



René Descartes was a French philosopher, mathematician, and writer .

"It is not enough to have a good mind. The main thing is to use it well."
(René Descartes) The eternal truths are those that have been known for generations, but unfortunately, it is the fate of each generation to re-learn these truths for itself for they are not part of inherited knowledge.

A business I once knew was managed and run by smart people, well educated, well experienced articulate and clear, yet the business failed—its owners the poorer, its employees left without jobs, its customers dispersed. One tries to learn a lesson or two from each of life's experiences and the magnitude of this failure is such that it has left me reeling for some time, finding it difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, the true lesson from the inane.

We think, in our more confused moments, that size bespeaks success, that size protects more efficiently than the lack of it. How foolish we are. A large business poorly managed is as well-disposed towards failure as a small one with poor resources. It just makes more waves when it fails. We deceive ourselves when we think that pure size is a compensation for agility and speed. How much more quickly can we change course in a small fast ship than in a large one? We are deceived by that part of our minds which reacts to impression rather than analysis. The intuitive is not always the most reliable basis for decisions.

Why do companies fail? There are surely many reasons, but perhaps in the final analysis, they fail because they are poorly managed. Being poorly managed covers a multitude of sins, but among those at the top of the list are surely the lack of ability to satisfy the needs of customers and the exposure to a level of risk which is too great to absorb should the risk become reality.

So, when customers ask for changes in the way the company does business or try to negotiate a change in the terms of a contract, an inflexible response is sure to cause dissatisfaction. If management cannot evaluate the depth of dissatisfaction, refuses to understand the effect of its inflexibility in its approach or the validity of the proposed changes, it is not a sign of strength based on sure principle, but simply a display of vain arrogance and yes, perhaps greed. It will lose its customers. Somewhere in the



market place are other companies who display a greater sensitivity to the needs of customers – and it is surely not in what you say, that determines the efficacy of your responses, but in what you do. In the vernacular, "Do you walk the walk, or just talk the talk?" One does not need lengthy questionnaires or surveys to know what the right course of action is. If you refuse to negotiate, if you refuse to understand the needs of customers, if you insist that your way is the right way, your customers will leave you, one by one, you will have difficulty getting new ones and your business will slowly wither and die.

And then, if you expose your business to a risk that is greater than its ability to withstand should there be a disaster, then too have you failed. Being enticed by the rewards of landing a huge customer must be balanced by the evaluation of how such a failed relationship will impinge on the survivability of your business. It's great to get rich quick, if your new-found wealth is able to be lost without sending you to the poorhouse! I guess it's called putting "all your eggs in one basket."

I guess one just has to pay attention, to be aware of the environment in which one operates, be open to the threats that are ever present. If you delude yourself into thinking that you know it all, if you interpret everything you see through the lenses of your own preconceptions, you are on thin ice. Reality is the Sword of Damocles, ready to drop at a moment's notice. If you ignore your responsibilities to those who have an interest in your business, you bring down chaos and turmoil on your life. When you look at yourself in the mirror every morning, make sure you know who peers back at you. Do you recognize the wrinkles or is your mind blind to what the eyes see?