

IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

By Robert J. Tamasy

When a business gets started, the hope is that it will attract customers or clients. But once that's assured, the question becomes, "How can we grow?" followed by, "How much should we grow?" While answers to both questions vary by company, growth is rarely regarded as a bad thing. The bigger the better, right? More profits. Greater impact. Bigger brand. Sometimes, however, it might be wise to ask a different question: "How big is too big?"

This came to mind after reading a post by marketing blogger Seth Godin. In it he cited a huge hotel in a large U.S.A. city that has more than 1,000 rooms. I have a good idea of which one he was referring to, since I have been to one much like he described on a few occasions. We might be tempted to wonder, what could be bad about a lavish, ornate hotel with more than 1,000 rooms?

As Godin pointed out, the hotel check-in line was always long, requiring a lengthy wait for guests arriving or preparing to depart. The fully equipped fitness center was usually filled, as early as 5 a.m., meaning the likelihood of getting a rigorous workout that fits into one's schedule is far from certain. And as for personal service, there is virtually no possibility of any hotel staff member knowing, much less greeting, a guest by name or even recognizing their face.

Establishments like that become big because they generate money. Shareholders are happy. Their financial resources allow them to offer amenities smaller establishments could only dream about. But as Godin asked, is being bigger most important, or is striving to become better, regardless of size, the key?

I sometimes shop at the so-called "big-box stores," where they can buy large quantities of products and offer them more cheaply than competitors. That has some appeal. But invariably, these stores are not known for customer service. Sometimes finding an employee to ask for help seems impossible. So for me as the consumer, bigger definitely is not always better.

That is not to say growth, and becoming bigger, is universally bad. But it should be pursued with caution, and with a clearly thought-out plan on how to avoid letting "bigness" undermine the fundamental values that helped the business become established and prosperous from the start. Here are principles from the Bible, some of them very familiar, that might be helpful to consider:

Service should always remain paramount. The best companies are known for excellent service, as well as products. When people are served well, they become repeat customers. *"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28).

Commitment to meet or even exceed expectations. In business we always hope for a profitable day, but sometimes committing to doing the best for the customer is the greatest reward, with the highest return rate. *"... 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'"* (Acts 20:35).

Focus on the mission. We can entertain great dreams of growth, but at what point will growth make it difficult to remain true to the corporate mission and values? *"A discerning man keeps wisdom in view, but a fool's eyes wander to the ends of the earth"* (Proverbs 17:24).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is your first reaction when you hear the statement, “Bigger is better”?
2. Can you think of examples when being bigger did result in making for a better company, not just one that reaps higher profits? Explain your answer.
3. How can a business owner, or corporate leadership team, go about evaluating how to grow, as well as being able to discern at what point continued growth could become a liability?
4. Maybe you are not a business owner, or even a top executive that must wrestle with corporate growth issues. However, we all must consider growth issues as they affect us personally and professionally: How much more work should I or can I take on? Should I strive for that promotion, even if it might require sacrificing time and energy I can now devote to family or personal interests?

What other questions are worth asking ourselves as we ponder opportunities – or temptations – for personal and professional growth?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 11:14, 18:15, 20:5; Matthew 4:42-44, 6:19-21,33, 19:19; Galatians 5:13-14