Actionable Ideas for Businesses
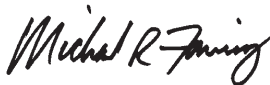
SCORE and MassMutual are pleased to provide you with **Actionable Ideas for Businesses**.

In partnership since 2011, our goal has been to help educate small business owners on how to put their ideas and passions into motion, all while helping them protect what matters most.

We hope you'll find these ideas and tips useful in helping you grow your business.

W. Kenneth Yancey, Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
SCORE

Michael R. Fanning
Executive Vice President
MassMutual U.S.

CONTENTS

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Leadership

Leadership is essential to your success. Be a visionary, a strong communicator, and an inspiration to your team.

Have a generous spirit: Be liberal with your time, give opportunities to others and share, share, share.

What's the inspiration behind your business? Share your vision and your mission with your employees, and they'll be motivated to help you achieve it.

Developing your mission statement:

A mission statement is a summary of an organization's core purpose — who you are and what you seek to achieve. A well written mission statement helps your employees know what is important and what is not; states who the company serves and how they are to be served; communicates the intended direction for the entire organization.

Developing your vision statement:

A vision statement should be aspirational, and describe what your company would like to achieve in the future. While a mission statement focuses on 'who we are,' a vision statement shows 'where we are going.' It is intended to serve as a framework for making decisions about current and future courses of action. A vision statement can help set direction for your business plans.

Be a more agile CEO by rotating yourself through different lead roles in the organization. See problem solving first-hand, and connect (or re-connect!) with the entire team.

Show customers how your business benefits them! A clear, accurate and compelling value proposition not only ensures your customers understand it, but your team will be able to recite it word for word.

Developing a value proposition:

A value proposition is a business statement used to summarize why someone should buy your product or service. Its goal is to convince potential customers that your offerings can solve their problems and provide more value then your competitors. Your value proposition should be clear and concise; avoid jargon.

Example (fill in the blanks):

We help _____ **to** _____
                        (who)   **(what)**

by _____ **so they can** _____ **.**
                (how)   **(why)**

Don't be afraid to fail. Failure helps you identify weaknesses, gain new perspective and think innovatively. Think of failure as just one step on the road to success.

Doing good is good for business. 88% of consumers say they are more loyal to companies that are socially responsible — and 87% would be more likely to trust that company.*

*2017 Cone Communications CSR Study

Good employees become great employees when they know where you want to go, and they want to help you get there. As a leader, you need to tell them, show them and help them.

When you work side-by-side with your team — and get your hands dirty together — you become a more effective leader.

Set 3 goals for your business: the potential, the possible and the practical. When employees strive for the potential, they will realize the possible. Point your lenders to your achievement of the practical.

Spend more time working on your business and less time working in your business. Delegate tasks to trusted employees; both they and you will benefit.

Set three goals for your business:

1. **What is your audacious (potential) goal?** _____

   _____

2. **What is your stretch (possible) goal?** _____

   _____

3. **What is the achievable (practical) goal?** _____

   _____

Personal Growth

The only person you can change is you. Change yourself, and change the world.

Things to organize everyday: Your morning (it'll affect the entire day), your priorities (what's most valuable), and your expectations (be realistic).

Quantify time management by assigning a monetary value to each task on your to-do list. Tackle the high-value tasks yourself, and delegate the low-value.

Assign a monetary value to each recurring task on your to-do list.

Task

High Value

1. _____ $ _____

2. _____ $ _____

Medium Value

3. _____ $ _____

4. _____ $ _____

5. _____ $ _____

6. _____ $ _____

Low Value

7. _____ $ _____

8. _____ $ _____

9. _____ $ _____

Don't just dismiss the 'bad' ideas. Instead, understand the thinking behind the idea, and look for the gems hidden within.

Create a system to capture ideas. Catalog moments of inspiration, and keep them visible. Then, you can more easily connect the complementary dots.

Great ideas can come from anywhere. Keep track of them so
it's easier make connections with other ideas later.

Idea	How inspired?	Where can it connect?

Never waste an idea. Work though it and see what happens.

Agree that no decision is ever final, then get started. Movement, more than planning, is the best way to turn ideas into reality.

Many conflicts are the result of a misunderstanding in an impersonal communication (e.g., email). Pick up the phone, or better yet, talk face-to-face with others.

Choose the best mode of communication based on the expected content of the conversation.

Appropriate face-to-face conversations:

- Personal/ personnel issues
- Compensation
- Negotiations
- Building relationships
- Complex questions

Appropriate phone call conversations:

- Detailed instructions
- Idea discussions
- Maintaining relationships
- Order processing
- Routine questions

Appropriate email conversations:

- Confirmation of agreements
- Proposals
- Next steps
- Weekly updates
- Announcements
- Simple questions

To delegate effectively, you must overtly grant authority to that person to make decisions. Then get out of the way.

You are smart, but not as smart as the collective wisdom of your customers and employees. Talk to them often, and inform yourself.

Two is one; one is none. Always have a back-up plan, and be on the look-out for areas in which to build redundancies.

