



How Do You Decorate Your Rut?

A few weeks ago one of our business client's made the statement:

"They got into a rut and decorated it."

Those words quickly turned into a great conversation at our weekly business coach training. We acknowledged that we all have ruts and joked about how each of us might decorate our own ruts, and in that conversation realized the value of this conversation.

Think about your own rut -does it feel safe & comfortable? Has it become home? Or is your rut uncomfortable? Does it frustrate you? Do you dream of how it could be different? Or perhaps you're so at home in your rut you'd hire an interior decorator and have your rut decorated for you. Regardless of your decorating style, you're still in a rut.

Throughout this article we'll be focusing on how to climb out of your ruts.... but for right now we challenge you to take two simple steps.

1. **Identify a rut.** The rut can be one you've recognized in yourself or or perhaps you recognize one of your employees are stuck in a rut - if so, you may want to apply this to their situation.
2. **Think about how the rut is decorated.**
 - o Is it safe and comfortable? Do you feel at home in this rut? Have you added little touches so that you could stay a while?
 - o Does it make you uncomfortable? Is it cold, dark, or remind you of a prison cell?
 - o Have you "delegated" the decorating of the rut to someone else? Do you feel like it's outside of your control?

Keep reading as we explore how you decorate your rut and more importantly how you can overcome the obstacles that are keeping you in those ruts.



Safe and Comfortable Ruts

In the last section, we challenged you to identify a rut and to think about how it's decorated. In this section, we want to focus on the ruts that feel safe and comfortable. Examples of ruts that feel safe and comfortable might be:

- Having an attitude of us versus them; this attitude leads to finger pointing or blame and can prevent a team from taking ownership of changing what is within their power to control.
- Defending the status quo; when you or your team are busy defending what has happened it's difficult to be open to opportunities to change.
- Repeating the same advertising strategy over and over again; never taking the time to question if it's working, just repeating it year over year because it's easier to write the check and not have to think it through again.

It can be difficult to identify when you're sitting in the middle of a safe and comfortable rut. You may not be getting the results you want, but the rut itself is not always seen as the cause. Think about it. It feels comfortable. It feels safe. If you're looking at someone else that is stuck in a rut that's been decorated to be safe and comfortable, it can be tricky to address, because they can't see far enough outside the rut to feel the pain of being stuck.

Changing ruts that feel comfortable and safe start with changing mindsets. The person in the rut has to begin to see the rut as something that is holding them back. Follow these steps to begin to change the mindset:

1. **Acknowledge the Rut:** If the rut is not acknowledged as something that is holding you or the person experiencing the rut back, then you have identified your first problem to tackle. If the rut is not acknowledged then moving ahead will only be going through the motions of change, without really addressing what needs to be different. It's important to acknowledge the rut using facts and taking out as much emotion as you can. Ideally this conversation keeps the business point of view in mind. Simply state what the business is NOT getting and get an agreement that your business needs a different result. At this point, don't assign blame or guilt, just work toward the acknowledgement that the rut is no longer acceptable and different results are needed.

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- 2. Make It Uncomfortable:** Change happens with motivation. If your rut is decorated to feel safe and comfortable what motivation is there to take action to change so you can get out of it? People in comfortable ruts need to experience the pain of being stuck in the rut. You have to ask the tough questions to expose the gap between where you are today and where you need to be.
- 3. Let Go of Excuses:** The truth is sometimes excuses are very true. "I'm missing the sales goals because the market is down or our prices are too high. We care about our clients, but we just don't have time to follow up." All of these excuses probably have a kernel of truth to them. It doesn't matter though. If you want to get out of your rut then you have to let go of the excuses. It doesn't mean that you pretend they are not there. Instead it's changing your mindset to think: I'm going to do this in spite of these excuses. You change the excuse into a challenge or competition such as, "The market is down and our prices are high, which means I have to talk to five more people this week." Or "Our prices are high, which means I need to be able to believe and justify the WHY to my clients." Helping to refocus the excuses, acknowledges that getting out of the rut isn't easy, but it is possible.

