



TPI BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Hunting in a Farmer's World

By John F. Dini

Everyone in business is either a *Hunter* or a *Farmer*. The working style that fits you best isn't really a matter of choice, nor is it determined by your job description. It is ingrained by eons of cultural evolution.

The working styles of a hunter and farmer are markedly different. Hunters are linear. It is their nature to focus on the kill. A hunter moves towards a goal, and on reaching it begins to immediately look for another objective to accomplish. A farmer's work is cyclical, tracking the

seasons from planting to harvest. Their evolutionary traits apply to an office environment as well as the outdoors.

Ten thousand years ago we were all hunters. Until humans developed agriculture, hunting was the only way we survived. Those whose job it was to hunt for the tribe knew that failure wasn't an option. They persevered through fatigue and bad weather until they had accomplished the objective—bringing home food for everyone.

As mankind started farming and domesticating animals, nomadic tribes were able to settle in one place, build permanent living quarters and begin developing societies. Skilled workers could specialize in pottery or tool-making, and tribes began trading goods with each other. Hunting kept people alive, but farming built civilizations. As villages grew into cities, the majority of their populations became involved in growing, transporting and distributing agricultural products. Hunting was relegated to a sport.

The cyclical nature of farming, tilling, sowing, tending and harvesting have morphed into the business cycle of planning, budgeting, implementation and measuring the results. Just as the populations of cities focused on farming, the majority of employees in any business are dedicated to production, along with managing and tracking the production of others. Hunting is left to a small minority; the entrepreneurs, salespeople, executives and creative talent whose jobs are to look ahead and focus on the next objective.

For business owners and leaders, the challenge is to support the linear attitudes of a hunter in a business environment that concentrates on the cyclical tasks of farming. Computerization has given managers exponentially more data to track and measure, but management is by its nature farming, and management books promote farming methodologies. Balanced scorecards, six sigma quality and ISO 9000 are valuable tools, but for the typical hunter, they pose a problem...they are boring.

Thousands of business hunters spend millions of hours each year trying to master the intricacies of process and procedure without understanding why they are doomed to fail. They start to implement an initiative, but then become drawn to the "next big thing," or simply lose interest in the effort and let things slide. They aren't excited by potential for incremental improvement, but rather by the newness of the latest management fad. They enjoy building new things, but don't fare as well in managing them. Their inability to follow through makes them think of themselves as "bad" business people.

The real problem is letting dynamic, creative problem solvers waste time and energy trying to adopt a style that doesn't suit them. How much more productive could your business be if everyone, including you, worked only on things they enjoyed?

The stereotypical example is that of a top salesperson who is promoted to sales manager. The salesperson is a hunter.

Hunting...Continued on page 2.

QUICK LINKS

TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

1 — 4

SAFETY MANAGEMENT

5

MARKETING TIPS

6 — 9

SHREWDER COMPUTING

10 — 11

TAKE ACTION

12 — 15

She enjoys working independently and “bringing the meat” of a closed deal. It isn’t hard to understand why moving her into a manager’s role is counterproductive. She has no inclination to oversee the work of others, prepare reports, or think about improving the sales process. She wants to hunt, and managing is the farthest thing from hunting.

Of course, the opposite is also true. Take the case of an excellent controller who has advanced to Chief Financial Officer. As a controller, he was focused on detail and deadlines. Measuring and analyzing were his core competencies. Faced with the prospective-looking duties of the CFO role, forecasting, projecting, and seeking new financial opportunities; he is lost. The mere fact that both positions involve financial skills doesn’t make them interchangeable.

Most job descriptions involve both some hunting and some farming. One job recruiter once remarked that “When job descriptions require strength in both styles; you begin seeking a ‘flying mermaid’ to fill the position.” That’s someone who is willing to do detailed

and repetitive work all morning, such as balancing accounts and data entry, then shift to an aggressive sales job in the afternoon. Even if you could find someone willing to take on a flying mermaid job, the odds of achieving success in both roles are nil.

Farmers far outnumber hunters in most organizations. Regardless of the owner’s natural style, however, it’s a mistake to seek out similar people for management responsibility. We all want to interact with people who understand us, but duplicated personality traits come with two pitfalls. The first is when the two of you agree on a course of action, it may be because it’s the best decision, or merely because you just have the same point of view. Including someone who sees things differently than you do in your decision-making team creates better debate and more options. Two hunters together may skip critical details, while two farmers could be putting too much emphasis on avoiding risk.

The second pitfall is that the managerial duties you tend to shun personally also don’t receive much attention from your

key manager. Two farmers might focus on process over marketing initiatives, or two hunters may spend their time driving sales without looking at production efficiencies.

Hunters have always needed farmers. They keep things together when the hunter is off chasing the next objective, and make incremental improvements through the business cycle. Farmers depend on hunters to create new opportunities and develop a long-term vision. Both are necessary, and neither is nearly as effective without the other.

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