



# ENTREPRENEUR'S CORNER

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## Ensure It's Efficiency Not Ego Driving Entrepreneurial Passion

by Jack Roseman

In my last column, I explained how a heart attack at the peak of my career forced me to re-evaluate my priorities. I was only 43 and a workaholic, proud of my long hours and the success of On-Line Systems, the public company I ran. I worked hard, handled a lot of stress. I was a hard-driving executive and happy as hell. If half my heart hadn't died that day in 1973, I would probably have never questioned my management style of my lifestyle.

But the fact was I had no choice. It would have been suicidal to continue at the same pace. I don't want any entrepreneur who reads this to think I'm saying slack off and work nine to five. It takes fire and passion to get something new off the ground and into the marketplace; and there's usually one person who goes around igniting it in others. (I don't even know now if it was the 18-hour days and seven-day weeks that caused my heart

attack. Theories about negative health effects of Type-A personalities have pretty much been discounted, particularly for a Type-A who thrives in a stress-filled environment).

So I'm not saying don't give your enterprise all you've got. I would never advise an entrepreneur to hold back their passion or hesitate to work long hours. What I am saying is be smart about your passion and direct your energy where it will do the enterprise the most good, not where it does your ego the most good.

Being in charge is exhilarating. But it can also lead to an intoxication with your own ideas, an exaggeration of your own importance. This was driven home to me in several ways in the days I spent recuperating.

Standard procedure in the early 1970s for a heart attack victim was to restrict visitors. They would only let your wife in to see you for 15 minutes at a time, two or three times a

day. So Judy would be sitting around all day waiting to see me. Later I asked her, "What was the toughest part of the heart attack for you?" She didn't hesitate. "You'll never guess. It was while waiting to see you each day. I knew the question you would ask me. And I knew there was no good answer."

The question was: "What is the stock doing? And she was right - I always asked it.

She said: "The doctors told me to make sure I didn't depress my husband. But I knew if I told you the stock was up, you would tell yourself you're not important, that it didn't matter whether you were at work or not. And so that would depress you. And if I told you the stock was down, then that would depress you because you would feel you were letting the company down. It was a no-win situation."

The other example was even more telling. I couldn't

stand being idle, so there I was in the coronary unit at Passavant Hospital in the North Hills with wires all over me, commanded by my doctor to absolute bed rest and I say to this cardiologist, "I need a recorder so I can dictate memos for my secretary." My doctor must have decided that I would be less stressed if I was dictating memos than just lying passively on my back so he got me a recorder.

Well, I dictated more memos in the next two weeks than I had probably dictated in the previous year. For some reason I saved all those memos and when I stumbled across them about a year ago, I was surprised how many there were. They made a stack about four inches thick.

Out of curiosity, I sat down and read them. Now you have to realize that at the time, I thought they were important stuff - ideas that would grow the company. But when I looked at them last year, you know what? They were about nothing. I went through all those memos and they didn't mean a hill of beans. In fact, I was embarrassed by the triteness of them.

What I hope you take from this is not that hard work leads to heart attacks or that passion about your work makes you write pointless memos. One of the things I learned from my heart attack was that when you run a company you are at risk of assuming that you are indispensable to it. And that's an assumption that can be as hazardous to your own

health as it is to the health of the company.

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