How I Built a Business That Helps People Feel Good About Doing the Right Thing — and Why You Should, Too

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You need focus to build a business, but my experience has taught me that there's also such a thing as being too single-minded.

Financial, environmental and community goals aren't competing objectives; they're interconnected. This is why founders who chase revenue at the expense of value for their customers or broader social impact often experience limited growth.

This is a bit like buying a gym membership and then letting your diet go because you're working out. Just like healthy eating habits are part of an effective fitness plan, your mission and values are essential parts of creating a business plan that works.

So when my brother Todd and I founded Roof Maxx as a cost-effective alternative to roof replacement, it was about more than filling a gap we saw in the market. It was about solving a problem we saw people struggling with and doing it in a way that also helped those people feel like they were changing the world for the better.

Here's what we learned.

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Consumers already want to do the right thing; you just have to help them

Call me naive, but I take a view of the world that most people are basically good — or at least, they want to be.

They might not always put the right items in the recycling bin, but that's not because they hate the planet. They're usually just confused or short on time, because modern life can be hectic and overwhelming.

That means appealing to guilt is rarely the most effective way to sell someone on a socially responsible product or service. Guilt can be a powerful emotional trigger, but it only works when someone doesn't want to do something.

Todd and I saw this a lot in the early days of Roof Maxx. We knew many homeowners already had some idea of how much waste roof replacement produces, so we didn't harp on it. No one was throwing away their shingles every few years because they genuinely believed it was good for the planet. They were doing it because the rest of the industry had convinced them there was no viable alternative.

When people already want to make a change but don't feel like they have the option, guilt just makes them feel worse. In these cases, you need to show them the option exists, then use other strategies to win their business.

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Learn to position "doing good" as

“getting more”

Since most people already want to be better citizens, you don’t need to waste time trying to convince them it’s a good idea. Instead, you should spend most of your pitch showing how easy you can make it for them and how they can benefit from taking action.

The first few times we pitched Roof Maxx to homeowners, I saw how true this was. They listened when we talked about how they could save 3.8 tons of landfill waste on average by rejuvenating their roofs with our treatment instead of replacing them, but that wasn’t really where we won them over. The vast majority came on board when we showed them our solution cost up to 80% less than a full replacement, and that it could be done in a few hours instead of taking days or weeks.

Those experiences showed me that we didn’t have to make our customers more willing to do good in the world, because most of them already had that motivation. All we had to do was take away the obstacles they felt were standing in their way.

Social proof is never about you; it’s about your customers

One of the things that struck me most about the first homeowners to work with us was how proud they were. That pride didn’t just stem from the time and money they had saved. For a lot of them, it also came from feeling like they had made a difference by reducing their carbon footprint. They felt like they had joined a community that was working to improve the world around them.

It would have been easy to edit the many testimonials we received and trim them down into concise endorsements of our company. Many brands do. But we didn’t, because we knew those

testimonials weren’t just about us. They were about the kinds of people who chose us and the values that those people upheld.

A customer who touts the quality of your product is a good advocate. But a customer who sees your product as a way to help them live a better life is a great one. The more you showcase those people, the better you look by association.

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People are more loyal to values than they are to brands

One last piece of advice: Brand loyalty is a fickle thing, but values tend to exist on a deeper level. People change their cell phone plans far more often than they change their core convictions.

That means a strong mission helps you build long-term loyalty. If you’re really committed to saving money for people, protecting the environment or community building, then you’ll always be appealing to people who value those goals. And if you can somehow find a way to do all three at once, that loyalty becomes much more difficult to lose to a competitor.

So while it might be tempting to focus on raw profit when you’re starting out, don’t be fooled. Your mission isn’t there to distract from your margins; it’s there to set your brand apart and attract customers who already want to be on board. From there, it’s just a matter of showing them how easy it is to get involved.

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