Your #1 job as a leader is to make sure your team knows what you STAND for, not what you'll SETTLE for.

Business Planning

Smart planning is your roadmap to success, but don't stop there. Always reflect, re-evaluate and set new goals.

Eliminate three things that stifle innovation: 1) organizational silos, 2) lack of diversity, and 3) complacency. Each limits your team's ability to challenge the status quo.

Creating an exit plan is a process, not a one-time event. Start by knowing what your business is worth, creating fair and equal ownership roles and building a strong management team. Then, review your plan every year.

Regardless of what form your exit plan takes, its ultimate success often hinges on timing. The sooner you start planning the better off everyone will be.

20 Years Out:

This is the ideal time to start exit planning. It allows you ample time to groom your successor, build a strong management team and give your chosen successor enough time to accumulate the funds needed to buy you out.

10 Years Out:

You can accomplish most everything in 10 years that you can in 20 years, but it will likely be more expensive. You'll also have less room for error; unforeseen issues may arise too late to be adequately addressed.

Under Five Years:

It will be difficult to execute a comprehensive exit plan in under 5 years. Identify your successors and immerse them in the business, secure commitments from your management team, and identify the drivers that will maximize the value of the business.

Keep key employees happy by easing their financial worries. Contribute more to their retirement plans or offer access to insurance options, and you'll invite lifetime loyalty.

Retirement plans aren't just for big companies anymore. Investigate plans made for small businesses — they can help your company attract and retain employees.

When developing a new product or service, ask yourself: 1) What problem does it solve? 2) Is it easy to describe? 3) Is the market big enough? 4) Can it be built at the right price?

Employee log-in credentials are a common target for hackers. Protect your business with two-factor authentication.

Your business plan needs three different advocates: One with an internal focus to ensure the business' needs are meet. One with an external focus to ensure it stays market driven. One with a strategy focus to ensure everyone is sticking to the plan.

Business plans don't have to be complicated. A vision statement, SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), sales forecast and a core market story are all you need to create a simple plan.

The goal of a SWOT Analysis is to identify key internal (SW) and external (OT) factors critical to reaching your goals. But don't stop at simply compiling the list below; think critically about each and identify priorities.

Company Strengths

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Company Weaknesses

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Current Opportunities

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Current Threats

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Boost your business' value as you plan for your eventual exit. Develop a long-term strategic plan, build a strong management team and standardize processes so your business will be easier for your successor to run.

Why go it alone? Create a business board of advisors. Tell them everything, share your financials and let them have candid conversations with your employees. They'll repay you with objective insights that help your business grow.

In addition to your spouse/partner, who would you consider including on your board of advisors?

Name	Function	Contact Info
	Financial Advisor	
	CPA	
	Attorney	
	Key Family Member	
	Key Employee	
	Peer/Business Owner	
	Peer/Business Owner	
	Other	

Business Finance

Finance is not just about money.
It's about creating value.

Never intermingle personal finances and business finances. Use different banks and financial institutions (checking accounts, credit cards) to ensure they stay separate.

Budget every dollar you spend. With few exceptions, if it isn't budgeted ahead of time, don't spend the money.

Discretionary spending is an important part of your company's budget. Be sure to allocate your discretionary budget dollars in ways that will help keep you and your team inspired.

What discretionary spending ideas are you considering?

Item	Amount
1. _____	$ _____
2. _____	$ _____
3. _____	$ _____
4. _____	$ _____
5. _____	$ _____

Protect your business credit score by tracking your debt-to-credit ratio (the amount of available credit you use monthly). Keep it below 50%; higher ratios can limit your ability to get future funding.

Keep tabs on how money moves through the company. Compare current movement with past movement, and identify trends throughout the year to help forecast future cash flow.

Cash flow is determined by looking at three components by which cash enters and leaves a company: *operations*, *investing* and *financing.*

Cash Flow from Operations

This is the key source of a company's cash generation. It is the cash brought in through regular, ongoing business activities that generate revenue for the company.

Cash Flow from Investing

For the most part, investing transactions generate cash outflows, such as capital expenditures. Cash inflows from investing come from the sale of assets.

Cash Flow from Financing

Debt and equity transactions dominate this category. Companies continuously borrow and repay debt.

Limit using your business as an ATM. Running non-business perks through the company may artificially depress earnings, making the company appear less valuable.

Employee compensation is tax deductible when it is reasonable. Ensure bonus and benefit programs are well-defined, consistent and not out of the ordinary.

Want to get paid faster? Make it easier for customers to pay you! Create invoices that offer different payment options like credit cards or online payments.

Have an 'emergency savings' fund for your business. This financial cushion can help cover potential losses or protect you when things don't go as planned.

Always pay your bills on time. It is critical that you build both a favorable credit history and a reputation as a company to be trusted.

Don't get overwhelmed by expense management. Identify one area in your cost structure and improve it. Then, move onto the next.

Managing expenses is an ongoing process. Use the space below to identify the expenses you'd like to improve, in the order in which you'll tackle them.

