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INSIDER: Company of One: Why Staying Small is the Next Big Thing for Business
Jacob Brenton, MDiv/MBA
Does your firm have an overarching goal? You might be able to recite a mission or vision statement full of buzzwords and corporate jargon, but at the end of the day, what is the driver that keeps pushing your company forward? The answer for many companies worldwide often comes down to two factors: profitability and/or growth. For many businesses, these two beacons light the way forward, leading managers to ask what decisions will be the most profitable, or in more recent startups, how can the most growth be achieved in the least amount of time.

Some are beginning to question the usefulness of only these goals, however, and are redefining business success. For example, an entrepreneur may decide that for her family, she wants to bring in net earnings of $100,000 a year. While it may take several years for her business to reach this point, she may one day be faced with the opportunity to make business decisions that would potentially amplify growth and profitability well beyond this point. Traditional business wisdom would tell this entrepreneur to keep growing and profiting. Instead, she may choose to stay small, be content with growing just enough to keep up with inflation, and focus more on improving her product and customer relations. What if business leaders focused more on sustainable success, pleasing customers, and producing quality products?

Entrepreneur Paul Jarvis explores these questions and more in his book *Company of One: Why Staying Small is the Next Big Thing for Business*. The author covers a variety of perspectives in how small business owners, entrepreneurs, and even people working within a traditional corporate structure can redefine success in business, focusing on quality over quantity.

**THINK POINT #1: Set the Right Goals**

In defining a *company of one*, Jarvis explains that companies resist and question “some forms of traditional growth, not on principle, but because growth isn’t always the most beneficial or financially viable move.” A company of one is not necessarily the work of a lone entrepreneur (though many companies of one are). A company of one can even be an individual within a large corporation willing to lead a department or project in a way that refuses to be defined by incessant calls for growth and unending profitability.
Whether these companies of one find themselves as entrepreneurs or so-called “intrapreneurs,” working within the structure of an existing corporation, they may find themselves pursuing goals that vary from traditional business goals. Those working in a company of one may be more interested in pursuing quality: both product and customer relationship quality. Jarvis asserts that companies of one will become relentless and passionate about creating a quality product or service in response to actual customer needs.

In today’s business environment, however, many competitors offer high-quality products and services. Jarvis explains that the quality of the customer relationship is key to a company of one. By growing slowly and organically, companies of one can replace resources traditionally assigned to advertising and marketing with a quality customer relationship. Once a company has found its personality and cultivated deep customer relationships, clients may be more willing to pay a premium for the company’s product or service.

When working at the pace of a company of one, these shifted priorities from growth and profitability to quality product and relationships will not only continue to turn a profit for the company but build a more fulfilling and pleasing work environment. Jarvis reminds readers that companies of one should not be based on pursuing a simple hobby, hoping it becomes profitable; rather, it should be the result of hard work and focus on quality to the point that quality becomes one’s passion.

THINK POINT #2: Create a Scalable Infrastructure

It is not enough to merely hope for better business by setting better goals and focusing on quality. If one wishes to capitalize on the freedom a company of one may offer, an entrepreneur must work to create the kind of infrastructure that can support this business and reach the goals. Though many companies of one work within complex existing structures, it is important for entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs to build more efficient processes for carrying out traditionally time-consuming business tasks.

For example, companies focused on relationship quality over producing products must work to cultivate their market segment. With limited resources and no desire to grow wildly, these companies cannot possibly mass-create the kind of generic products or services that appeal to a broad customer base. Companies of one, then, must harness the power of segmentation to better understand their target market and the specific needs of their consumers. By understanding their core customers, managers can then hone their corporate personality, helping others understand who they are and why they exist. This customer understanding and company personality then effectively replace much of the marketing function with relationships and customer support.

Though companies of one are not focused on boundless growth, many of them will need seasonal capabilities or systems that can take on increased work. For example, if a company of one sells a digital product, they may want to consider using cloud services which can scale up or down
capacity as needed, rather than trying to host servers on their own. In order to keep supply and demand in check and at the level the company desires, managers may want to employ artificial intelligence which can respond to demand and set prices to deter or increase interest in the product.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps the most important lesson Jarvis shares in his book is that companies of one are not just comprised of daring entrepreneurs who happen to hit it rich by following a whim of passion. Companies of one take hard work, a focus on quality, and a scalable supporting infrastructure. The fruit of this work, focus, and infrastructure, however, lead to a quality of life rarely found in the relentless pursuit of profit. Jarvis envisions an attractive future of small companies of one, each perfecting their craft for its target market, each satisfied to grow slowly while maintaining a work-life balance. It is no wonder so many find this vision compelling.

**Recommended Reading**


**About the Author**

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Jacob Brenton graduated with his Master of Divinity/Master of Business Administration from Baylor University in 2020. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Computer Graphic Design from the McLane College of Business at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in 2014 and then worked in a non-profit before returning to school. Jacob enjoys studying the intersections of faith, business, ethics, and technology, and he currently serves as Acting Interim Pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Robinson, Texas.