

## Velocity

I was catching up on my reading this past weekend and came across an essay on the topic of velocity. If you can stomach a little math and physics, I think the following ideas are worthy of study and understanding (don't worry, there won't be a test!). The subject of velocity has some delightful applications to business, but it's important to get a few definitions out of the way. First of all, velocity describes both the speed and direction of motion. For example "70 MPH to the north" would describe the velocity I travel on my way home for the weekend.

Next, let's discuss the difference between potential energy and kinetic energy. Potential energy describes the energy that a body at rest could bring to bear if and when it moves. You might picture, for example, a big truck parked at the top of a hill: lots of potential energy but currently no action. By contrast, kinetic energy is based on current action—in other words the energy of what the object is doing right now.

The contrast between potential and kinetic energy is stark. It took a lot of work to get that truck up to the top of the hill. But now it's just sitting there; its velocity is zero. Being up high gives it a lot of potential energy, but no kinetic energy. In business we might describe that big truck sitting at the top of a hill as a company of scale. One that has enormous potential based on its size and position but one not necessarily geared for immediate speed or focused action.

I am reminded of one of my first and favorite jobs in life at The Oyster Harbors Club on Cape Cod (shining shoes and parking cars). I remember one of the resident pros trying to talk a duffer out of wasting his money on a new driver with an enormous head by explaining that it is the velocity and the accuracy of the swing and not the scale or size of the club head that makes all the difference.

Now, are there individuals or organizations that, having worked for years to get to the top of the hill are now comfortably at rest? Would it be fair to describe such outfits as having lost their punch, their velocity, their speed-of-response to the markets they serve? In many cases the answer is, "yes." The decline of once mighty outfits like Sears, JC Penney and GM has become almost the rule rather than the exception. It almost goes without saying that earlier in their life-cycles these enterprises bristled with the kinetic energy and velocity typical of more entrepreneurial organizations.

If I had just one chance to add just one thing to a business or organization I was part of, I would add velocity. It has an exponential effect unmatched by mere linear dynamics such as scale. I know everyone on our team has heard our exhortation to be "the first with the most." Because that simple bromide is really how we make it happen, folks. By executing with velocity and plenty of kinetic energy we position ourselves to enjoy the business results we seek to achieve.

*Chris Toomey*

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