



*"I Never Met A Reconstructed Rebel I Liked" or*

*"You CAN Beat Them At Their Own Game"*

Fighting, any kind of fighting, is traumatic. But only if you don't know who you are fighting, and if you don't know how to fight. The one thing you have in your arsenal is a little bit of both. And, better yet, you know the lay of the land and the enemy doesn't.

That, my friend, is the essence of guerilla warfare.

Now you're asking yourself, "Just what the blue-blazin' dickins is he talkin' about this time?". Well it's really quite simple. Ever since '62 we've been fighting a guerilla war - overwhelming odds; inflation; usurious interest rates (when the banks are willing to lend money - remember, you have to pay for their mistakes); carpetbaggers and scallywags; mergers and acquisitions; roller coaster economic cycles; and, as small businessmen, fighting the "guvmint" as much as we fight the E-N-E-M-Y. On top of all this everybody and his brother is talking about how downtown retailing is a thing of the past and anybody with any sense would head for the coalfields west of Dogtown or out past Short Pump where the Springfield Spur runs. Bull feathers!

Fighting a guerilla war takes several things to make it work: a sense of small unit tactics; a decentralized command structure; knowledge of the people and the area you're fighting in (language, customs, culture, short-cuts, back roads, etc.); strong communications and logistical support; the need to travel light with superior weaponry and substantial ammunition. In other words, a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness coupled with intelligence, economy of force and the element of surprise. It also requires constant vigilance and attention to detail. Under virtually any circumstance a small force can defeat a larger one using these methods.

During any or evacuation there are people who stay on and wait out the tide. These are the ones who ultimately win out (even if it takes a generation or two). Why? Some would say because of sheer stupidity; others because they recognize character. In reality it's a combination of both. The key ingredient to anybody having "stick-to-it-iveness" is simple: a product or service that is needed; competitive pricing; a high orientation towards service along with a good source of capital and a high degree of cussedness (but not directed at your customer!).

Now let's combine the elements of fighting a guerilla war with a merchant who stays during an evacuation.

That's sort of where you are. On the one hand you have a potential vacuum because other merchants are following the thundering hordes; on the other, there is the



prospect (read: latent threat) of a major player realizing the potential of the vacuum and cutting a deal for low-cost space and a ready-made market. A major player can weather the storm easier because they can force (blackmail) the “powers that be” into concessions to locate downtown and, assuming they aren’t in the throes of paying-off the effects of greenmail, can amortize the additional cost of a new location over all their stores.

You, on the other hand, can’t get concessions from rental rates, utilities, taxes or even the prospect of seed money to spur you on; You can’t amortize any cost over other stores because you don’t have any - or not enough to make a difference. No matter how you look at it, your options are limited and your resources are slim. So, now we look long and hard at where we are and start to think about how we make the best of what is potentially a great opportunity - but a disaster if we fail.

First, take a deep breath and look around. Do you really know where you are, what resources you have, who’s buying your product(s) and why?

Do you know who your competitors are, how they approach the market, what their strengths and weaknesses are?

Do you know your staying power and how to adjust your inventory and product mix to maximize potential?

Do you understand that a plan of action is required and that it must be flexible and include contingencies?

Second, what changes can you make in physical layout, product display, decor, signage, point-of-sale, etc. that separates you from the masses but appeals to your target market?

Third, have you put a marketing plan in place that will maximize your message reach against your market with a far degree of frequency?

Does your marketing effort appeal to your target’s needs and wants - instead of yours? Does all this sound familiar? Of course, but that’s how you get a mule to pull a straight line. Keep geein’ and hawin’ over and over until he can plow a straight furrow.

Besides, I’m just a simple ol’ Virginia country boy and I learned a long time ago that if you remember the basics you’ll always beat the guy who tries to complicate matters. Start rolling your blanket, tie-on your tin cup and put an edge on your sword, we’re going to begin a ride that’s long and hard and, if you keep up, we’ll beat’em yet.

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