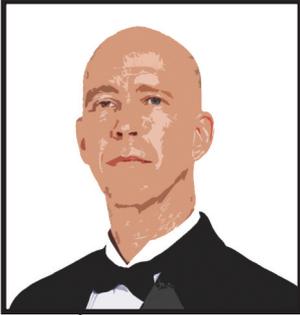


Business as Usual?

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BY MARK BUTT



AS YOU BEGIN TO READ THIS, I KNOW YOU ARE EXPECTING THE USUAL HILARIOUS, knee-slapping narrative that is consistent with past writings.

last turn

Fooled ya! (In honor of the day.)

I would have provided something mildly amusing, but frankly, nobody did anything remotely funny this month. In fact, my wife Sue spent most of the past month in Florida on what around here we term a working vacation: I work while she goes on vacation. So as long as I was working anyways, I thought I would do a public service to the thousands of Frederick Magazine readers thinking about starting their own business and let you know how I started mine.

I had thought a long time about starting the business. The trouble was, I had a good job, with good pay, a short commute and a boss that lived in Nevada. I had it made. There was no reason for me to start my own business. I did it anyway.

But before starting, you have to write a business plan. This is a document you prepare to convince people to give you things, like a loan or a lease, that you would never consider giving yourself (You're not stupid, after all). Production of the business

plan requires extensive knowledge of your industry, projections of revenue growth and the clairvoyance of the Great Carnac. Since most of us do not have that third requirement, we substitute with a rich assortment of lies, exaggerations and predictions, all of which have the same probability of happening as finding a parking spot on North Market Street on First Saturday.

The launch date was July 1, 2007, which you might remember was also the day the recession started. Good planning, and a happenstance I had left out of the business plan. On that day, I started my lease on a one-room laboratory at the Frederick Innovative Technology Center business incubator, secured my domain name (which I paid on for five years before I got around to putting a website together) and started working out of my basement on a folding table I bought at Costco.

I had one employee on that day: Sue. Here is a good rule for business: If you cannot fire someone who works for you, then you also cannot manage that

person. Almost six years later, Sue is still trouble at work. With my other employees, I can say: "You have to stop what you are doing and immediately get this other report out." They follow instructions. With Sue, when I say, "You have to get this contract out right now," she answers, "Sorry, I have a nail appointment and then I am taking the dogs for a walk. If you wanted it out today, you should have planned ahead." Since the chances of me ever getting another woman to live with me is about as good as me achieving my business plan, I just say, "Fine dear."

Six months after startup, we hired Beth and her dog, Hogan. Beth responded to my very short ad in the newspaper that read, "Come work for the best boss in Frederick County." She has threatened to sue me for false advertising several times since.

But somehow, in spite of the recession and the Maryland tax rate, we managed to graduate from the incubator and move to our new facility. If the economy gets bad enough again, I might write a business plan for an expansion. 