

Retail Momentum – Which Side of Momentum Are You On?

By Bob Steele

The *Encarta* dictionary defines momentum as “the capacity for progressive development. The power to increase or develop at an ever-growing pace. The speed or force of forward movement of an object.” Does that sound like what is happening in your retail store? Or do some of following phrases more closely describe your store: Steady as she goes; let’s not rock the boat; or the ever-popular we’ve always done it that way.

In a recent series of Spring Arbor Business Solutions Seminars, we challenged retailers to increase their retail momentum. One of the ways we did that was by asking stores to ponder a bit on the phrase popularized by Dr. Phil (and given a new momentum of its own): If you always do what you always did, you’ll always get what you always got. It sounds simple, but it’s powerful. Let’s explore that a little bit.

As an industry and as individual stores, we need to ask ourselves if our retail momentum has slowed down. Are we doing the same things we’ve always done and yet expecting entirely different results? Will that work for us on an ongoing basis? Are we advertising the same way to the same

people as we did five years ago and expecting different results? Are we managing our employees with the same personnel manual we used 10 years ago and expecting it to meet the expectations of newer employees? Are we buying product the same way we always have and expecting the gross margin to improve? Are we at the same technology level we’ve always been at and can’t understand why we can’t cut labor costs?

There are dozens of similar questions we must ask ourselves in order to regain our retail momentum. In this first article for *Spring Arbor Retailer*, I want to look at some of the general business principles we should be following:

Measure and Monitor

One of the most important themes running through every management seminar I have developed and presented is called performance management. Simply stated, performance management means keeping score.

When we relax and entertain ourselves through involvement in sports activities, we generally keep score of some type, even if it’s just for fun. We want to know how we did. The next time we perform that activity, we often compare ourselves to how well we did the last time.

Now, what about your business/ ministries? How good of a job are you doing of keeping score? Are you

measuring and monitoring your business performance? Do you know if you are improving month by month, quarter by quarter and year by year?

In our current series of Retail Momentum seminars titled Inventory Management –Best Practices, we provide attendee’s with a StoreScore©. This score card identifies seven key result areas that should be measured and monitored regularly. The score card is designed to compare your results over successive years as well as comparing your store to bookstore industry averages of similar stores. For a sample of the score card, go to the TrinityGroup Web site at www.trinitygroup.biz/download. You are welcome to download a copy for yourself.

One of the most important things you can do to help improve the health of your store and increase your retail momentum is to measure and monitor your results. Just doing “things” is not enough, you need to measure and improve on them. You need to focus on results, not just activities.

Determining to Succeed

Have you ever heard the statement some succeed because they are destined to but most succeed because they are determined to? Fate seldom plays a role in success,

at least not in our market sector. It’s hard work! More often, determination, hard work, goals, mini-failures, mini-successes and many other factors determine success. Sure, fate happens, but will it happen to you? Can any of us in Christian retail afford to wait for fate to come and crown us successful?

How determined are you to succeed? Do you have a plan? Are you working your plan? Are you measuring and monitoring the results of your plan?

A Business or a Ministry?

To some of you, all of this probably sounds a little overwhelming. Many of you got involved in bookselling for the ministry. So did I, and I still am. In the spring of 1971, the faithful ministry of a bookseller in a small Christian bookstore in Allendale, New Jersey, changed my destiny—eternally and professionally. In addition to new life in Christ, I developed another passion—the desire to impact others in the manner in which I had been impacted—through the ministry of Christian products and bookstores. Little did I know when I first volunteered in that store that it would lead to a lifelong career in the Christian products industry.

Today, I educate because I want to minister. I educate booksellers

because they are in the business/ ministry of providing Christian products. But I have also found the following statement to be painfully true: if you don't run your ministry like a business, you won't be in business to minister.

Maintaining retail momentum in today's marketplace is a difficult task. There is a channel shift of Christian products from conventional Christian retailers to general trade retailers and big boxes. These stores are traditionally better-equipped as retailers and have access to more resources. If the Christian products retail industry is to be a viable business in the future, we must embrace the future, be willing to adapt to a changing environment and educate ourselves.

Remember, if you always do what you always did, you'll always get what you always got. For those who are conservative industry thinkers, remember that staying in a safe position may be the riskiest move of all.

Bob Steele, who conducted the original Business Solutions Seminars for Spring Arbor from 1980-1986, has presented more than 400 business and training seminars in multiple business sectors including automotive, manufacturing, banking, engineering, government and retail. His expanded scope brings balance and additional experience to

the marketplace. Bob will develop and present the Retail Momentum Seminar Series as well as contribute articles related to the seminar series in future issues of Spring Arbor Retailer.