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Donald Cooper, MBA, HoF

Donald is respected by clients in over 40 industries throughout the world as a “thought leader” and passionate visionary in the key areas of management, marketing, and service excellence.

Drawing from his experience as a world-class manufacturer, award-winning retailer, business speaker and coach, he has helped thousands of businesses to sell more, manage smarter and grow their bottom line.

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An article by Donald Cooper, MBA...

Everyone who starts a business needs to reinvent themselves at some point:

Most businesses are started and built by driven initiative-takers who see an opportunity and just get on with it. They do it all, because they have to, and nothing stops them. But, if they’re successful, some day the business grows to a size where managers are hired to run individual parts of the business and, often, that’s where “the wheels come off”.

The initiative-taking boss just keeps taking the initiative, because that’s who they are and that’s what got them where they are today. They can’t help themselves. It’s in their DNA.

For all of you who are struggling with this challenge right now, here’s what you need to know. “Initiative” does not exist in the air...it exists in people and when you take it, you take it away from people. Your people become puppets, the good managers leave and the weak ones stay, keep their heads down and wait for your next instruction.

The key insight here is that it is indeed initiative taking that built the business and you need to hire and nurture a whole team of initiative takers to run every part of your growing business. That means that you need to become an initiative-giver...an empowerer.

To use a sports analogy, you need to make the transition from being a player to being a coach. Players take initiative ...coaches give initiative.

Yes, they also teach skills and discipline along with the values and culture of the team. They encourage and cheer and they switch or fire players when necessary.

One of the single biggest problems in many growing companies, the problem that eventually does them in, is the inability of the founder, boss and “chief” to become an initiative giver, to make the transition from player to coach.

The solution is clear. First, they need to learn the skills of coaching. I help lots of clients with that. Then, they need to learn a whole new way of feeling good about themselves. As “players” they’ve defined success and happiness for their entire business life by their ability to personally score goals ...preferably the winning goal....preferably in overtime.

Now, as coaches, they need to learn to feel good about themselves in a whole new way by saying, “*I personally scored no goals today, but I coached an entire team to score enough goals to win.*” In business, great coaches don’t just grow companies, they grow people...and that’s very neat.



Realistically, as the business grows, sometimes it will need you to be a coach...and sometimes, still, a player. The secret is to constantly ask yourself in every situation, "Which role does the business need me to play right now, player or coach?" and then play the role that the business needs you to play...not the role that you'd rather play or that you think is more comfortable. It isn't all about you any more...it's about what's best for the business.

So, if this is the challenge that you face, what will you commit to do to make the transition from initiative-taker to initiative-giver? What will you do to move from being a great player to being a great coach? If you're struggling with that, perhaps we should chat.

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