

## Seven Keys To Get Out Of A Rut

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Rut -- a routine procedure, situation, or way of life that has become uninteresting and tiresome... And not surprisingly, unprofitable.

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Dr. Edward Debono suggests that thoughts are pathways literally "etched" in our brain as electrical connections that get strengthened each time we think them -- thus limiting our mental options. Just like cow paths. It all begins when one of the cows wanders home from the field along a new path. Being cows, others naturally follow, nicely beating down the grass. The next evening our intrepid cow is a bit less bold, and follows her own freshly trampled path, fellow cows in lockstep behind her. And so on, night after night, widening the path into a footpath, which over time becomes hardened into a dirt road?

More time passes and the road are paved into a street, then an avenue, a two-lane highway, and ultimately an interstate. By the time you come roaring up the onramp in your shiny SUV, your direction is all mapped out in front of you. There's no way to turn, and nowhere to go but towards the next exit.

If you want to chart a fresh direction you are going to have to grab the steering wheel and give it a hard, gut-wrenching yank to the right. And so it is with your thoughts and actions. Repeating them a few times all but insures you will comfortably repeat them indefinitely unless you take deliberate - possibly disruptive -- action to do otherwise.

Here are 7 rut busters I use with my business coaching clients that you can apply immediately to get yourself and your business out of a rut.

1. Shift your mindset from self to customer. Most business people think of themselves first. They craft product and service offers from their own perspective and consider themselves the beneficiaries of their actions.

While that's not wrong, to get out of your rut does this: put yourself into the mind of your customer. Who are these people anyway? What are they concerned about? What are they trying to accomplish?

If you were your customer, what would you think of that new product, marketing campaign, or mail piece? Are you selling your wonderful "stuff", or are you providing them tangible, meaningful benefits. Ask, "If I were the customer, would I care?" And if not, consider, "What WOULD I get excited about?"

2. Shift your mindset from customer to client. A customer is someone who buys your goods or services. The original meaning of client is entirely different: someone who is under your care and protection.

Now that's a switch, isn't it? If they're customers, your goal is to get them to buy something. But if you were to think of them as under your care - would you approach your business from another angle? How would you take care of them? How would you "protect" them? What new programs would you want to implement immediately?

3. Revisit your vision. Whenever I feel like I'm in a rut I return to my vision and I do 2 things. First, I make sure it still inspires me and that it is pointing me in the direction I want to go. Once sure, I put pen to paper and rewrite it. Not just once, but over and over. And I keep writing until I can't write it anymore because I'm jumping up and down with a new idea I must do something about right away.

4. Conduct a Survey If you don't know what to do next, ask your clients. (They are clients, aren't they?) Conduct a

survey about anything that interests you. Ask them what's bothering them. Ask them what they're stuck on. Ask them what they like about your company and what they'd like you to do next. Ask them about new features, or new products, or new services.

If you're not happy with your current customers, conduct a survey among the kind of people you'd like to have as customers. And, if you can't do that, conduct a survey online. Write an attractive search engine ad, promise something of value, and drive people to a survey page. Ask them anything you like - the answers will almost always provide you with a neat mind-shift.

5. Focus on building your strengths and dump your weaknesses. From the time we are little children we are taught to better ourselves by working on our weaknesses. This is often both frustrating and fruitless, and certainly not as much fun as practicing our strengths.

Try this on: What if you focused 100 percent of your energy on being world-class in those few things at which you are already very good and out-tasked or outsourced those things at which you were mediocre. Imagine if you never had to face any of those things again and could spend all your time doing the good stuff. Would that change the way you felt about your business? Would that bust you out of your rut?

6. Not if, but how. Think of that wild and crazy idea you had recently. The one where you said to yourself, "That would be great, but there's just no way." Well, I know there's no way - you just said so -- but if there was a way, what would it be? Answer that question as if you believed it was possible - probable even -- and then get busy making it real. That's power, you know -- turning your vision into reality. Talk about a breakthrough!

7. What are you willing to sacrifice? Some important things are more important than other important things, and trying to keep all those plates spinning in the air saps your vigor for the ones that truly matter. Dissipated energy - lethargy -- is one of the reasons we lie down in that rut in the first place, and dropping a few of those plates can really help things break loose.

So let go. Make the sacrifice. Clear your plate and give up some of those precious things you've been holding on to. Focus your vitality on plans which will really rock your world. Ruts? Who needs 'me?

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