

***Renowned Entrepreneurs Views on
How to Run Competitive Businesses***



Competitiveness guru Michael Porter stated that “A strategy delineates a territory in which a company seeks to be unique.” Within our local context, most of the key sectors operate within open markets. This means that there are no barriers to entry and as such businesses can enter the market without any restrictions. Therefore in any given sector, there are several competitors. One district may have more than one restaurant, barber, clothing store etc. Running a successful and competitive business involves being strategic about everything including the choice of employees to your accounting practices.

The following are out of the box ideas that these global business tigers have instituted within their respective businesses. Richard Branson founder of Virgin Atlantic, is one of Britain's and the world's most successful entrepreneurs. His maverick style has taken him to extremes, not only in business but also in pleasure, making him a global brand. In competing in business, he stated the following:

"It's not unusual for an entrepreneur to become overly preoccupied with what his competitors are up to. By doing market research on your competitors, you can work out exactly how to provide a product or service that is superior. This is the reason that I sometimes fly on other airlines - often, great ideas are sparked when you notice a problem that a competitor faces and try to find a good solution yourself."

He believes that businesses should keep an eye on their competition while remaining focused on their team, products and services. Companies that do not practice this, will always be a step behind, and this can foster a culture that is, at its core reactionary. He maintains that businesses that are reactionary forgo innovation and can quickly become irrelevant to consumers. It becomes pointless to purchase a product/ service that another company has already done better. He further adds that companies should show ambition and put effort into creativity and focus on the next big thing which will allow the company to emerge as the one that other businesses want to copy.

The late Steve Jobs creative entrepreneur and pioneer of the microcomputer revolution gave this advice in marketing a business:

"One of the greatest jobs of marketing that the universe has ever seen is Nike. Remember, Nike sells a commodity. They sell shoes! And yet, when you think of Nike you feel something different than a shoe company. In their ads, as you know, they don't ever talk about the product. They don't

ever tell you about their air soles and why they are better than Reebok's air soles. They honor great athletes. And they honor great athletics. That's who they are, that's what they are about!"

And so, in working on Apple's marketing strategy they focused on what their customers want to know about them, what they stand for and where do they fit in this world. Therefore, the marketing strategy focused on Apple's core value- people with passion can change the world for the better. The company has had an opportunity to work with people who have this passion for example software developers, with customers, who have done it in some big, and some small ways. Apple has the philosophy that, in this world, people can change it for the better. And that those people who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones that actually do. And so, their first brand marketing campaign focused on getting back to this core value.

Tony Hsieh the entrepreneur and mastermind behind the \$1.2 Billion powerhouse online shoe company Zappos stated *"Great things will happen if you make employees happy. It's like a playground at the Zappos headquarters."* Tony said his employees are a little fun and very creative. One of the company's core values is to create fun and stimulate creativity. They really recognize and celebrate each person's individuality and they want for their true personality to shine in the work place. *"This is one of the keys to how to run a successful business."*

Tony was approached to sell shoes online. He thought "it sounded like the poster child of bad internet ideas." But it was the most exciting business from a growth perspective and he really liked the people. So he jumped on board as CEO, and run the company differently in order to ensure that the company's culture did not go downhill. He said if he had to go into an office, it would be with people he would choose to be around, not just for business purposes.

Tony ensured that his employees were happy by offering free lunch in the cafeteria, covering all medical benefits and even supplying a life coach to help employees reach their goals. Fortune magazine named Zappos as one of the top 10 companies to work for. Tony said “It is really more than a place to work. It is a lifestyle. The employees hangout with each other after work not because they are forced to but because they actually choose to.”

In conclusion, it is important that our local businesses understand how to strategize to build better businesses. The complacent business that has enjoyed advantages in the past may very soon find that it is overtaken by hungrier, fast-moving competitors. Businesses will need to implement strategies to enable them to be more competitive. They should strive for excellence in order to face fierce competition and more importantly for survival. This effort to outperform their competitors supports productivity and competitiveness which contributes to overall economic growth.

About the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC)

Established in October 2013, The National Competitiveness and Productivity Council (NCPC) is responsible for the identification of key issues related to competitiveness and productivity in Saint Lucia.

The NCPC and its Technical Secretariat is committed to providing the necessary advocacy and research to produce timely and effective recommendations to policymakers on issues that affect both competitiveness and productivity on island. For more information about productivity or on the NCPC, visit www.stluciancpc.org; www.facebook.com/stluciancpc, call 468-5571/5576, send an e-mail to stluciancpc@gmail.com or visit our office on the 2nd Floor of the Financial Centre on Bridge Street.