

Examine Your Myths!

Humans live on stories. We love to listen to stories, we learn more from stories than from facts, and we have our own story which gives us our own time and place. But sometimes, those stories are myths. When we try to run companies on myths, we run the risk that the myth no longer holds true for us. When we live by a myth, we are far more vulnerable to con men and being taken advantage of by people acting as if they are fulfilling the myth.

In 1519, the ruler of Mexico was troubled. His people had a myth that Quetzalcoatl, one of their gods, would return around that time. He heard that there was someone who had landed on the coast and was headed towards Mexico. While doubting the myth, the ruler still needed to honor that myth and welcomed Cortez opening the door for the Spanish Conquest of Mexico.

Myths are potent. We live on many of them. Hollywood has made fortunes on putting our myths into movies. Studies show that myths are forwarded on social media far faster than truth. We have conflicts as to which myths we teach in public schools. In most cases, the myths are not a problem. Some are even true.

Business myths abound in our culture. A simple search on the topic of business myths can find numerous lists of such myths. One such list starts by calling "the customer is always right" a myth. (If the customer is always right, then they will set the price at a point where you can't make a living.) The reason such lists abound is that there are so

many myths in business. It takes a lot of training to look at data and act on that data instead of myths and "gut feeling".

Learning to question our myths can be a potent business advantage. It requires us to question everything that we have assumed about how our business operates both internally and with the external world. Spending the time with actual data from our businesses can open our eyes to a number of issues, ideas, and new ways of operating that might be far more profitable.

What Would You Do Differently

Some questions that help break through our myths are: How would you operate if you had to start over? What would you do differently if you didn't have x requirement? If you had 15% more budget, what would you change, or 50% more? Who must we, as a company, become to be who we need to be? Why are we here to begin with? What matters more than money?

Questioning our myths is not an easy proposition. In many cases, we have so many expectations of how things should be that we can't see the possibilities in front of us. For example, many cities ticket and jail the homeless for littering. One city hires the homeless to clean up the place. The same effect is accomplished for far less money. A number of companies have made social actions their top priority and found, to their surprise, that they can be profitable. Others are doing what would be called "charity" but making a profit at it.

Every startup is about changing the reality in front of us because of a vision of what it could be. Question what we believe to be reality in order to see what really is and what we can do differently.

The Jungle Will Overtake a Garden

Anyone who has seen Angkor Wat or the images of how Mayan temples were discovered can see the power of the jungle to take over a fancy city. Trees are growing everywhere and huge temples got covered with dirt and vegetation. Even a lowly garden has weeds attacking it every week.

The same is true for any computer system. We like to think that we have this nice pretty garden. The reality is that we are fending off the attacks from the jungle just outside the hedge.

There are two ways that the jungle attacks a computer system. The first is the obvious attempts by weeds (hackers) to invade the garden and to plant their own seeds. Likewise, animals in the night invade and dig up the growing plants (people stealing data). Both are common problems for computer systems and gardens.

The second way is far more subtle. In gardens, we see plants that grew well a few years back are now struggling. Some plants no longer have vitality. Bushes have overgrown their place. The garden has aged and perhaps, not aged well. In short, the garden needs a revival.

Similarly, computer systems age. Sometimes, updates make old programs no longer function. Web sites we used to visit won't respond to our (old) browser. We see programs running on other systems that we wish we could have but can't. Our computer system needs a revival also. But that can be quite expensive.

Computer systems, like gardens, are often just a brief moment of clear land in a jungle that quickly reclaims it.

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Risky World

A journalist totally wired her house with smart devices to see if she would wind up with electronic servants. Instead, everything spied on her and could ask for help. Her final report is that the privacy risks are large but living with so many smart devices is "annoying as hell."

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