Expense Item	Target Reduction	Complete ⊘
1. _____	$ _____	◯
2. _____	$ _____	◯
3. _____	$ _____	◯
4. _____	$ _____	◯
5. _____	$ _____	◯

Human Resources

Your employees are your company's most valuable asset. Invest in them regularly.

When looking to fill a role, hire for potential, not just experience. Seek those with passion, cultural fit and the ability to adapt.

'Pre-boarding' helps new hires feel welcome before they even start. Share non-proprietary information and company insights so they are better prepared for their first day.

Onboarding new employees helps both the company and the employee. Consider the following as you develop your company's onboarding process:

Before First Day

- ○ Prepare paperwork/ benefits package
- ○ Prepare workstation
- ○ Give access to internal tools
- ○ Discuss roles & responsibilities

First day

- ○ Team welcome and introductions
- ○ Office tour
- ○ Review company culture
- ○ Outline expectations

First Week

- ○ Assign first project
- ○ Give overview of expectations for next 30 days
- ○ Confirm paperwork complete/correct
- ○ Assign a mentor

First Month

- ○ Establish regular check-in meetings
- ○ Explain long term goals
- ○ Encourage social interaction with team

Never wrongly classify employees as contract workers to save on overhead. If you control their hours, pay, and work performed, they are employees.

Consider outsourcing HR functions (recruitment, payroll and benefits, regulatory compliance), especially if the time spent on these each month limits your ability to generate revenue.

Strive for consistency and fairness with all employees. Apply uniform performance criteria to all employees, not just a few.

Before firing an employee, be certain you have exhausted all options (with proper documentation). In most cases, termination should be the last course of action.

Large companies often have a slow hiring process — so, beat them to the punch. When you find good talent, don't delay in hiring them.

A face-to-face interview is a critical step in the hiring process. Use this time to uncover what is not on a candidate's resume — their knowledge, confidence and attitude.

Questions that may help gauge a potential employee's confidence and attitude.

○ Tell me about a time you had to admit a mistake.

○ How would you react if asked to take on something beyond your capabilities?

○ Have you ever had a problem with a coworker? If so, how did you resolve it?

○ What was the best job you ever had, and why was it so great?

○ What is most important to you in your next role?

Use social media to recruit employees. It helps you promote your company, your values and your mission at the same time.

Provide each employee with an 'employee handbook' that outlines your business' rules, policies and expectations. Have them acknowledge — in writing — their agreement with the terms.

Things you may consider for inclusion in your employee handbook.

Disclaimer: Clearly state that employee handbook is not a contract of employment. At-will employers should state that employment is at-will and may be terminated for any reason.

Company goals and mission statement: Employee 'buy-in' is vital to a successful business.

Harassment and anti-discrimination policies: Clearly state your company has zero tolerance for harassment or discrimination of any kind.

Leave policies: Define acceptable types of leave such as vacation, jury duty, maternity leave, sick leave and the like.

Disciplinary policies: Define what constitutes employee misconduct and the consequences of such actions.

Problem/resolution procedures: Define process for employees to bring forward internal grievances, complaints or other workplace issues.

Social networks: Policies that address who can communicate on behalf of the company and which types of communications from employees are prohibited.

Confidentiality: Requirement that employees keep business information confidential.

Subject to change: Statement that the policies included may change with or without employee notice.

Team/Culture

A positive company culture can lead to more success — for you, your employees and your business.

A positive company culture depends on a shared sense of ownership. Give your team more input and control over their work.

Empower your team by setting boundaries. When employees know where they can act autonomously, they'll innovate more with what they control.

Identify your next leaders not just by how they behave in the office, but by how they lead — and are involved — in your community at large.

Measure and reward your leadership team not only for financial performance, but for their employees' morale and retention.

Often, your team's biggest fear is that you don't see all the 'bad' that's happening around them. On a regular basis, ask them for their insight.

Your team needs to be reminded why and what they do every day truly matters. Tell them, show them and celebrate them often.

**There are many meaningful ways to celebrate individual and team successes —
including birthdays and work anniversaries — that won't break the bank.**

○ Handwritten 'thank you' notes

○ Preferred parking

○ Free lunch

○ Time off (e.g. half day)

○ Recognition on company social media

○ Rotating trophies

○ Company branded apparel/goods

It is important to survey your team ahead of time to ensure the
rewards/celebrations you choose for recognition will be appreciated.

Redefine the meaning of success for your team. Success isn't just found at the end, but in every step and every lesson learned.

Many employees are distracted at work due to personal financial issues. Making financial education available to employees can help increase productivity, build loyalty and improve morale.

The following financial education topics are often made available to employees through the workplace. Based on what you know about your team, what topics do you believe would be most beneficial for them?

○ Setting financial goals

○ Budgeting

○ Debt management

○ Common money mistakes

○ Personal risk profile

○ Investment basics

○ Asset allocation

○ Retirement planning

○ Retirement income

○ Retirement risks

○ Social Security

○ College planning

○ Life insurance

○ Health savings accounts

Encourage quiet brainstorming. Put a goal at the top of a whiteboard, and list available tools across the bottom. Invite your team to find connections at their own pace.

