

Be Skeptical of Success

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A good friend of mine was a senior manager for a software development company who had been there since the beginning. The company enjoyed a steady stream of revenue but by no means were they getting rich. Then one day, the company's profits skyrocketed. Money was coming in, more hires were made to handle the demand, and bonuses went from bi-annual to monthly. Everyone was happy and at the end of the year, the CEO told the staff to expect more of the same in the New Year.

Then, the bottom fell out from under the company just a few months later. Revenues plummeted. Layoffs were a regular occurrence. Bonuses ceased. **How could a company go from the top of the world to the bottom of the barrel so fast?**

The answer turned out to be easy; their success the previous year was because they had one, just one, very large client that equated to 75% of their total revenue. That one client only signed a 12-month agreement and did not renew. Though the software my friend's company produced was exceeding expectations, the customer service and technical support was sub-par, so the client found a company that did both very well. They also neglected

their smaller clients, who left to go with other firms.

When a company fails, executives and teams alike will look at why. What did the market do? Why didn't we see this coming? What lessons did we learn and what processes are put in place to never repeat this again? Who is to blame? These questions are asked repeatedly until the root of the problem is identified and steps are taken to not let it happen again (assuming the company is still in business!).

Success must be approached with the same level of skepticism as failure. We're quick to ask tough questions when there's a failure, but very rarely to do we analyze why something is successful. What made us successful this year? What is preventing us from going to the next level? Is our growth a cause for concern because we can't keep up with demand? How do we stay on top? How do we sustain this pace?

I had a former CIO who said we need to act with a sense of urgency at all times. His experience showed when times were good, there is no sense of urgency until something is on fire. At that point, it takes far more energy to get teams aligned to put out a fire than if they just planned ahead in the first place. When our online sales that year hit a record, his first thought was to make the response time of the transaction better. Otherwise, consumers would get frustrated and not come back to the site.

If you let success own you, you'll find yourself trapped by it and terrified of the possibility of failure. Be skeptical of your success. Ask the tough questions in the good times. Success is simply preparation for the next challenge.

About the Author



Jason Orloske

I am a seasoned project, program and portfolio manager with over 15 years' experience in the healthcare, retail, legal, and regulatory sectors. I believe that a successful project is more than just delivering on time, scope, budget and quality. It starts with a solid understanding of the requested project and ensuring it aligns with organizational goals and market needs. Through a governance process, I have worked with executive teams so only the right projects are approved, as well as agreement on priority. I have created a culture of success with project teams through well-defined processes, open communication with and among team members, and continual stakeholder engagement. I'm a clear communicator who can interact with executives and their teams about technology, business and financial topics.

