

Hi, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thanks for tuning in. As always click the button below with your comments and let us know what future blog topics you'd like to hear about. Today I want to talk about 'The Broken Windows Theory' and how it relates to your family business. If you're familiar with the broken windows theory, the concept was sort of written about first in about 1982 by a criminologist at UCLA named James Q. Wilson. In criminology terms, he's kind of a rock star. I know that makes me a geek to even know that. Anyway, he's kind of a rock star in that world. He wrote about this broken windows theory.

Some other sociologists had done an experiment. They took an old car and they just abandoned it in two places. One was in The Bronx, New York, and the second place was in Palo Alto, California, which as you know is Silicone Valley and a very wealthy and well to do area. The car in The Bronx was pretty much destroyed, stripped of all of its valuable items in about 24 hours. They put a camera up and observed remotely and all that kind of stuff.

In Palo Alto, so was this a very wealthy place, the car sat untouched for a week. Then one of the researchers got a sledge hammer and went over to the car and knocked the crap out of it and broke the windows and all that kind of stuff. Then it snowballed. I mean, that's all it took, even in Palo Alto, one of the wealthiest places in the whole country, it snowballed, and people started coming over and they broke windows and did things to this abandoned automobile. So, it just kind of proved the point that neglect and apathy and those kinds of things have a snowball effect in a community, even one as wealthy as Palo Alto.

The theory behind the broken windows theory is that if the local authorities, the city municipal government, the county government, the State, etc., if they can't control things like vandalism on a parked car or graffiti on public buildings and things like that, then how can they control big things like murders and rapes and armed robberies and things like that? So, the broken windows theory, and this was really popularized and made famous by Rudy Giuliani as he cleaned up New York City when he was mayor, the idea was if there is a broken window you fix it right away. If there is graffiti, you clean it up right away. Because not doing those things get you into that cycle of apathy and it produces genuine harm on people and the community around them.

So, I got a letter. Hang on a sec. This is what got me going about the broken windows theory, all right? It sounds more ... I talk about my health all the time on these blogs and it's kind of getting weird, so I'm going to try to get away from that. But I got this letter, I went to the doctor and he said, "I want you to go see a cardiologist and just have a test. No big deal. Everything's fine." Anyway, so I get this letter from the cardiology people and it's crammed into the envelope like a first grader who was in a hurry did it. So, this is a cardiology practice with doctors that make who knows how much money, and they have people's lives in their hands every day in the operating theater. And I get a letter from them, you know, call the office to schedule, and it looks like some stinking child who absolutely didn't care one whit sent this letter out. And it's not even signed by anybody in the office. No human being signed it even. It's not even got a fake signature. It's just a form letter.

So, what am I thinking? Broken windows theory now. What am I thinking? This letter represents the quality from this cardiology practice. This is how much they care. And I want them looking at my heart? I want them maybe doing something inside me at some point? Are you kidding me? So, it really got me worried. I called my doctor,

and Steve is a terrific doctor, he's a great guy and neighbor, and he reassured me. But you know what I almost said? You know, "This is bogus."

So that's one of the things that we're so focused on here. We don't get it right. Nobody's perfect. But when things go out of here we don't want broken windows impressions. We don't want typos in our letters or our emails, or misspellings and all that stuff. I'm on my soapbox about this all the time. Because to me, quality is a way of life, excellence is a way of life, it's not something you turn on and turn off. So, if I'm going to send out a crap letter like this, that says something about the quality of the ... I would think that you guys think that represents the quality of The Family Business Institute. So, we don't have this. I'm shocked that this cardiology practice too.

So, my point for you guys is, enforce your norms and your quality in everything you do in your shop, with your people, with your output, in the way things look around the building. I mean, make sure it's quality because any little thing like this reflects on you. Don't be a family business that tolerates graffiti and broken windows. Pay attention to the little things and that helps the bigger things take care of themselves.

This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you.