Consider using the 70/20/10 rule for employee training:
- 70% real experience
- 20% feedback/observation
- 10% formal education

Providing formal employee education doesn't always mean high expense. Many low cost education programs may be available to you through adult education programs in your community. These may include:

- ○ Computers and technology

- ○ Social media

- ○ Negotiation

- ○ Interpersonal skills

- ○ Public speaking

- ○ Photography

- ○ Foreign languages

- ○ Writing for business

Sales

The essential elements of a 'sale' are competence and mutual benefit. Otherwise, it's just a transaction.

Sales is the same as leadership: share your vision, build relationships and provide solutions.

When you view 'sales' as simply helping the customer achieve their objectives, everyone in your company is a salesperson.

The most important sales call you make is after the order is received, but before it's fulfilled. Say 'thanks' and confirm expectations.

At the moment of purchase, your prospect becomes a customer and your relationship changes forever. Be ready for that transition ahead of time.

Provide your client a project summary, including estimated costs and timing. This will help you judge client intent before developing a full — and often costly — proposal.

In many instances, up-selling works better than cross-selling. It is often easier for the client to upgrade their purchase, while cross selling may be distracting.

What are the 'up-sell' opportunities available to you?

If this…   **Then this…**

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Consideration: Are there discount opportunities available to help encourage additional purchases?

Lower the cost of acquiring new customers by creating standard, and repeatable, sales processes. Start small, and scale up over time.

There are three ways to get referrals — earn them, ask for them, and reward for them. Create and implement a plan for each.

Who can you ask for referrals? Identify those customers below.

Name	Company	Contact Info

The fewer the decisions, the easier it is for a prospect to make a purchase. Limit the number of decisions involved in a sale.

Prospects say 'no' for specific reasons: no need, no money, no urgency or no trust. Be ready to provide a solution for each.

Many customer objections can be overcome simply by being prepared ahead of time.

Their objection:	Your response:
No Need	
No Money	
No Urgency	
No Trust	

Marketing

Marketing helps you build awareness for your company, making it easier to attract — and keep — customers.

Creating a marketing plan? Keep in mind the top five lead generation tactics:
1) Email 2) Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
3) Social Media 4) Website Optimization
5) Content Marketing

Match your marketing materials to your stage in the sales cycle.
• Early on, educate.
• Midway, make the business case.
• Near the close, offer a specific solution.

List your current marketing materials/marketing content by stage of the sales cycle; identify any gaps you may have:

Educate the customer:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Make business case:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Offer specific solution:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

People buy based on emotion. To make the sale, create an emotional connection with the customer.

"What's in it for me?" That's what customers want to know about your business, so make sure your marketing messages focus on benefits rather than features.

Many companies promote the features of their products or services, but often don't explain the benefits of each. What are the benefits your customers ultimately receive?

Feature: **Benefit:**

1. _____   _____

2. _____   _____

3. _____   _____

4. _____   _____

5. _____   _____

Make news with your press release. Explain who, what, where, when and why; link to your website, and 'tell, don't sell.'

Spread the word about your business by making friends. Connect with industry journalists on social media, and they'll think of you first when they need a source for a story.

Identify journalists or industry influencers with whom a relationship may be important:

	Name	Industry/Media Outlet	Contact info
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Marketing to the C-suite? Show them how you'll boost their sales and profits, their market value or their competitive advantage.

Want new customers? Partner with other small business owners who target the same market, either for a short-term joint promotion or a long-term strategic alliance.

Did you know positive online reviews inspire trust in 7 out of 10 consumers?* Boost your reputation by encouraging customers to review your business online.

*BrightLocal: Local Consumer Review study 2015

Word-of-mouth advertising is key to every business. Get more with superior customer service and by sharing customer stories.

Website

A website is often the window into a company's soul. What do you want others to see?

Visitors to your website judge you first on its ease of use; second by its content. Spend your limited website resources first on improving the user experience.

Beef up your website's 'About Us' page as it's a great way to introduce yourself. Create your story — who you are and what you believe — with the customer in mind.

Your website's 'About Us' page is often the first place visitors will go to. Here are some things to keep in mind while creating your 'About Us' page:

- **Share your story.** How did you get started, and why?

- **Talk about your customers.** What are the challenges they are looking to solve for?

- **Let your customers talk about you.** Include testimonials.

- **Introduce yourself with pictures.** Let customers see who they'll be working with.

- **Establish your credibility.** Include any accreditations you've earned or awards achieved.

- **Help them get to know you better.** Provide easy access to contact information.

- **Be personal and authentic.** Avoid jargon and use language that is easy to understand.

Your website should seek to do three things:
1. Add value
2. Collect data
3. Conduct commerce

Since many websites today look a lot alike,
you need to be crystal clear on yours.
Show your visitors what they should do,
and how they should do it.

