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WHAT HAS ROWING TAUGHT ME ABOUT BUSINESS?

A LOT; BUT LET ME GIVE YOU THE BACKGROUND.

I have only been rowing for about a year, so I am a complete novice, however, both my children are considerably more experienced, having been rowing for the last 5 years.

This has provided me with some valuable insight into the rigging and de-rigging boats whilst navigating the wind and rain that dominates Northern Irish weather.

So, what made me want to become a rower? It looked like fun, but also September for me is the time when I plan my forthcoming New Year's resolutions as my kids back into routine and knowing that the next New Year will be here in a flash.

Like many of us post-Covid, I had decided it was time to get fit - or fitter - to help improve my quality of life, at home as well as at work. I was easily persuaded to sign up for family membership at the Boat Club's registration day and I was able to avail of the adult's 'learn to row' course. After my first session I can honestly say that I was hooked and have since become a regular on the Bann on a Sunday morning.

I must confess that naively I thought rowing really couldn't be that hard - it would be just a case of jumping and "row, row, row your boat" as I used to sing to the kids. I was wrong. However, with perseverance came results. And satisfaction. The more time I have spent in the boat, learning, and growing, either with a crew or on my own, it has really highlighted to me how businesses could take a leaf out of the rower's handbook to guide them through these continuing challenging economic times.

My Sunday morning observations from the River Bann include:

1. BALANCE

If you have ever studied a racing rowing boat, they are incredibly thin and also very lightweight, which means small movements can quickly create imbalance. One of the basic rules of rowing is having both your hands and as a subsequence, your oars, being held at the same height. This also balances the boat and moving one side either way can easily cause the boat to tip.

Similarly in the business world, does your company have balance? This could be in relation to the products or services you provide, is there enough balance in your customers or your value proposition?

We all witnessed niche businesses suffering during the Covid pandemic when certain sectors faced heavy restrictions. Perhaps a question to consider in your business is, can we move our hands quickly to rebalance the boat? Do your people have the capacity and process to allow them to be innovative and think like those businesses during the pandemic to act quickly and re-purpose their materials?



2. SMALL INCREMENTAL CHANGES

In my first few weeks of learning, I felt there were so many different elements to learn - when to move your arms, when to pull the oars, when to push your body down the boat, to name a few. Whilst not yet perfect, practicing over and over again alongside the assistance of a coach guiding and suggesting small incremental changes each week, has enabled me to really enjoy my mornings gliding down the river.

During these challenging economic times, reviewing what is happening in each section of the business and looking for those small incremental changes is key to keeping costs and processes as efficient as possible. The same method equally applies to the businesses tax requirements, are there any tax reliefs that are not being maximised or are there compliance requirements in overseas jurisdictions that could create expensive issues in the future?

3. TIPPING IN

As my confidence and technique improved, I started to row alone in a single scull, which allows little room for error. I took an unexpected swim back in June when a fishing boat came quite close on the river, moved my hands too quickly and was underwater in seconds.

However, just like a child riding a bike, I knew I

needed to get back in the boat as soon as possible.

Business resilience is imperative for creating success and should be ingrained within the culture of the business across all departments. Businesses that have good resilience, whether that is financial, operational, or technological, are much more agile when facing unforeseen circumstances or sudden opportunities.

4. TEAM

Rowing in a crew boat, either as double, quad or an eight, enforces good communication and for each rower to be focused on what is happening in the boat.

Similarly with any team, if the whole crew are not aligned and willing to put in the same effort, the boat or project will not go as fast or as smoothly as it should. Additionally, each seat in the boat has a specific role within the crew, whether that is setting the pace or steering.

Just as in business, everyone has a specific role to play to reach a common goal. Making sure that the business goals are clear and are communicated to all within the business should, like the boat crew, be a recipe for success.

It is now back to winter training and climbing into the boat on the cold, foggy miserable mornings to get the kilometres in for the 'Head' racing season. Although as the saying goes, "Winter training equals Summer success", a salutary lesson, that putting the hard work in when its needed most, will help you enjoy the results when they come. This is true in life and business and I for one will be looking forward to the short distance regatta season come Spring, knowing the hard work and effort this Sunday will make this Spring all the better.

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