

## 4 Corners to Building a Sustainable Business

By David W. Cooke

Why does one company grow while another fails during an economic crisis? In its simplest terms, it comes down to vision, flexibility, value, and connectivity. Having had the opportunity to work in several different geographic regions this past year, I have had the pleasure of observing how successful businesses operate regardless of what they do or where they are located. While leadership and corporate culture are important, it is these four components that define a business's success:

1. **Vision:** Vision is having a clear direction of where the business is going, with leadership and management providing a consistent message throughout the organization of what that direction is and why that path is critical to the business. This is analogous to a cruise. When the chartered course is clearly charted and defined, the destination is always attainable. Even in the midst of a storm, simply maintaining focusing on the destination enables the captain and the crew to get there. Simply heading out of port for a "three hour tour" could put your business on Gilligan's Island as a result of the missing vision. You may survive; but you are certainly "lost."
2. **Flexibility:** Businesses need to know how to anticipate and maneuver away from disaster before it strikes. Failing businesses lack vision and flexibility and stay on course, oblivious to the dangers and the obstacles in front of them. There is a clear and easy highway from Detroit to Grand Rapids, Michigan. However, if I-96 is suddenly closed, a flexible and nimble business would sense the obstacles and get off the highway and find a new way to Grand Rapids. The rigid or myopic business drives right to the obstacle and then sits in traffic with the rest of the lost and wonders how they are going to get to Grand Rapids now. There is more than one way to the road to success, knowing when to get off the easy road without losing your way is the key to sustainable success, even in times of crisis.
3. **Value:** This is what dooms every business-not knowing what their true value proposition is. There are three things companies offer their clients-product/service, experience/capability, and value. 100% of the lost think that the first two are the differentiators. They are not. Your competitors promote the same things you do when they are talking about their business to your clients. Just because you think your business is different, does not make it so. What makes your business different is that unique value that you bring to the client relationship. Identifying that value is not done in a brainstorming or vision session with your marketing team or your leadership group. No. It starts by finding out from your best clients why they do business with you and what you bring to the relationship that they value. Ask enough clients and you will identify that common thread that truly makes your business special. Then you can go out and claim your greatness. Truly knowing what that value is makes your message all that more powerful. And, it is that component that you can leverage when times get tough. When a business does not know what their unique value is, a bad cycle is going to blow them completely off course.
4. **Connectivity:** Your relationship with your clients and your suppliers is the key to everything. Too many companies simply do business with their clients and suppliers. Great businesses built strategic connections with their clients and suppliers. Effective client relationships are so interdependent and interwoven that it would be difficult to break them apart because of the collective value everyone brings to the game. The problem is that businesses are so focused on selling their stuff instead of really identifying and solving problems, that they become suppliers and not solutions based resources. When the conversation comes around regarding your value to your clients it becomes a difficult one because

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you have no idea if your client would even be able to answer the question. If you are uncomfortable going to your customer and discussing your value as it relates to your performance, your business is already at competitive risk. If this is the case, you have probably positioned yourself as a supplier and not a solutions based resource. Look out—there's a storm coming!

#### ***About the Author***

*Dave Cooke is the Founder of Strategic Resource Group, LLC ([www.salescooke.com](http://www.salescooke.com)) - a business committed to helping businesses find the sustainable and profitable road to growth through effective sales strategies. He leverages his 25 years of sales and marketing experience in conjunction with effective social media tools to educate and enlighten his clients and his contacts with a direct and informative approach to effective business and sales tactics. He is most famous for his sales persona, Sales Cooke, and has an active blog and video blog that can be found at <http://www.salescooke.com>. Dave is also a member of the cast of The John Adam Show heard weekly in the Phoenix, AZ market.*

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