Include web content that customers like to come back to often: How-to's, interviews, case studies, research and infographics. Update regularly.

80% of online visitors will only read a page's headline or scan the body text. Only 20% will read the page.* Plan accordingly, and use stronger headlines and sub-heads.

*Source: Copyblogger

Use your social media platforms as a website research arm. For example, use Twitter to test headlines or Facebook and Instagram to test images.

Nurturing a prospect online can take time. Get started with a small commitment from them, such as answering a one question survey.

Below are a few simple, one-question survey ideas to help you nurture prospects online.

○ How often do you visit our website?

○ How did you hear about us?

○ Overall, how well does our website meet your needs?

○ Was it easy to find what you were looking for?

○ How likely are you to visit our website again?

○ Do you have any suggestions for improving our website?

What other questions would you be interested in having answered?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

For better SEO, add descriptive terms to your site's keywords. For example, use 'New York City consulting firm' not just 'consulting firm.'

Website Calls-to-Action: Be direct, be unique, be urgent and use actionable language. But most importantly, be simple.

'Actionable language' can encourage website visitors to take the next step.
Below are action words you might consider including in your calls-to-action.

○ **Start**   ○ **Build**   ○ **Grow**

○ **Join**   ○ **Learn**   ○ **Discover**

○ **Want**   ○ **Need**   ○ **Free**

○ **Save**   ○ **Try**   ○ **Why**

○ **Get**   ○ **Find**   ○ **Now**

○ **Today**   ○ **Before**   ○ **Ends**

○ **Create**   ○ **Contact**   ○ **Plan**

○ **View**   ○ **Explore**   ○ **Buy/Shop**

Social Media

Social media is all about engagement. Use it to tell the story of who you are.

Social media rules to live by:

Be responsive.

Be helpful.

Be succinct.

Be authentic.

Seek to build trust first, traffic second. Focus on getting your social media content shared; visits to your website will follow.

Tracking social media metrics on a regular basis helps you answer important questions:

Is your content engaging? Understand which content gets attention, and which does not.

- ○ Likes — number of people who 'like' or 'favorite' your post
- ○ Shares — number of people who amplify your message by sharing your post with others
- ○ Comments — number of times people provide comments and feedback

Are you reaching the right audience? Pay attention to who is following you and why.

- ○ Active followers — number of followers and friends on any given platform

Are your social media efforts driving visits to your website?

- ○ Clicks — number of times people 'click thru' to your website page via posted URL

Content creation made easy: Re-format your existing content, such as testimonials, case studies, e-newsletters and blog posts. Soon, you'll have your own content library.

Use social media to tell the story of your brand. Make your story memorable (and shareable) by having a hero, a goal, an obstacle, a mentor and a moral.

'Story-telling' is a great way to make an emotional connection with your prospects.

Hero: _____

Who is the hero of your story? Is it your company? Or is it a customer?

Goal: _____

What did the hero set out to achieve?

Obstacle: _____

What did the hero overcome to achieve the goal?

Mentor: _____

Nothing is done alone. Who helped along the way?

Moral: _____

What greater good (or side benefit) was realized?

Social media marketing on a budget: Promoting your blog, making behind-the-scenes videos, and curating content from industry influencers are easy ways to make your mark.

Did you know 90% of business-to-business purchases begin with an Internet search.* Use social media to engage prospects while they are still doing their pre-purchase research.

*Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Who are influencers in your industry that regularly produce articles
and content which you would be willing to share on your social media?

	Name	Media Outlet	Topics Covered
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

Note: Consider applicable copyright laws and permission requirements prior to
sharing. Always acknowledge original source when re-posting.

Use the 80/20 social media ratio: 80 percent of your social media content should be educational and engaging. Only 20 percent should directly promote your business.

Intimidated by all the social media options? Start where most of your customers are. If you sell to consumers, that's Facebook, if you sell to businesses, try LinkedIn. If your business is visual, try Pinterest.

Engage the prospect in the conversation they are already having, not the one you want them to have.

Reward your most engaged social media followers. Offer discounts or coupons, invite them to special events or ask for their input on customer engagement.

Productivity

Being more productive means doing all the things you have to do more efficiently.

Are your processes streamlined? To find out, try reversing the process (working backwards) to identify any constraints: then either eliminate them, or create a work-around.

Does your business measure up? Measure your productivity against industry benchmarks to see how you compare to the competition and where you can improve.

One measure of productivity is 'cost of goods sold' (COGS). How does your company compare to your industry's average?

Industry	COGS	Industry	COGS
Accommodation	38.88%	Information	23.48%
Administrative	41.12%	Management	1.13%
Agriculture	54.28%	Manufacturing	71.96%
Entertainment	16.03%	Professional	31.10%
Construction	73.62%	Real Estate	13.31%
Education	11.12%	Retail	73.50%
Finance	57.32%	Transportation	32.23%
Health	9.23%	Wholesale	77.60%

COGS represents only direct costs (materials and labor) attributable to the production of goods sold. It excludes all other indirect expenses.

