

Kitchen Tools, Comfort Zones and Other Small Business Lessons

Steve Underhill, our Senior Marketing Coordinator, has this great sign near his desk. It reads: **Kick yourself out of your comfort zone**. It's the word "*comfort*" that got me thinking.

Running a business can be challenging and at times chaotic. It's easy to fall into a routine of getting too comfortable, staying the course, and not changing or improving all that much. (Kodak or Sears come to mind). But getting stuck in your comfort zone can hinder your small business from seeing and seizing new opportunities, and limit your business growth.

Which is exactly why we got uncomfortable at our recent management meeting.

Each quarter, ECHOtape's leadership and management team gathers to review, discuss, and share how we are progressing in terms of this year's objectives. Each meeting we dive into the year's strategies and deliverables but by the end of the day, we are mentally spent.

Which makes it the perfect time to play!

Earlier this year, we tackled the [Marshmallow Challenge](#). This

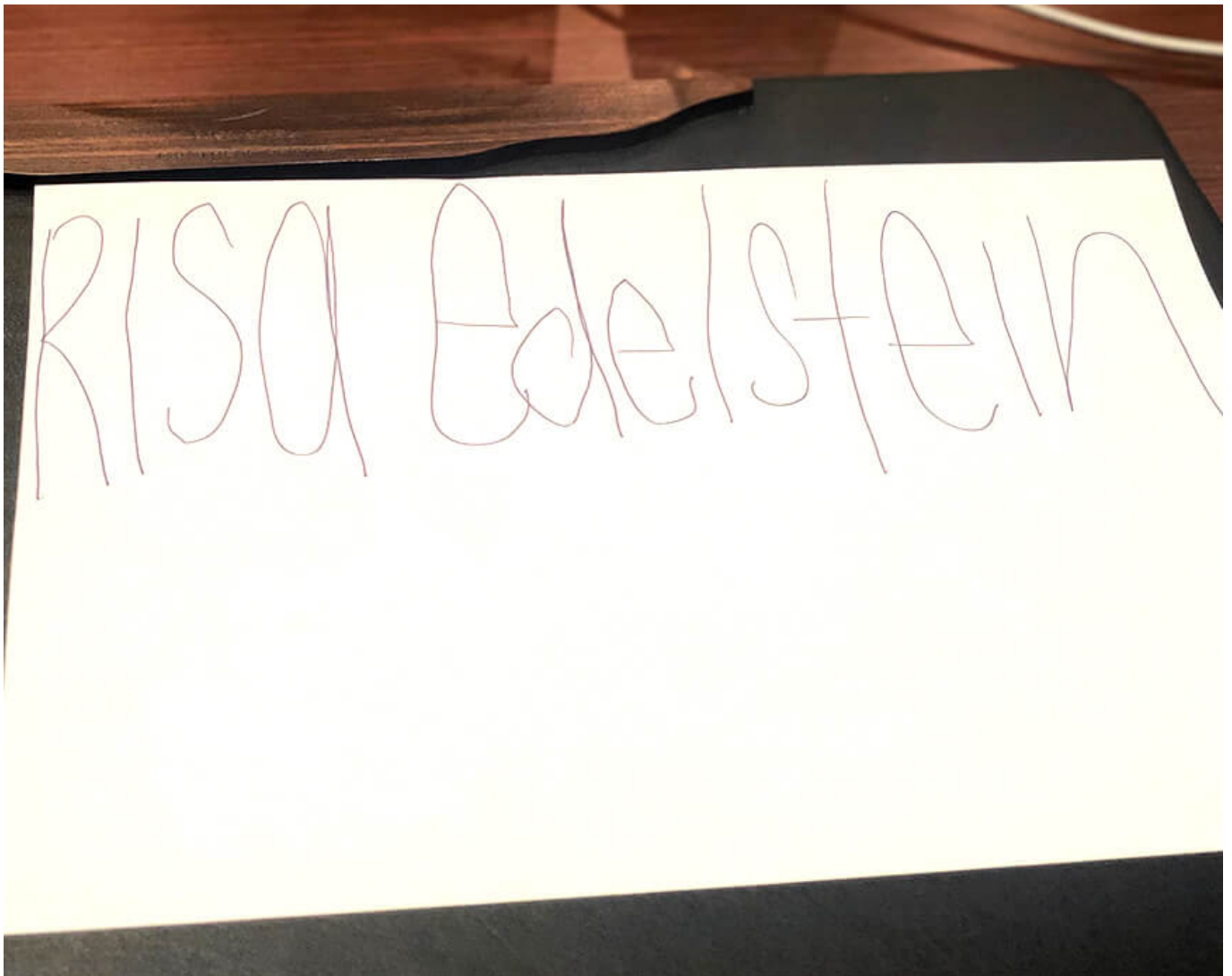
time, we upped the ante with not one, not two, but three team activities.



Activity 1: We were put in teams of four that included people from different departments. The challenge? [Carry a marble on an upside-down cup on a kerchief across the room](#). For the record, that's much harder than one might imagine.

Activity 2: Imagine a kitchen drawer, filled with gadgets.

Choose one that best describes yourself and share with the group. I chose scissors. Mainly because it is an art supply and I enjoy being creative, but also because I like to make new things out of old things (i.e., collage).



Activity 3: Write your name with the opposite hand you usually write with and one word that describes you. Then tell the group your word and why. My word was “open” because I think of myself as open to new ideas, open to change, open to

failing.

As leaders, we each have our unique style and approach, so trying something different was fun and awkward, challenging and surprising.

That holds true for the company as well. We believe that part of our success over the past 45 years is that we have been able to adjust to an ever-changing market. However, it's always good to remind ourselves that comfort can lead to complacency even for the most successful businesses.

To grow, we, as leaders, have to kick ourselves out of that comfort zone. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable. So that we can, in turn, encourage our employees to expand their boundaries as well.

We have incredible and loyal staff, many of whom have been with us for decades. It is our responsibility to help everyone thrive amidst change and chaos, to foster the skills they will need to manage to continue succeeding in an ever-changing business world. It is also on us to figure out the pace of change, how much we can absorb at any one time and get everyone aligned with making the changes we deem are needed to keep us competitive and innovative.

Easier said than done.

What team activities does your company do? How is your company managing change?