

Commentary **Mark Richardson**

Your End Game

Position yourself now for future growth.

Do you ever ask yourself, “What will I do next?” When you think about the length of time you’ve been involved in the remodeling business, do you wonder, “How long is long enough?” The urgency of questions like these depends on individual circumstances, but even if you haven’t asked yourself these questions yet, rest assured that someday you will. What matters, of course, is how you answer them.

As we grow, we move through passages. Most of us begin our career in remodeling with a passion for something. Your passion is what gets you out of bed every morning. It is what drives you to become masterful. For some remodelers, it is a passion for the craft; others are first attracted to the



business by the satisfaction of making the sale; still others are driven by the satisfaction of managing a complex system of people and processes.

As time marches on and your skills advance to new levels, you discover that you need to develop new passions to keep the flame alive. Otherwise, you risk becoming disillusioned or burned out.

When I came out of architecture school in the late 1970s, my passion was for design, and that is where I focused all my energy. My single-minded devotion to design led to steady growth in the requisite skills which, as I matured, eventually led to professional success and recognition. My design experience also included involvement at various stages in the sales process, and although it took many years for me to admit it, I discovered that mastering sales was tremendously fulfilling. My new passion led to growth and mastery of a new set of skills, which eventually led to the transfer of my passion to the challenge of growing a team and achieving results that could never be achieved alone. Eventually, this passion has led me to devote my energy to building a world-class organization.

I share my story not to impress you, but to illustrate the importance of being a little bit restless. I have been fortunate to have always been part of an environment that provided the opportunity for passage from one stage of development to the next. At first, it was less purposeful and more a matter of luck, but I soon recognized the importance of deliberately looking ahead to the next step.

GROWTH HAPPENS

Many remodelers tell me that they are happy with the size of their company, or that growth is not something they are particularly interested in. I would argue that growth is inevitable; these days we need to pedal faster just to keep from sliding backward. Growth doesn’t have to be fast or big, but it does have to occur, and the crucial question is how you will grow and in which direction. Growth can either be left to chance or controlled. If you leave growth to chance, you may not be creating an environment that can support your passion.

It’s easy to get in the way of our own growth. Several months ago in this column I wrote about the importance of finding the person who will fire you. I used that terminology partly to shock readers into recognizing the need to prepare for the next step. Your passions will change, and when they do you will either be free to pursue them (because there will be someone to fill the void) or you will be held back (because you can’t abandon your old responsibilities). In the former case, your business becomes an asset; in the latter case, it’s a liability.

Growth can mean many things (top line, market share, more leisure time, etc.), so it is important to define growth that fits your goals. Make appointments with yourself to spend a minimum of one hour per week pondering the next step. Not just for you, but also for your people: Half your time should be focused on developing future leaders for your business.

If you are happy doing what you are doing, position yourself today for the passages that will ensure you are equally fulfilled two, five, or 10 years from now and beyond. —*Mark Richardson is president of Case Design/Remodeling and Case Handyman Services, Bethesda, Md. He was named a Maryland Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year for 2006.*