Know your 'flow': Energy levels fluctuate throughout the day. Understand yours, and plan tasks accordingly.

Is that task 'important' or just 'urgent'? Know the difference and make sure you set aside time each week to work on the important stuff.

Get over the hump. Start each project by pinpointing possible problems. Then tackle them head-on so you don't get stalled later.

Overwhelmed with work? Don't have a breakdown. Instead, break down big projects into small, manageable steps to build momentum.

Leave your employees to their own devices. A BYOD (bring your own device) approach to technology boosts productivity by letting your team use the tech tools they prefer.

Want to boost your personal productivity — fast? Identify low-value, recurring tasks and either drop them, delegate them or outsource them.

What are your recurring, low value tasks and how should they be handled moving forward. (Note: Also see page 17)

Task	Drop?	Delegate?	Outsource?
1. _____	○	○	○
2. _____	○	○	○
3. _____	○	○	○
4. _____	○	○	○
5. _____	○	○	○

A similar approach to increasing productivity can be found in the concept of 'Start, Stop, Continue.' Similar to above, identify the tasks you or your team will **start** doing, **stop** doing, or **continue** doing.

So your workload is bigger than your budget?
Hiring employees isn't the only solution.
Try outsourcing to temporary employees,
independent contractors or freelancers.

Should you ever say "No" to a customer?
Yes — if you're too overloaded to do a good job,
or if taking the job will move your business
backwards instead of forwards.

While it is often difficult to tell a customer 'No', there may be specific reasons why you might. Identify those reasons below and note any options you might offer instead.

Reason #1: _____

Option:_____

Reason #2: _____

Option:_____

Reason #3:_____

Option: _____

Share this list with others on your team so they are comfortable with making 'no' decisions on their own.
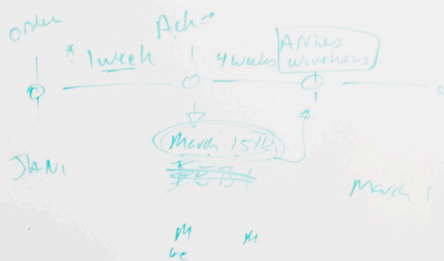
Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is both a process and a mindset. When executed well, the former leads to the latter.

Process improvement cannot happen from the top down. Empower employees closest to the problem to find the root cause and implement modifications.

Standardize and document all your processes (what, who, when and how) to establish predictable outcomes. This helps limit variations, and sets a baseline for future improvement.

Documenting and standardizing your internal processes is an important part of a continuous improvement mindset. While every company will document their processes differently, most will include similar information:

○ **Sequence:** What happens when, and in what order.

○ **Task:** Detailed description of task and actions taken.

○ **Systems:** Identification of system requirements.

○ **Time:** Estimated time for task completion.

○ **Dependencies:** Outside factors to be considered.

○ **Responsibilities:** Responsible party for each task.

○ **Key points:** Important items responsible party needs to know.

○ **Confirmation:** Confirmed defined process is correct.

○ **Revisions:** Documented history of changes to process.

Interruptions to workflow often happen when there is no simple, direct 'path.' Limiting the number of hand-offs can help create a clear line-of-sight.

Map out your internal processes with the customer's experience in mind. Identify (and quantify if possible) the value the customer receives at every point.

Use space below to sketch out your customers' experience.
Use standard flow chart icons to diagram their process.

Standard Icons

Start/End

Process

Decision

Document

Go see your many processes first hand. Learn by putting yourself in the middle of the action — listen in on customer calls, walk the shop floor or have lunch in the break room.

Test any new process by piloting it on a small scale. Running an experiment can help minimize your exposure while you 'fail fast' and work out the kinks.

Use the "5S" concept for better organization: Sort, Set in Order, Shine (keep clean), Standardize and Sustain. This helps eliminate clutter and makes things more accessible.

'Visual management' can help the team see how, and where, their processes fit in. Post your goals, and progress in meeting key metrics, in common spaces around the company.
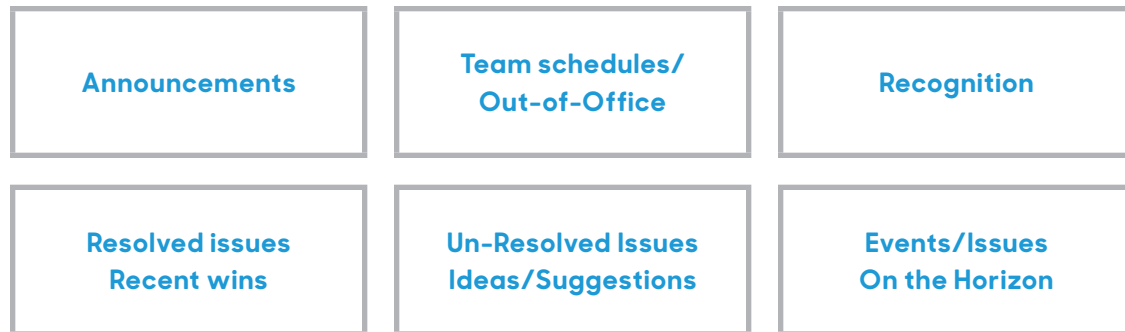
Obstacles arise when process connections between two or more people are not clearly defined. Hand-offs and accountabilities should be explicit and direct, with no ambiguity.

