4 Ways That, As an Entrepreneur, You Can Overcome That Troublesome 'Blind Spot'

I recently had a scary near-miss: I was turning right on to a busy street, in the city where I live. So, I looked to my left, where a bus in the right lane was sputtering along, too slowly for traffic. And my brain assessed the situation:

That slow-moving bus means the right lane is free for me to go, I thought. *Time to turn right. Right?*

Surprise! As I slowly moved into traffic, some kid on a bike rode off the sidewalk – and nearly hit the front of my car! No, wait a minute; let me rephrase that: *I nearly hit that kid!*

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I reacted, shouting my favorite curse word at him, then thought to myself: "*That kid came out of nowhere!*"

But, at the same time, I was thinking something else: *Isn't it interesting how surprises like that one leave us even more surprised when we try to make sense of events that "come from nowhere"?* Because, of course, we all know that things *always* come from somewhere.

How does this relate to business? If you're like me, you plan and monitor your calendar. You watch your data. You monitor your operations, your numbers. You take comfort in the fact that you "know" what's going to happen at your 9 a.m. meeting. And then:

We plan, but we are surprised. And we're constantly reminded that life doesn't exist on anyone's Google calendar. Instead, life unfolds in the moment, in spite of what we plan for. So, uncertainty is really all we have, despite the calendars, dashboards and data we may employ. Life still reminds us that the scoreboard is not the game; the map is not the territory.

Which begs the underlying question, What do you do when something unexpected shows up? Clearly, blame-storming is not the answer; nor is beating yourself up for being yourself (how is that productive?) Instead, it's time to see what you've been missing: that you're not broken. Only human.

The trouble is, we all have a blind spot. The blind spot is a scientific fact (caused by the connection of the optic nerve to your retina). But it's also a fact for entrepreneurs: You can't see everything, no matter how hard you try. But there are ways around a blind spot. Here are four strategies so you can see what's next, before it hits your business:

Automation

What can you do to ease or completely remove the mundane tasks from your day? What's dragging you down might be what's keeping you from seeing your next opportunity. As *Entrepreneur* contributor Martin Welker pointed out, automation is where business is headed. From apps to AI, automation can help you offload the stuff that's holding you back.

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Consider "20 Apps You Didn't Know You Needed" – another *Entrepreneur* post. If you haven't implemented machine-learning in your business, maybe now is the time to start. Companies are helping clients navigate between automation and human-to-human interaction. Machine-learning isn't just the first step toward Skynet (the fictitious software that made *The Terminator*); it's an actual tool that can make you more

effective as you run your business. AI systems provide support for decision-making, so that you can focus on what's next.

Riding shotgun

After that day I made that right turn, I wondered, what would have happened had there been somone sittting in the passenger seat? That someone would have seen what I missed. In business, leaders need somebody "riding shotgun." And that person is probably outside of your organization (ready to offer a fresh perspective).

For professional football teams, the team roster has 53 players, and sometimes 25 or more coaches – a near 2:1 player-to-coach ratio. Why? Because these teams want to win. They need more perspective. Do you? A coach can make a huge difference, because he or she offers another set of eyes and ears focusing on what matters to you.

Karen Mangia is the author of *Success With Less,* and an executive with Salesforce, one of my clients. Mangia has told me that she credits an executive coach for really accelerating her career growth. But she says she initially worried that having someone there in the passenger seat would slow her down.

That didn't happen, she says. "Instead of introducing new obligations, my coach helped me to see how I could handle my role differently," Mangia said. "I was resistant at first, but ultimately I was so glad I didn't have to go it alone."

Curt Vander Meer, CEO of a chocolate bar company, says something similar. "At Endangered Species Chocolate, I wanted to know that I had the support of not only a coach but also an entire team," he told me. For him, membership in the business advisory group, Vistage, also made a difference. "It's a place where everyone is focused on everyone else's success, and the group sees things that I don't," he said.

The end result has been double-digit growth for the Indianapolis-based chocolate company, an uptick in donations to its mission to protect animals in Africa and a fresh perspective on key business issues.

Talk time

Some conversations keep showing up, even when they're conversations you don't want to have – but need to. This kind of uncomfortable feeling may just be an internal blind spot monitoring system, a "warning light" that requires your attention. If you want to change your results, you've got to change the conversation, and that change starts with you.

What might you be assuming about an issue that's limiting your ability to resolve it? Try transforming your assumptions to see how the conversation changes. What happens if you look at the dialogue in a new way? As an entrepreneur, you probably have the super-power to break from a pattern. Use it!

I think of Ben Schrader, a budding entrepreneur I know in College Station, Texas. "I do everyting I can to communicate via text and social media," he told me. "But, sometimes, I have to put down the phone to pick up the conversation." What he meant is that you have to know when to text and when to go face to face, which can accelerate the dialogue. "Sometimes, texting is quicker," he shared with me. "But some conversations have to be IRL [in real life] – and knowing the difference is key."

My own take on this? I like to quote the Elvis lyric: "Stop, look and listen."

A focus on what's missing

If you've got a blind spot, like the one I had that day at that intersection, like the one I have in business, your

customer may see it. And it’s scientifically proven: The blind spot phenomenon exists. So, finding what’s missing and providing value is the key to driving your new business and investment. Help your customers to see what they don’t. Or won’t. Or can’t.

Mark Twain said it best: “It ain’t what you don’t know that can hurt you. It’s what you know for sure that just ain’t so.”

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Blind spots, then, are a fact of life. That doesn’t mean you’re a bad driver, or a bad leader. But the smartest thing you can do is to make sure you’re prepared for the unexpected. You’ve got to look beyond the dashboard. Otherwise, even a simple right turn might not go the way you planned.

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