

In Pursuit of Happiness

...a great idea while looking for a new business to buy.

Each July as we celebrate Independence Day, we hear again the immortal words of Thomas Jefferson; “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”.

This year, I found special meaning in these words as I was preparing to buy a new business (more on that later). Purchasing and running a new business is a big step. I realize that, in my own small way, I am “living the American Dream “as envisioned by our founders and described so eloquently by Jefferson and others. So in a very personal way I can’t help examine how the “pursuit of Happiness” was a part of my decision to take this step and, in a larger way, is a big part of the motivation of us all as we lead our lives.

I sold my last business; Today’s Staffing, at the end of 2008 and immediately began looking for a new venture. I made a list of the type of businesses I thought I wanted. And to find the ideal business for me I created a list of the steps I thought I needed to match my skills and passions with a profitable business and meaningful work. This is the list of those five steps:

Identify my unique skills and passions. Honesty was critical as I thought about the kind of business I have the skills to run and, at the same time, could truly enjoy. I realize I have strong financial background and, at the same time, people energize me. I truly enjoy relationships in which I am selling a product or service I really believe in.

Identify what types of businesses require a leader who possesses those traits. For example, what businesses need a sales-oriented CPA?

Network!! I sought the opinions of experts in many fields. While doing this I happened upon a tactic that proved very useful: the art of asking positive questions. I rarely asked about the dangers or pitfalls in any course of action. Those negatives and warnings naturally came out of the discussions. Instead I asked about those things necessary for **success** in any particular business. The feedback was great and I had the opportunity to decide if I really wanted to do those things necessary for success.

Gather and analyze the information about these opportunities. I created a mini-business plan for each business and then considered both financial potential and match with my skills and passions.

Decide!! This is perhaps the hardest step. It's easy to delay making a decision. There will always be more information or more opportunities. Luckily I have a strong bias toward action.

So how did this turn out? This month, I purchased *The Presidents Forum* from Joan McGinnis Knorr. I have been a member of *The Presidents Forum* for many years. It was founded 20 years ago by Joan. Her mission statement included ".... members of *The Presidents Forum* provide continuing strategic intelligence through vital, confidential, non-vested dialogue that can only be found among peers who are willing to share their own successes and challenges". Today, many smaller companies establish advisory boards to guide them, through an interchange of ideas, on business growth and development. The Presidents Forum creates that environment and facilitates a Board of Peers who provide those insights.

During my time as member, I credit much of my previous business's success to the insights of my peers at the monthly *Forum* breakfast. As the new owner, I believe that I have the skills and passion to build on this successful model that helps business leaders thrive. And I also believe I will enjoy doing it.

Author Maira Kalman, writing in the New York Times about Thomas Jefferson after a visit to Monticello, remarked that she came away with a deeper understanding of "this country and its people and what it means to be optimistic and complex and tragic and wrong and courageous", in other words all of those elements of the great American experiment in democracy. Historians may debate why Jefferson included "the pursuit of Happiness" in the Declaration but I know this pursuit was a big part of my thought process. Today, it is necessary for us to work long hours in our jobs. If we don't enjoy our work, it's hard to enjoy what we're doing in the rest of our lives. Satisfaction in our work is a big part of satisfaction in life, at least for me.

I realize how lucky I am to live in a country where this is so openly recognized, allowed and even encouraged. So however we define happiness, its pursuit is a necessary and meaningful part of our lives.

Steve McCarthy
July 2009