Start each day with a team "huddle" to identify and address any issues from the day before. Huddles are also a great venue for motivating and recognizing team members.

Visualization helps engage team members during huddles.
A simple white board (that can be updated regularly) can help
everyone focus on the most important items. Below is one 'huddle board'
suggestion; yours should be customized to meet your needs.

Announcements	**Team schedules/ Out-of-Office**	**Recognition**
Resolved issues Recent wins	**Un-Resolved Issues Ideas/Suggestions**	**Events/Issues On the Horizon**

Data Analysis

Understanding the data you already have can help you make better decisions.

You cannot improve what you cannot measure. Understand what data any given process is generating, and capture that data at regular intervals.

Be specific when setting data analysis goals. A narrowly defined goal can provide you clearer, more meaningful metrics that are easier to track over time.

Many of your data analysis goals will be focused on your company's key performance indicators (KPIs), such as sales generated or customer acquisition costs. Use the space below to identify your KPIs and data needs.

KPI: **Data needed to track:**

1. _____   _____

2. _____   _____

3. _____   _____

4. _____   _____

5. _____   _____

Take care to document where your input came from, and how your outcomes were achieved. Detailed documentation is critical for future confirmation and replication.

Be diligent when collecting data to ensure it is as accurate, and as comprehensive, as possible. Cutting corners with your data only gets you one thing: "garbage in, garbage out."

The volume of statistical data being generated each day is enormous. However, much of the data you might ever need may already be available to you.

Internal customer data

- Surveys
- Profiles
- Primary research

Internal technology data

- CRM software
- Website/Social Media
- Business apps

Internal transaction data

- Invoices
- Statements
- Payments

External public data

- US Census
- Data.gov
- Secondary research reports

'Sample size' rule of thumb: The bigger the change, the smaller the sample size needs to be. The smaller the change, the bigger the sample size that is required.

Large amounts of data does not always mean you need expensive software. Also, consider data maturity, data source, and your goals. Often times, a simple spreadsheet may fit the bill.

When using a simple spreadsheet program for data analysis,
you may find the following functions helpful.

Tables

Ease organization and management by grouping similar data together.

Sort & Filter

Sort data into a specific arrangements; filter data to isolate key information.

Pivot Tables

Automatically summarize selected data to generate specific reports or table views.

Data Cleaning

Remove inaccurate, missing or unnecessary data prior to analysis.

A single word can make all the difference. Simple A/B testing can be used to evaluate if a perceived change in behavior has, in fact, occurred.

Correlation does not equal causation. Our preconceptions might lead us to believe one action causes another when the true relationship is far more complex.

Partner with local colleges for your data analysis needs. Many students are knowledgeable, eager and often have free time. They may also have access to data sets that you do not.

