

When to Kill an Idea

Written by Steve Marr
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When you have an idea or dream, you tend to hold on to it. I often hear, "I will not give up." However, it is important to know when you should press forward and when you need to cut your losses.

Consider the lesson the Lord taught in this parable:

"A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" (Luke 13:6-9, NIV)

The fig tree failed to produce even though the tree was given special care and attention. Without fruit production, the tree had no purpose and would be removed. Do you know when to cut down a tree? That's the question you must answer in your business as well as your life.

"Bill" ran a carpet cleaning business. He worked on high end oriental and area rugs. He did a great job. However, for five years he made no money, lived with his parents and was never able to break through.

I met with him several times, but he was reluctant to take my suggestion to broaden his customer base and expand into more standard carpet cleaning. Because Bill continued to insist on doing very high end work, I finally advised him to shut down the business and get a job or start something else because the market was simply too small to generate the income he needed. He refused. Nine years later, he filed for bankruptcy.

"Ken" spent his time trading stocks and commodities. He never made much money, but he avoided major losses. If he wasn't spending full time, he would have been okay. Ken believed that he was one step away from a breakthrough that would make him rich. He pressured his wife to take a job, which she did to bring income in. While she disliked the job, she stuck to it believing they had few options. This went on over 25 years. He never saw that he had hit a wall. Rather than finding a breakthrough, he stayed stuck.

Anybody can engage in a project or activity that doesn't work. As you move forward, you may find a breakthrough. Other times, you just hit the wall. While it may be painful to spend two or three years with no results, you can recover from a few unproductive years. However, to invest 20 to 40 years in an unproductive effort makes no sense.

My experience has taught me to set up benchmarks. If I fail to make progress, I must be willing to cut my losses and re-evaluate. For example, if I am investing; I create a set budget. When the funds are gone, I stop. The temptation is to put in a little more time or invest a little more money to get over the hump. However, if you find yourself in this situation; you need to figure

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out how far up your mountain you have climbed and whether a little push would get you to the top. If you are too far down the mountain or still in the valley, maybe the summit is out of reach.

You should also take these situations to the Lord. Ask others to pray with you about it. It is easy to get so involved emotionally that you don't hear an answer from the Lord. If you have failed to make progress and those closest to you confirm you are stuck, give that feedback great weight. The only thing worse than wasting two or three years on a failed idea is to waste the rest of your life on it.

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