

Mission Ready

Volume 2, Issue 12

December 1, 2000

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Virtue of Thinking Small

Most businesses do not like to be thought of as "small" - by their customers, their competitors, or by their own employees. Even companies, which compete within very limited, specialized markets, want to be perceived as the biggest frog in that specific pond. "Smallness" is only acceptable in the minds of most CEOs as a starting point, the assumption being that we may be small now, but that will soon change. Smallness is only pleasant to talk about in nostalgic terms, after the condition has been remedied, as in "Here's an old photo of our original 600 sq. ft. Production Area; we've certainly come a long way."

For those of you who currently represent, manage, or own small companies - and who stutter and stammer whenever asked by a customer to compare your company to your Godzilla-like competitors - we offer a pretty good model to keep in mind: the United States Marine Corps.

The Marines are the first to point out the vast differences in respective size *vis a vis* its competitors, the Army, Navy and Air Force. Rather than being shy about their relative smallness, the Marines positively revel in it. In fact, few organizations have ever made such a big deal about being small.

In their famous recruiting ads, what are the Marines looking for?

A Few Good Men and Women.

A *Few*, versus the *Many* who are sought after by the competing mega-services. A *Few*, suggesting that only a tiny percentage of those who hear the ad need apply (those who "have what it takes to be one of the Few, the Proud"). A *Few*, suggesting that the standards are higher and that a large portion of the *Many* would not make the grade.

Now that you're fortified with a little Marine Corps adrenaline, let's look at some of the very positive ways in which a prospective customer may very well view your relative smallness, compared to your competitors.

- Your customer may consider your organization more of a "family," where everybody knows each other's name and where things get done, as opposed to a vast conglomeration of disparate divisions with a bewildering number of departments and points of contact.
- Being smaller, your company creates the impression of having less overhead that the customer must subsidize.
- Because you're small, your customers may perceive fewer obstacles in the process of doing business with you, less red tape, etc.
- Your customers may think that you care more about their business than the bigger vendors, and that you may offer more handholding after the sale to *keep* their business.
- Being small, you give the impression to your customers of being dedicated to your core expertise, rather than trying to be all things to many customers in diverse markets.
- And, as corny as it sounds, there is something in the customer that roots for you, as you take on the bigger competitors; they fight the very same battle and they empathize.

So, we hope the Marine Corps' "elitist attitude" about its diminutive size inspires you "think small," at least for a while. Your organization will, of course, grow. But even when you become a Goliath in assets, we trust you will remain a David in attitude.