Data visualization is critical to understanding relationships. Use bar charts instead of pie charts to compare values (the human eye has trouble comparing areas of slices).
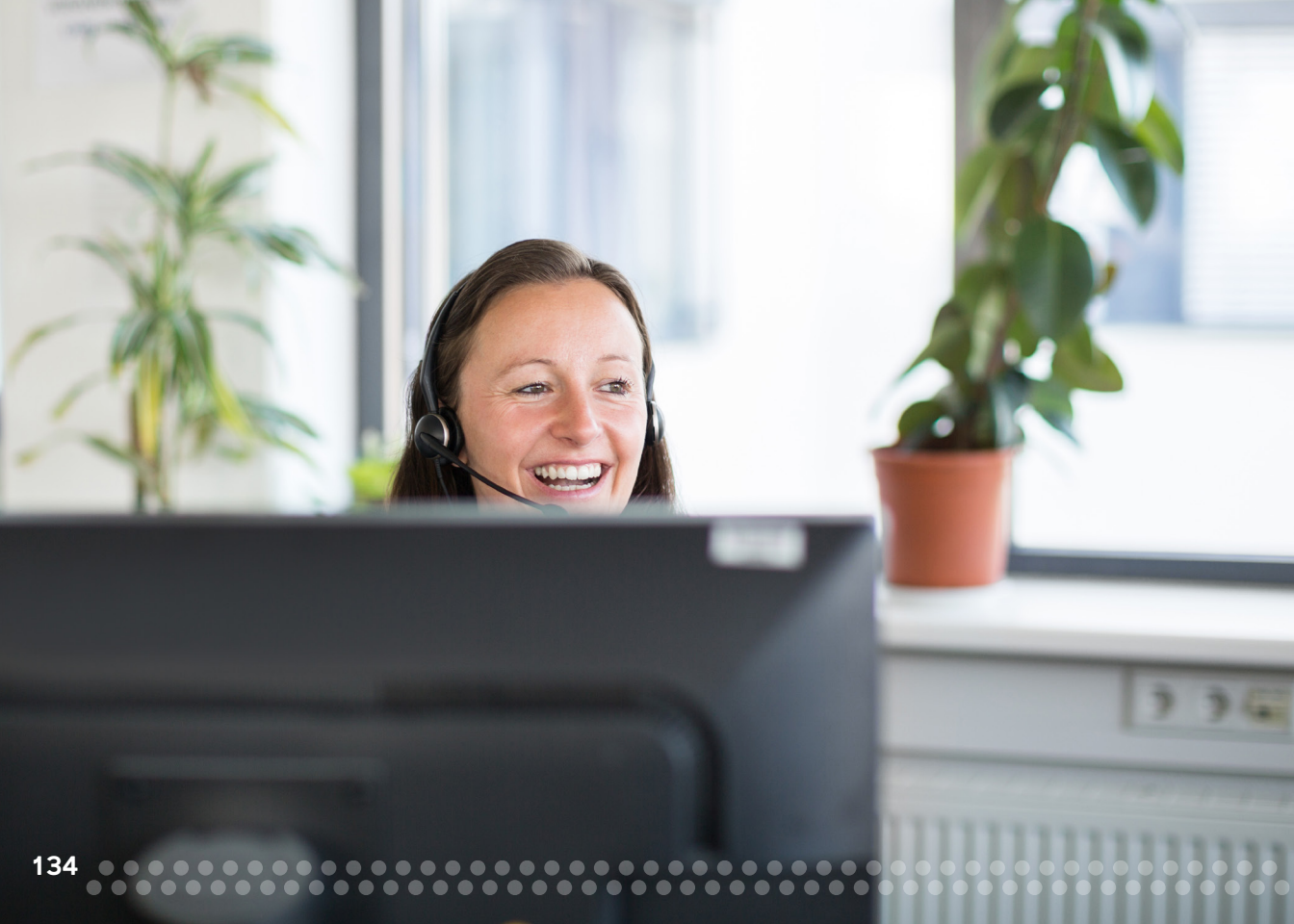
Customer Service

Customer service is the most direct way to solve customer problems. When done well, it is also a competitive advantage.

You can better serve your customers when you educate yourself on their business, their industry and their competitors. Share that knowledge with your entire team.

Give your customer service team a philosophy instead of a script. This will help them be more efficient and personable when interacting with customers.

Our customer service philosophy is: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Customer service is most effective when team members have quick access to customer data and can anticipate the customer's desired outcome.

Be proactive in getting customer feedback. Reach out to your customers first, before they have a problem.

No customer complaint should be viewed in a vacuum. Track every complaint, get additional feedback when you can, and identify trends.

Social media is critical for customer service. Monitor, engage and respond quickly. It's important that customers know they have been heard.

The buyer's journey is no longer guided. Create positive experiences for whatever journey they choose to take.

First to touch rule: The moment someone becomes aware of a customer complaint, that person is responsible for keeping that customer satisfied. Avoid the run around.

Help your customers look good online: Share their content, promote their events and recommend them.

The most critical ability your customer service team needs is the power to fix issues.

Community Engagement

As a vital member of the community, you are in a unique position to contribute to the greater good.

Align company's 'giving' strategies with its mission. Make a greater impact by contributing time and resources to local organizations that share your goals.

When your business is up-front about how it engages with the community, requests for support that fall outside of your stated mission are easier to respectfully decline.

When identifying potential organizations to include in your community engagement plans, start by considering what the organization's overall approach is.

Relief

Organizations that provide direct relief to those in need. These may include food pantries, shelters and the like.

Improvement

Organizations that seek to improve people's circumstances. These may include health, housing, or employment.

Reform

Organizations that encourage change, especially as it relates to social issues.

Response

Organizations, either permanent or temporary, that respond to specific events such as natural disasters.

Look beyond 'one-and-done' volunteer opportunities. Instead, seek ongoing engagements that can provide a transformative experience for all involved.

Match your community engagement plans with employee skill sets (or lack thereof). Use volunteer opportunities to hone existing employee skills or to create new ones.

Skills your team can share:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Skills your team needs to develop:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Your company's written business policies need not be limited to processes. Consider including policies that can help align business strategies with community goals.

Consider your customer's values in your philanthropic initiatives. Partnering with customers in community-based programs helps build stronger business relationships.

Which customers could you work with on joint philanthropic or volunteer initiatives?

Customer

Community opportunity

Date a community organization before you marry them. Get to know each other first — through smaller initiatives — to confirm that your values and interests are in sync.

You do not need a lot of money to build relationships within your community. Non-monetary efforts, such as promoting employee time off to volunteer, can help create goodwill.

Report volunteerism in terms of dollars and cents. Expressing hours volunteered in monetary values helps highlight the company's efforts as a tangible investment.

Having employees who are involved in the community — with your support — are often happier, more engaged at work, and less likely to leave.

Notes:

Notes:

Let's Get to Work On
Your Business.

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