

Second Step to a Simpler Business

By David Brewster

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If you have made the commitment to making your business less complicated (see <http://www.businesssimplification.com.au/articles/issue7vol2.htm>), the next thing you need to work on is Clarity. Clarity and simplicity are soul mates. You can't have one without the other. But there is a lot more to achieving clarity than writing down a vision statement.

When I learned to drive a car, I was lucky enough to have a really good instructor. Ron was interested in teaching me how to drive – not just how to pass the test. He was one of those uncompromising sorts – very hard to please. But his lessons remain with me still: in particular his constant emphasis on the need for clarity while driving.

Ron wasn't too concerned with destination. I guess it's something we take for granted when we drive. While we can't do that in business, we need to limit the amount of time and effort we devote to getting it 'just right'.

Ron's hobby-horse was 'clarity-in-motion'. He was always reminding me to keep looking around as I drove along. Keep checking the mirrors. Watch the side streets for traffic. Look down the road – not just at the car in front. Keep an eye on the gauges – especially the speedometer. Expect the unexpected.

The message was that if you don't work constantly at maintaining clarity as you drive, you can get into complex – and dangerous – situations without warning.

The business equivalent of 'clarity-in-motion' is maintaining clarity on a day-to-day basis. How were sales yesterday? How are your receivables looking? What work do you have on now, and will it be finished on time? What's in the pipeline? How are stock levels? Are your people happy? Do they know what they are expected to do? The list is endless.

The trick is knowing which critical aspects of your business you need to be clear about – and having systems in place to provide you that clarity. It doesn't mean burying yourself in the detail.

Ron taught me to watch my speed constantly. Speed is critically important when motoring and it is something the driver has direct control over.

When it came to engine temperature, Ron told me to check it once in a while. Cars have built in systems to keep temperature under control automatically. I only needed to worry about it if it got out of hand. (Imagine how complicated driving would be if we didn't have those systems in place!)

If you want to minimise the complexity in your business, you need clarity of direction. But just as importantly, you need to maintain 'clarity-in-motion'. To create an environment in which clarity exists on a 'day-to-day' level. It requires constant work – but it has to be better than going to sleep at the wheel.

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