

Who's Winning?

There is an expression that the person who wins the silver is the #1 loser. Think about that for a moment. No one can always be best. The top dozen or more athletes in the world can beat each other on any given day, yet on the one day that counts, only one will be considered a winner and the others, even though they too are the best in the world, are considered losers.

That's just the way it is, right? Is that a healthy way to live your life? Yet in business, it is becoming the norm. Who had the best quarter? Who is the top sales producer? Who had the largest revenue increase, market share growth or any one of a dozen other competing arenas?

It used to frustrate me when my salespeople would want to focus on what the competition was doing. They would worry about their latest ad campaign, the most recent price and service options available. They expected we should change our course to "compete" with other salespeople; they wanted to imitate the competition.

We all need ways to measure how we are doing. I have always been very competitive but my measurements were with my own past performance. I never worried about how everyone else was doing, so this win/lose mentality bothered me. I never really understood why *I* thought that way or why *others* thought their way until I read a book called "*The Other 90%*". It discussed the difference between competing and excelling.

Competition, it explained, has an outer focus while excelling is inner focused. Being outer focused only serves to increase your stress level and prevents you from being your absolute best. When you compete with yourself, you feel the satisfaction of being at your best no matter what others are doing. The president of Toyota says he knows what world market share he wants to have in five years, but he really doesn't care if he is first or 23rd. He is inner-focused.

What the competition does is out of your control. How you choose to excel is within your control. Runners with inner focus who compete only with their own best time can all be perceived as winners, while the runner who is focused on others competes with the entire field for which there can be only one winner. The golfer who compares their game to their handicap will be more often satisfied than the golfer who compares their game to other players. Unless you are playing for money why not just enjoy the game? Inner focused players will consistently enjoy the game, and frankly, they are most often easier to golf with!

When you compete, you move in a direction chosen by others. When you excel, you move in a direction of your choice.

Take music for example. Several artists compete for the number one record while others carve their own niche and don't have to compete at all. I cannot name one Grateful Dead song, yet I have heard of them and know they had an almost cult-like following. The leader, Jerry Garcia once said, "You do not merely want to be considered just the best of the best. You want to be considered the only one who does what you do." Who

do you think enjoys life more, the competitive artist who only occasionally hits the number one spot, or the one who has a constant following? How can this apply to your industry, business or profession? Sometimes it is the fear of striking out in our own direction that holds us back.

Competing is a zero sum game; there are winners and losers. In competitive sports, there is only one winner. Excelling has a positive focus. There can be more than one winner. People can simply choose to win in different ways.

I now understand why the discussions about competition had bothered me. My staff wanted me to imitate the competition. I wanted us to march to the beat of our own drum. Knowing what the competition was doing was important in creating the context of the marketplace but as long as our focus was only on competing, we could never excel because we were always waiting for others to make the next move in order to measure ourselves against them. When we quit worrying about their stats and began focusing on the areas in which we wanted to excel, our company really took off.

In order to win, someone has to lose. We waste energy thinking about what we can do to slow the competition down. Companies that use comparison evaluation to determine who will be promoted, cause employees to focus on what the competition is doing. Not only is it important for them to do well, but it is also just as important to have the competition seen as not doing well. Cooperation deteriorates as gossip and politics enter the office.

Recent studies report that almost half of all work time may be wasted due to mistrust. **50% of all work time!** Change that for your organization. Conduct a brain storming session and discover how to develop a culture that fosters excelling so everyone on your team can be a winner.