

A Lesson for the 4th of July: Teamwork is Everything

Description

If you own a business, you already know how vital a strong, vibrant, economically healthy community really is. Thriving communities attract talent, which attracts business, which attracts more talent, which attracts more business. It's a virtuous cycle.

As an entrepreneur, I've long been fascinated by the relationship between thriving communities and thriving businesses. Vibrant communities *always* have a strong local business presence. It's why we work hard to support Pensacola's business community through workshops, roundtables, and our EntreCon conference. And it's why, as I meet with communities across the country to talk about their journey to vibrancy I *always* emphasize the importance of business leaders, citizens, and government officials working together as a team to meet goals.

Teamwork. That's what I really want to talk about today. Throughout my career in business and in community development I have found that teamwork is the factor that makes the difference. Companies that emphasize (and live) the virtue of teamwork are the ones that succeed. And the same is true of communities. *Those who work together, win together.*

As Independence Day approaches, I've been thinking about how universal and timeless this truth is. The need for cooperation and teamwork seems to be baked into the human experience. America may pride itself on rugged individualism but this is more myth than truth. After all, a nation is really a big collection of communities—not a loose affiliation of individuals.

Truthfully, it was the spirit of interdependence—even more so than independence—that built our nation. Our ancestors had to work together, share what they had, and rely on each other when times were tough. And when it was time to break away from England, our nation's founders had to work together in a similar fashion when they decided to bring America into being.

Early communities needed each other and that drove a lot of their interactions. We went through a period of time where we started to believe we didn't need each other and that clearly isn't true. We now realize that working together is the only way we can make our cities and towns thrive.

There is quite a bit today's communities can learn from our ancestors as we seek to move forward with positive change. Here are a few "history lessons" we can all benefit from.

THE HISTORY LESSON: **Our founders set aside their self-interests and created something that worked for everyone.** Lots of different professions, industries, and interests were present at the birth of America. Cabinet makers weren't fixated only on the wood industry, nor silver smiths on the silver trade. Everyone was fired up to contribute to something bigger than themselves. They bought into the overarching mission, and weren't bogged down by endless debate over the short-term costs of their plan of action.

THE TAKEAWAY: Don't be overly concerned with your own wellbeing. Setting aside your own short-term best interests may accomplish far more for everyone in the long run. Because a rising tide lifts all boats, this includes you.

THE HISTORY LESSON: **They didn't let ideological differences stop them from achieving something tangible.** Despite bitter disputes and differences of opinion, a group of people with little in common other than their shared determination that change was needed were able to get mobilized and get something done. While there was much to be decided about the way things would function in the new nation, they all recognized that there wouldn't even BE a new nation if they didn't set aside their disagreements and move the ball down the court.

THE TAKEAWAY: Know what matters. Don't get bogged down by petty disputes about how things should get done and let it sabotage the greater task at hand.

THE HISTORY LESSON: **They weren't constantly trying to steal the spotlight from each other. Instead, they agreed to let someone else be "the one in charge."** No one complained that John Hancock's signature was bigger than theirs, or that so-and-so got to sign the Declaration before they did. (Okay, it's possible, but we can see by the document that resides in the National Archives that it got done anyway!) The founders kept their focus on the ambitious mission/vision of standing up to one of the most powerful authorities in the world: the King of England.

THE TAKEAWAY: Don't always try to make it about yourself, or worry that your teammates are getting the spotlight. Keep the greater goal in mind and stay focused on that.

THE HISTORY LESSON: **The founders didn't wait on the government to "fix it." Instead, they joined together and took bold action at the local level.** The changes desired by American colonists weren't coming from Great Britain. And so, in the summer of 1776 delegates from each of the Thirteen Colonies took it upon themselves to challenge British authorities and make change happen—their way.

THE TAKEAWAY: Remember that citizen-powered change is the most powerful change. If it's to be, it's up to you and me, not government agencies. (Local governments tend not to have the budget to drive fundamental change, and due to election cycles, officials come and go. Many won't be around to see long term projects through.)

Whether you're a business leader or a citizen (and of course business leaders are both), I'd like to leave you with a few tips on how make your community closer and more connected:

- Hold a block party and get to know your neighbors.
- Join a neighborhood association. If you don't have one, start one. When neighbors band together, amazing things can happen. (This is why the Pensacola Center for Civic Engagement made "[The Next-Level Neighborhood Organization](#)" a cornerstone of its course offerings.)
- Show up to civic meetings. Research when and where your local government meets. Or find causes and groups in your community that are important to you and attend their meetings.
- Start a social media page to solicit others in working toward change.
- Always be looking for ways to bring in different groups. If they have fundamental cultural or political differences from you or most of your group, so much the better.
- Attend community events like street festivals, rallies, school fundraisers. These gatherings are great opportunities to talk to people whose paths you might not otherwise cross.
- Make sure you eat, shop, and play locally. Local companies, including new and small businesses, are the backbone of your community. Yes, government should make it easy for them to thrive, but that's only part of the equation. Whenever possible, spend your dollars at home!
- If you're a small business owner, join the local Chamber... This will create great networking opportunities for your business and forge strong relationships with other business owners.
- ...and find creative ways to partner with other small businesses in the community. For example, a chiropractor might refer patients to a local acupuncturist (and vice versa).
- Look for ways to get small business owners galvanized and working toward a stronger community. This is a natural role for them. They create jobs and keep dollars circulating locally. Their owners live there. Their kids go to school there. They care about what happens.
- Find and narrate the bright spots. Too often we look at our communities with an eye for what's going wrong. Instead, look for what's going right. Positivity, like negativity, is powerful! What we focus on multiplies.

Finally, spend this 4th trying to think more like America's founders. I'm not saying they were perfect. They were far from it, as we are. But one thing they got right was the knowledge that they needed to work together for a common cause. Teamwork is a powerful force. We couldn't have built a nation without it, and we can't build a better community without it either.

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