordinates concerning it. In the book, Construction Contractors' Survival Guide this common element of construction business failure comes under the heading of "Lack of Managerial Maturity".

Prevention

Prevention of this phenomenon is difficult because predicting who might be susceptible is complex and challenging. Convincing strong-willed entrepreneurs that they are at risk from this is almost impossible and intervention once the distraction occurs will be aggressively resisted. Small and mid-size contractors have little accountability to anyone so the institution of a Board of Director or Advisers may help. An independent Board may be in a position to observe changes sooner, and if trusted and relied upon, may be in a position to affect the outcome.