

# Business Lessons Learned

## On a Teeter-Totter

Part of the “People, Process, Technology”, Series of Articles

Life’s lessons start early ! That’s why we continue to thrive as a species. Business life lessons start at that same early age, when games, playmates, and trust, are the most important decisions of the day.

These are still the most important decisions of the day, fifty years later when working to optimize our business options and partners!

All too often, we now describe our good or bad decisions as “learning experiences” or “character building exercises”. I hate both! These are just other ways of saying that we made major mistakes that cost us dearly, but we are still in the game. If we look at these experiences from the standpoint of the play-ground, and the memories of our lessons learned there, we should wonder how we ever made the same mistakes again!

Teeter-totter decisions have to be the first major points in life where we get immediate feedback, either positive or negative. There are immediate consequences from our decisions. Remembering those lessons, we can save a lot of pain in business today.

1. Choose your teeter-totter that gives you an advantage. This is a simple concept – just as we always chose the end with the best seat, the safety handles, or the one where we didn’t have the sun in our eyes, we now have to choose which business project or corporate goal which lends itself to success. Any small advantage we can gain for competition, our careers, or our corporate goals, should be used for the best results. Also, don’t forget the concept that good business should also be fun business. This means we should enjoy the game we choose as well as the projects we start.
2. Choose your partner carefully! All too often, our first experience was with the simple request for a fun time from one of your school mates. Often, we didn’t look at such things as size, weight, and most importantly, trust. We simply decided on the spot to go for the invitation. Sometimes this would lead to the learning experiences mentioned already. Choosing partners is critical, whether these are your employees, contractors, or consultants; these are the people with whom you are entrusting your business life. We all know what a poor teeter-totter partner choice can do to the fun part of your day.

Of all the decisions factors mentioned, trust was the most important. Little kids can play with big kids if they trust that they won't get hurt. Big kids can play with little kids, when they know and understand each others limitations. Remember being held high in the air without the ability to get down, only having your partner jump off their end! The resulting crash usually led to a sore rear-ends.

This occurs everyday in business as well. Choose your partner from a list of good previous experiences, from trust that they will fit well in your plans, from trust that they will play the game correctly and do what's right, and from trust that they won't let you down. (Either quickly or slowly!) Trust in your ability to check the facts, when your playmate says that they understand your business. Make sure contractors and consultants are who they say they are, and not just teeter-totter bullies in disguise.

3. Maintain your balance at all times! The secret of playground lessons is based on balance and agility. Always watch your partners and always watch your competition for opportunities that can be advantages to your game. Balance in this state, is not the sitting in the middle mode, where you lose all opportunity for highs or lows, but balance in keeping partners interested in playing with you; balance in maintaining the fun in the game; and balance in finding the right mix of partners. From the business mode, this means a balance of employees and outside consultants, contractors, and outsourced resources. It also means that the game has to be interesting and fun for each of these partners so that everyone builds on trust for the next engagement you tackle.

John Swan

Part of the "People, Process, and Technology " series.