

Hello, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thanks as always for tuning in. Please click on our social media icons and we always welcome your comments in the section below today.

Today I want to talk about the value of pre-mortems, pre-mortems as contrasted with post-mortem. And this idea actually comes from one of our members, Chris Williams, from Williams Construction in Pryor, Oklahoma. So, Chris, I told you that your idea about the red team was going to come up in a future blog, so here it is.

So why is this important? Why are we talking about this crazy idea of pre-mortem? Well, we've all had projects, initiatives, things that some failed dramatically and catastrophically, some just didn't meet our expectations. And as human beings, what do we do when things go wrong, we kind of review what went wrong and try to figure out why, and then put things in place so that we don't repeat our mistakes. That's what smart business people do. So, the idea that Chris had with the red team, or what I'm referring to as a pre-mortem is, why can't we bring that practice into the present? Why wait until a failure to learn from our mistakes? Let's figure out what the mistakes are upfront. Well, there's a problem with that and I'll tell you in a second. But the idea here is we want to prevent troubles from becoming troubles, but there are two problems. This is why they usually don't work. This concept usually doesn't work.

The first is that senior leaders are overconfident. And I know I've been a victim of this. We've been through the slings and arrows and we've always managed to overcome our challenges. And we've done this before, this ain't our first rodeo, as we say, and we just have confidence that we're going to somehow figure out how to muddle through these things. So that's the first problem.

The second problem is cultural and, in many organizations, many of our client organizations, it's not psychologically safe to bring up problems. If you think about construction firms, historically, maybe not today as much, but historically, they've been kind of butt kicking kind of organizations. When you screw up, golly, you hear about it. You hear about it really clearly. And there's not a lot of warm pats on the back, attaboy, you did a good job. You know, they're more butt kickers than back patters. And it's just not psychologically safe to bring up problems or negatives or things like that because you get pushed down from higher up in the organization. So those are two problems that usually prevent this troubleshooting process from working.

But in a red team or a pre-mortem, it's a little different. The process is that you get a group of people together and the instruction is to purposefully imagine what could go wrong with the project? What could go wrong with the initiative? And the idea is that you apply your brain power to figuring out where are the choke points, where are the problems, where are the challenges that are going to affect the people running this project and the success or failure of the project itself. So, everybody reviews the project or the initiative creatively. They look for problems. The idea is, they're going to be rewarded. They're going to be back patted for finding problems, because by finding and resolving upfront, we eliminate them later. So, they're looking for choke points, hurdles, issues, problems, challenges, all those kinds of things. And they're doing this in a positive way. This is the plan. This is exactly what we're doing.

It kind of turns those cultural barriers on its head instead of being butt kicked for finding a problem, this actually says, you're going to be rewarded. I am going to pat you on the back for finding a problem because you're helping us in the long run. So, I guess the point of all this is, I kind of wish Chris was here so I could talk to him about it, he could explain it better than me. But the idea is, why wait. Put a process in place to identify problems now so that you don't have to deal with them later.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about that, what processes you have in place. This is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thank you.