

Random Thoughts on Partnerships

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A couple of months ago I had a very interesting conversation with a friend of mine, who happens to be a close business partner in many different ventures. During this conversation, one of his phrases, probably the simplest of all, struck me and stayed in my mind:

“Business is about giving and receiving”.

Now, don't get me started on that chapter of “Friends”, where Joey writes a speech to celebrate Chandler and Monica's wedding, and all he can come up with is a series of “giving and having and sharing and receiving” phrases. Stay with me; I will try to elaborate on this point.

Being a constant learner in the business area, I take these phrases as precious information to shape the destiny of my own business. akosma software is my first company, and to my own amazement, my wife and I are able to live out of it; said like this, it might sound ridiculous. But it is a huge statement for me, an incredible source of pride. It is part of my very personal way of watching the world and ourselves.

Most people leave their employee status behind to start a company with the inner feeling of being the next Bill Gates or, these days, the next Steve Jobs. The idea, particularly in the tech business, is to become insanely rich. Much more than you really need to live a decent life. And to screw all those who block your path, and yes, why not, build an empire down the road.

Bullshit.

Let's go back to basics: the basic idea of business, the one that lays at the bottom end of any human activity which involves the exchange of goods and services, is to be able to get what you need for a living, in exchange of your work or its product. Remember? That's how it all started around 10 thousand years ago. And the basic ideas behind akosma software lie in very simple terms:

- To be able to live out of the product of my work, offering my own work, services and ideas;
- To be able to build something sustainable, that eventually might feed other people too;

- To learn new things, and to meet interesting people during the trip.

Most businesses have completely lost their touch with reality, not only because of the kind of products offered, but simply because of their way to perform their work. They treat people in such a way (inside and outside of their organizations) in such a way that it makes Jason Fried's speech sound like revolutionary, instead of what it really is: good old, down-to-earth, common sense.

When Jason says that most companies do their best to get out of business, he's absolutely right; simply because most people have forgotten why they go to work every day. That's why books like *Getting Real* or *REWORK* are successful. That's why Bob Sutton's books are successful. That's why Tim Ferriss' "4 Hour Workweek" became a bestseller.

Businesses, companies, managers, employees, we have all lost touch with reality.

Running a business is not just about how much money you can make; taking care of that is important, but not enough. It's not about trying to screw people just for the sake of making a few more bucks, all while having nice words about social responsibility in your website. It's not about filling your mouth with the ecology word while not even recycling paper in your printer room.

Don't get me wrong; I consider myself a liberal. I believe in the free market and I resent governments sneaking into our lives. I believe in being able to associate and create new things respectful of what surrounds us as a society and an environment. I also believe that cooperatives are the best type of organization for small businesses, but I do not believe in democratic project management processes. I believe in vision and direction for products and projects, and I believe in a redistribution of the earnings (and the losses) among all those who helped create something new. I believe in small teams, committed to (not just involved in) their projects.

Most importantly, I want to believe in the people I work with. Let me repeat that: I work with people; they do not work for me, I do not work for them. I believe in us, whoever is "us" in that group.

Business is about not being hypocrite. Business is about being upfront about what you do, about the value that you add, about being passionate about your craft, about being proud of your work and your colleagues. Business is about saying no at the right time, and about never saying yes without care and attention.

Business is about giving, sharing and receiving. A good friend of mine told me once that I should never say "thanks" to him; a simple "wow, cool" was better. Being able to marvel oneself with whatever comes is a key element in happiness, the second key element being giving back to others whatever happiness we have.

When you focus business on people, long term partnerships invariably become strong friendships.