

Commentary **Mark Richardson**

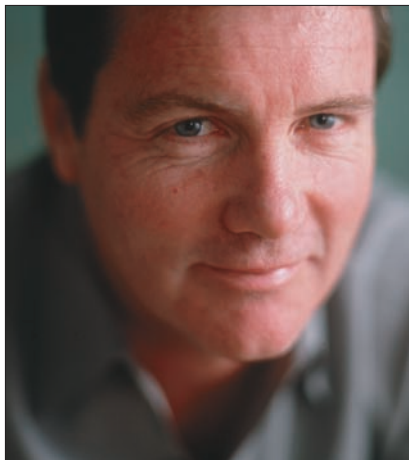
Pace Yourself

What is the right cadence for your business?

All businesses have a rhythm or cadence. One aspect with which most remodelers are familiar is productivity. As in manufacturing, an important part of a company's rhythm has to do with its ability to produce a certain amount of work or a certain number of products over a given period of time. A less recognized but often more important element has to do with a company's ability to adjust or change over a period of time to a new process or a new controlling idea.

DIFFERENT DRUMMERS

In a young company, business rhythm has a life of its own. Most owners of small companies react to the natural rhythm of the marketplace. Their companies grow and contract with the changing tide of the local or regional economy. Policies and procedures are habitual, tied more to the personality of the founding owner than to the changing needs of the business.



As a remodeling business and its owner mature, the rhythm of the business takes on more importance. Pace or cadence becomes especially important when

the business grows or when the owner decides it needs to grow. The larger the number of team members involved, the more critical it is that everyone understand the business's cadence. Without a coordinated effort, a business can easily be thrown off course. If a company's pace is too slow, it may miss opportunities; too fast, and it may stretch resources beyond reasonable limits.

ACROSS THE BOARD

Years ago, we adopted the theme "aggressive but realistic" to set the pace for our company and to keep its cadence in check.

When we measure our annual growth projections, for example, we check to see that they reach beyond past performance but stay within the capabilities of our available resources.

Similarly, when we meet with individual employees to review performance, we look for patterns that show the employee is striving but not overtaxed, motivated but not overwhelmed.

In the same way, we help employees set goals that exhibit the "aggressive but realistic" theme. These goals can then be measured to assure that employees are moving along at the same pace as the company.

Our company cadence extends to customer relations, as well. Our project schedules, for example, are designed to complete the job as quickly as possible without, however, making unrealistic promises to our clients.

FIND WHAT WORKS

Understanding business rhythm is an important element of any company culture, especially as it influences the ability to make coordinated business decisions. Think about the number of times you have been disappointed with your company's performance or with the performance of individual employees. Often, the culprit is not simply underachieving but rather the fact that people are out of step with each other, or company goals are out of step with team members.

What's the right pace for your business, and, more important, are you operating at or near that ideal pace? A 30% growth rate, for instance, is inconsistent with a "stop and smell the roses" company culture. Similarly, while improving your gross margin by 25% is aggressive and may look good on paper, it's not realistic.

The first step is to take a minute to articulate your company's ideal pace. Next, communicate the concept to everyone on your team. You will soon find that when everyone is in alignment and working in rhythm, you can achieve the results you want. —Mark Richardson is president of Case Design/Remodeling and Case Handyman Services, Bethesda, Md., and the author of 30-Day Remodeling Fitness Program. He can be reached at (301) 229-4600 or mrichardson@casedesign.com.