

Chapter 7 – Stepping Stones: getting the right help

It's plain and simple: we must get this part right. It doesn't matter how well you've started, it's game over if you screw up this stage. After all your hard work to reach this point, you simply mustn't crash and burn now. This chapter is going to ensure you can answer a critical question during the development of your business: 'How do I get the right help, at the right time, and at the right price? Get the right help and your business will grow exponentially. Fail to find the right help and you can kiss all those plans of yours goodbye. As we're about to discover, it's a cruel, do-or-die business.

Time to change

As I looked out of my office I could see our marketing director making his way across the floor. He looked exhausted. He'd just returned from the final meeting with our direct mail supplier, a company that had been with us since the launch of our business, one that had been integral to our survival and growth over the previous three years.

The meeting had been the culmination of several months of heated discussions. He had finally told them that we would no longer be working with them. We'd achieved our objective but our marketing director had received a torrent of abuse in return.

The previous few months had seen the supplier try to play on our heart strings ('We helped you to grow your business'), play on our sympathies ('You just used us as stepping stones'), play on our fears ('No-one else knows your business like we do – everything will fall apart') and even try to bluff ('We are the best in the industry').

We hadn't reached this point lightly. We'd genuinely looked for ways during the previous months to continue to work together, through price restructuring, changing roles, etc. But there was simply no way that this supplier could service our changing needs and offer us a price that was competitive on the enormous volumes of mail we were now sending every week. As soon as I realised this, the die was cast and they had to go. It was time to

change.

Was the supplier a 'stepping stone'? Damn right. Heartless? Ruthless? Maybe from one perspective. Should we have felt guilty about doing this? Absolutely not.

Listen up, because we've touched on a fundamental principle that you need to learn and apply at all stages of business development when dealing with those that are helping you. Your job is to survive and grow the business, service your customers as best you can, and protect your employees.

You're going to need to be brutal and ruthless in the pursuit of this objective. There is absolutely no scope for sentimentality in this game. You need to be constantly reviewing anyone or anything assisting you. Who is best-suited to help? Who can best get you through the next stage? You need to be ruthless not because I want to turn you into some Machiavellian megalomaniac but because the survival of your business depends on it.

Help can come in three forms: employees, suppliers and business partners. It's critical that in each category we understand what the ideal characteristics are, where to locate them and how to attract and motivate them – and if and when you need to upgrade them and move on.