Action Steps to Escape a Rut

Quote: "I find that even small changes sometimes jog you out of a mental rut." - Tom Perrotta

Question: What small changes can you make TODAY to take the first step out of your rut?

Our Thoughts: When most people decide to climb out of - or are forced out of - their ruts, there seems to be a tendency to want IMMEDIATE change. However, if you want lasting change, be prepared to focus on the small action steps that need to be taken to ensure you don't slip back into the same rut in the future.

As discussed in the last section, you have to first change the way you think about the situation that keeps you stuck in the rut in order to be free to focus on the small steps that will start the process of escaping your rut.

We challenge you to examine the rut and create 2-3 small action steps that will help begin to build the steps to climb free of your rut. Keep them small! Don't focus on fully escaping the rut just yet. Simply focus on small steps that can be done this week, then assess your progress and select your next set of steps.

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Escaping Uncomfortable Ruts

So far, we've focused on understanding how you decorate your rut. We looked at ruts that feel safe and comfortable, and discussed the need for small action steps to escape ruts. Now we want to focus on ruts that feel uncomfortable.

The beauty of an uncomfortable rut is that you already have a source of motivation. Uncomfortable ruts are not pleasant. You already have the awareness that you are NOT getting the results that you want. Yet, escaping these ruts can still be very difficult. It's change. Even if you know it's for the better, change can be difficult. It's also hard work. You have to redesign not just your actions, but how you think about the rut in the first place. So where do you begin?

- **Know Where You Are Going** - It might seem like common sense, but it's not. Just because a rut is uncomfortable doesn't mean that you truly know what you want. You know you want something different, but what? You have to have a vision that you know so well it's like a picture of the future that you can touch, see, and feel. If you're not clear on what is on the other side of the rut you're still a little lost. Define the end result so clearly that you can explain it to others.
- **Take Ownership** - We discussed letting go of excuses in our article on safe and comfortable ruts, but it applies here as well. It doesn't matter what the rut is, if you want to escape it there's only one person that can make the necessary changes. That's you. If you're waiting on something or someone to make changes to help you escape, you have not taken ownership of the rut. Taking ownership means that you accept the responsibility of escaping the rut, but it also means that you are so connected to the result of what you want that you won't give up. Too often we stay in a rut, even if it's uncomfortable, because it's easier than escaping. We give up. Taking ownership means that no matter what set back you encounter you keep going. You may have to get creative and look for out of the box solutions, but you don't stop and you don't repeat the same mistakes simply hoping for a different result.
- **Understand Your Barriers** - If there's one thing to know about an uncomfortable rut it's that often times the journey out of the rut is not fun and games. If it was, escaping wouldn't be such hard work and more of us would accomplish it. There will be barriers and setbacks. Some of these will be real and some will be larger in your mind than in reality. It doesn't matter if they are real or your perception, they have the same ability to keep you stuck in your rut. Before

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you begin to escape your rut you should know your barriers and have a plan for what you will do when you encounter them. Plan out how you will handle setbacks. Give yourself permission to lose a battle now and then, we all do, but know how you will win the war. Understanding your barriers is not a one-and-done exercise. You will run into unknown barriers as you work on escaping a rut, be prepared to repeat this step as necessary.

- **Accountability Partners** - Having an outside perspective is priceless. Accountability partners can help challenge the way you think about a rut and lend an ear to listen when things get tough. They can also add an extra layer of accountability to the process. In addition, they will be there to help cheer you on when you make progress. Trying to tackle a rut yourself is difficult. It can be done, but we suggest talking to a mentor, a business coach, or a trusted member of your team to help provide a different perspective.
- **Think Small** - We discussed taking small action steps in the last section. You did not get into a rut overnight and you will not completely escape overnight. Sure, we all want the magical pill, but true results come from small action steps in the right direction. If you haven't already - be sure to read last week's article on small action steps.

Remember, just because a rut is uncomfortable, doesn't mean it's easy to escape. The tips above will help you break down the rut into manageable pieces, but they also challenge you to think about your rut differently.

Only when you begin to think different will you begin to see results.