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Why You Need to be the Best or Just Give Up

Is it time for you to give up something?

Some job that you've been stuck in for a decade with no advancement. Some project you just can't wrap your head around. Some company that you hold on to just because that's what your family's always done.

If you're going to do something, anything, your goal should be to be the *best* at it. Nothing less will do. So, what are you giving up?

Be the best or give it up

In 1982, soon after becoming CEO of General Electric, Jack Welch made a bold statement: That GE would either be #1 or #2 in an industry or it would get out.

If a GE business wasn't the best or nipping on its heels, there were only three options:

Fix, sell, or close.

More often than not, it was the latter two options.

In a flurry, GE sold or closed across the country and around the world. Needless to say, this didn't make Welch the most popular man in many neighborhoods.

In 1982, Welch made one of his most unpopular decisions. He sold GE's central air conditioning division to a competitor, Trane. That meant closing three plants in the Louisville, KY area and potentially putting 2300 Louisvillians out of work.

The reason was simple and it lined up with Welch's philosophy of being #1 or #2 in an industry. The central AC division was small and barely profitable by GE standards. He considered it more of a distraction than it was worth. It was time to give it up.

But the sale rocked Louisville. Initially, there were protests, local newspapers smeared GE and Jack Welch, and the mayor of Louisville had a few choice words for Welch.

But then an interesting thing happened...

Give it to someone who can perfect it

The reason GE chose Trane was that Trane was a market leader in central air conditioning. In other words, they knew what they were doing. They were already doing great things in the industry. And that put them in a position to do great things with GE's central AC division.

The people who had previously worked for an industry doormat suddenly became a part of a winning team. As the months wore on, people even became thankful that GE had sold its tired, old laggard and put it into the hands of someone who would make it a winner.

GE gave up and its former employees now got to be the best.

Welch recounts a conversation in his book, *Jack: Straight from the Gut*, with the former general manager of the division, Stan Gorski, who was now at Trane:

'Jack, I love it here,' he said. 'When I get up in the morning and come to work, my boss is thinking about air conditioning all day. He loves air conditioning. He thinks it's wonderful. Every time I talked to you on the phone, it was about some customer complaint or my margins. You hated air conditioning. Jack, today we're all winners and we all feel it.'

'Stan, you've made my day,' I said before hanging up.

Through the onslaught of criticism to come, Stan's comments helped to fortify my resolve to carry out the No. 1 or No. 2 strategy, no matter what.

What's your #1 or #2?

GE was already #1 or #2 in a lot of industries and by fixing, selling, or closing the other businesses, they were able to focus more intently on the ones they were already winning at.

As they did this, many of their #2 businesses became #1. The increased focus allowed them to beat out some of the old guard leaders.

So, what are you #1 or #2 at? What things are you doing that you are truly the best at? Where do your passions and knowledge intersect? What do you wake up thinking about all day?

Now think of the things you are #3 or worse at. You have little to no passion for them. You don't understand it all that well. You are struggling just to be average...or worse. You have no desire to think about it all day or even to study it for five minutes.

What are you going to do about those things?

Get rid of them or continue to dwell in the land of average?

Are you going to allow those things to hold you back from the things you are truly an elite at?

Or will you make the difficult choice to give those things up and focus on what you are already great at?

You either need to be the best (or at least moving in that direction) or just give up.

It may not be the most popular choice. It may not be the most inspirational thing I've ever written. It may even lose you a few friends or cost you a few dollars initially.

But it will be worth it in the end.

Action item: I like to keep things simple. Don't try to cut out 500 things tonight. Not even Jack Welch did that. They methodically fixed, sold, or closed businesses one-by-one, over the course of a decade-plus. So, today, pick one thing that you will eliminate or delegate to free up more time for what you are truly good at. Just one.

What's your one thing? What are you eliminating or delegating to turn more attention to what you can be the best at?